

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.12

shall be handled according to paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(4) *Fees.* A State electing to implement this provision shall not require the payment of a fee or other cost for services provided under Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 651, *et seq.*)

(5) *Privacy.* The State agency shall provide safeguards to restrict the use of information collected by a State agency administering the program established under Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 651, *et seq.*) to purposes for which the information is collected.

(6) *Termination of disqualification.* The period of disqualification ends once it has been determined that the individual is cooperating with the child support agency. The State agency must have procedures in place for re-qualifying such an individual.

(q) *Disqualification for child support arrears—(1) Option to disqualify.* At the option of a State agency, no individual shall be eligible to participate in SNAP as a member of any household during any month that the individual is delinquent in any payment due under a court order for the support of a child of the individual. The State agency may opt to apply this provision to only non-custodial parents.

(2) *Exceptions.* A disqualification under paragraph (q)(1) of this section shall not apply if:

(i) A court is allowing the individual to delay payment;

(ii) The individual is complying with a payment plan approved by a court or the State agency designated under Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C., 651 *et seq.*) to provide support of a child of the individual; or

(iii) The State agency determines the individual has good cause for non-support.

(3) *Individual disqualification.* If the State agency has elected to implement this provision and determines that the individual should be disqualified for child support arrears, then that individual shall be ineligible to participate in SNAP. The disqualification shall not apply to the entire household. The income and resources of the disqualified

individual shall be handled according to paragraph (c)(2) of this section.

(4) *Collecting claims.* State agencies shall initiate collection action as provided for in §273.18 for any month a household member is disqualified for child support arrears by sending the household a written demand letter which informs the household of the amount owed, the reason for the claim and how the household may pay the claim. The household should also be informed as to the adjusted amount of income, resources, and deductible expenses of the remaining members of the household for the month(s) a member is disqualified for child support arrears.

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47889, Oct. 17, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting §273.12, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and at www.fdsys.gov.

Subpart E—Continuing Participation

§ 273.12 Requirements for change reporting households.

(a) *Household responsibility to report.* (1) Monthly reporting households are required to report as provided in §273.21. Quarterly reporting households are subject to the procedures as provided in paragraph (a)(4) of this section. Simplified reporting households are subject to the procedures as provided in paragraph (a)(5) of this section. Certified change reporting households are required to report the following changes in circumstances:

(i) (A) A change of more than \$50 in the amount of unearned income, except changes relating to public assistance (PA) or general assistance (GA) in project areas in which GA and food stamp cases are jointly processed. The State agency is responsible for identifying changes during the certification period in the amount of PA, or GA in jointly processed cases. If GA and food stamp cases are not jointly processed, the household is responsible for reporting changes in GA of more than \$50.

(B) A change in the source of income, including starting or stopping a job or

§ 273.12

7 CFR Ch. II (1-1-14 Edition)

changing jobs, if the change in employment is accompanied by a change in income.

(C) One of the following, as determined by the State agency (different options may be used for different categories of households as long as no household is required to report under more than one option; the State may also utilize different options in different project areas within the State):

(1) A change in the wage rate or salary or a change in full-time or part-time employment status (as determined by the employer or as defined in the State's PA program), provided that the household is certified for no more than 6 months; or

(2) A change in the amount earned of more than \$100 a month from the amount last used to calculate the household's allotment, provided that the household is certified for no more than 6 months.

(ii) All changes in household composition, such as the addition or loss of a household member;

(iii) Changes in residence and the resulting change in shelter costs;

(iv) The acquisition of a licensed vehicle not fully excludable under § 273.8(e); and

(v) When cash on hand, stocks, bonds, and money in a bank account or savings institution reach or exceed a total of \$2,000.

(vi) Changes in the legal obligation to pay child support. However, the State agency may remove this reporting requirement if it has chosen to use information provided by the State's CSE agency in determining a household's legal obligation to pay child support, the amount of its obligation, and amounts the household has actually paid in accordance with § 273.2(f)(1)(xii).

(vii) For able-bodied adults subject to the time limit of § 273.24, any changes in work hours that bring an individual below 20 hours per week, averaged monthly, as defined in § 273.24(a)(1)(i). An individual shall report this information in accordance with the reporting system for income to which he is subject.

