

## Federal Shutdown FNS Questions and Answers

### Applications

1. **How should counties handle pending and ongoing applications after January 20<sup>th</sup>?**

Counties should continue to take and process applications after January 20<sup>th</sup> and ongoing, using the normal processing procedures. Benefits will be issued on the normal ongoing issuance cycle date.

2. **Should counties process applications that have pending verification for deduction?**

Follow normal processing procedures for all pending applications.

### Recertifications & Ongoing Cases

3. **How should counties handle pending and ongoing recertifications after January 20<sup>th</sup>?**

Counties should continue to process recertifications after January 20<sup>th</sup> and ongoing, using the normal processing procedures.

4. **When we process the recertification do we need to change the start date on the recertification screen?**

The start dates do not need to be changed on the recertification screen, use normal processing procedures.

5. **What happens to those cases that never turn in a recertification form or are processed and determined ineligible?**

USDA has confirmed that Federal Regulations allow states to extend certification periods in order to release early February benefits. Counties are still required to complete the recertifications received, however, cases that the recertification is completed after the certification period was extended through February, and results in an overissuance, will not be charged with an overpayment and no claim will be established. This also includes those households that fail to return their recertification forms.

6. **We have a January pending recertification, that is extended through February, we are required to continue the recertification process if information is provided. Should we certify the case for the additional five or six months?**

NC FAST will automatically assign a 6, 12 or 36-month certification period. At a later date NC FAST will conduct a data fix to correct the cases to the appropriate certification period to bring recertifications back into the normal cycle.

- 7. If we have pending recertifications and the case is extended through February and we find that the client was eligible for an increase in benefits for February, are we to issue supplements?**

Yes, when completing the recertification, you will enter the evidence following the normal steps for a February recertification. The updated evidence would then cause an underpayment, and the county would need to issue a supplement.

- 8. Under normal circumstances the last date in the month that FNS benefits are uploaded to EBT cards is the 21<sup>st</sup> of the month. With the issuance of February 2019 benefits on January 20<sup>th</sup>; will January benefits will be issued on the 20<sup>th</sup> or the 21<sup>st</sup>?**

January benefits will be loaded on normal availability dates. If the normal availability date is January 21<sup>st</sup> then that is when January benefits will be loaded.

- 9. If a case determination is in “on hold” status and are not issued on January 20<sup>th</sup>, will counties be able to release the hold and issue benefits after January 21, 2019?**

Yes, if appropriate, accept the determination, then continue to process the case following normal processing procedures.

If the payment is in “on-hold dual issuance” status the county must follow the normal procedures of reviewing the case. These cases payments can only be released by NC FAST staff. Counties cannot release these payments.

- 10. Can the county issue replacement benefits if needed?**

Counties will continue to follow normal processing procedures after January 20<sup>th</sup>.

- 11. How should December’s timely reopened recertifications be handled, as well as December untimely recertifications that remain in pending status?**

Follow normal processing procedures for any reopen recertifications.

- 12. If benefits are extended, is there any time frame that the client would not be able to utilize any benefits that may still be left on the card?**

Benefits that are loaded to the EBT card are available for the household’s use as normal. The shutdown does not change the availability of benefits after loaded to the card.

- 13. What do we do with cases that need to be terminated for out of state, deceased or incarcerated?**

Process the case as soon as possible. If the case does not get processed and is issued February benefits, document the case in NC FAST providing the reason for the over issuance, establish a state agency error overpayment claim following normal procedures.

**14. Can counties process February recertifications prior to February 1<sup>st</sup> after the certification periods have been extended?**

Yes, NC FAST has relaxed the validation that prevents a recertification from being completed prior to the first day of the next recertification period.

**15. How are FNS cases with pending Notice of Adverse Action (NOAA) for February benefits handled when the NOAA doesn't expire until after the February benefits are released early?**

Counties will follow normal processing procedures.

## **Communications**

**16. When will the public communication regarding the January 20<sup>th</sup> benefit issuance go out?**

A press release was issued Friday January 11, 2019. The Department of Health and Human Services Office of Communications is also sending notifications through social media.

**17. What is the message being emailed and sent to participants in the robocalls?**

Due to the federal government shutdown, your Food and Nutrition Services benefits - also known as food stamps - for February will be [issued early](#). **Your February benefits will be loaded to your EBT card on Jan. 20, 2019.**

Your January benefits are not affected and will be loaded to your card on the usual monthly date.

Because you are getting your February benefits early, please budget your food dollars wisely. Additional benefits cannot be added for future months until the federal shutdown is over.

If you have questions about your benefits, please call the EBT Call Center at 1-888-622-7328. If you have questions about the shutdown, please contact your member of Congress.

## **Retailer Information**

**18. Are there some EBT retailers that are not able to accept EBT benefits?**

Yes. Per USDA, there are retailers that had not completed their recertification process for being an authorized EBT retailer and the Division responsible for those authorizations in USDA is closed until after the shutdown. Retailers will need to contact USDA once the Division is reopened.

**19. What should we do if we become aware of authorized EBT retailers that refuse to accept EBT cards or limit the amount of benefits that a household can purchase?**

Contact the EBT Call Center at 866-719-0141 and provide the retailer name and address. The Division will report this information to USDA for investigation.