(2) Certified households must report changes within 10 days of the date the change becomes known to the household. For reportable changes of income,

the State agency may require that change to be reported as early as within 10 days of the date that the household becomes aware of the change or as late as within 10 days of the date that the household receives the first payment attributable to the change. For example, in the case of new employment, the State may require the household to report the change within 10 days of the date that the household becomes aware of the new employment, within 10 days of the date the employment begins or within 10 days of the date that the household receives its first paycheck. For households subject to semi-annual reporting, the household must report changes no later than 10 days from the end of the calendar month in which the change occurred, provided that the household has at least 10 days within which to report the change. Optional procedures for reporting changes are contained in paragraph (f) of this section for households in States with forms for jointly reporting food stamp and public assistance changes and food stamp and general assistance changes.

(3) An applying household shall report all changes related to its food stamp eligibility and benefits at the certification interview. Changes, as provided in paragraph (a)(1) of this section, which occur after the interview but before the date of the notice of eligibility, shall be reported by the household within 10 days of the date of the notice.

(4) The State agency may establish a system of quarterly reporting in lieu of the change reporting requirements specified under paragraph (a)(1) of this section. The following requirements are applicable to quarterly reporting systems:

(i) *Included households.* The State agency may include all households within a quarterly reporting system, except migrant or seasonal farmworker households, households that have no earned income and in which all adult members are elderly or disabled, households in which all members are homeless individuals, or households subject to the reporting requirement under paragraph (a)(1)(vii) of this section.

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.12

The State agency may also limit quarterly reporting to specific categories of households.

(ii) *Notification of the quarterly reporting requirement.* The State agency must notify households of the quarterly reporting requirement, including the consequences of failure to file a report, at initial certification and recertification.

(iii) *Failure to file a complete form by the specified filing date.* If a household fails to file a complete report by the specified filing date, the State agency will send a notice to the household advising it of the missing or incomplete report no later than 10 days from the date the report should have been submitted. If the household does not respond to the notice, the household's participation shall be terminated. The State agency may combine the notice of a missing or incomplete report with the adequate notice of termination described in paragraph (a)(4)(v) of this section.

(iv) *Content of the quarterly report form.* The State agency may include all of the items subject to reporting under paragraph (a)(1) of this section in the quarterly report, except changes reportable under paragraphs (a)(1)(vii) or (a)(1)(viii) of this section, or may limit the report to specific items while requiring that households report other items through the use of the change report form.

(v) *Reduction or termination of benefits.* If the household files a complete report resulting in reduction or termination of benefits, the State agency shall send an adequate notice, as defined in § 271.2 of this chapter. The notice must be issued so that it will be received by the household no later than the time that its benefits are normally received. If the household fails to provide sufficient information or verification regarding a deductible expense, the State agency will not terminate the household, but will instead determine the household's benefits without regard to the deduction.

(vi) *Changes reported outside of the quarterly report.* The State agency must act on any changes reported outside of the quarterly report in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section.

(vii) *Sole reporting requirement.* The quarterly report form shall be the sole reporting requirement for any information that is required to be reported on the form, except that able-bodied adults subject to the time limit of § 273.24 shall report whenever their work hours fall below 20 hours per week, averaged monthly.

(5) The State agency may establish a simplified reporting system in lieu of the change reporting requirements specified under paragraph (a)(1) of this section. The following requirements are applicable to simplified reporting systems:

(i) *Included households.* The State agency may include any household certified for at least 4 months within a simplified reporting system.

(ii) *Notification of simplified reporting requirement.* At the initial certification, recertification and when the State agency transfers the households to simplified reporting, the State agency shall provide the household with the following:

(A) A written and oral explanation of how simplified reporting works;

(B) A written and oral explanation of the reporting requirements including:

(1) What needs to be reported and verified;

(2) When the report is due;

(3) How to obtain assistance; and

(4) The consequences of failing to file a report.

(C) Special assistance in completing and filing periodic reports to households whose adult members are all either mentally or physically handicapped or are non-English speaking or otherwise lacking in reading and writing skills such that they cannot complete and file the required report; and

(D) A telephone number (toll-free number or a number where collect calls will be accepted outside the local calling area) which the household may call to ask questions or to obtain help in completing the periodic report.

(iii) *Periodic report.* (A) The State agency may require a household to submit a periodic report on its circumstances from once every 4 months up to once every 6 months. The State agency need not require a household certified for 6 months or less to submit

§273.12

7 CFR Ch. II (1-1-14 Edition)

a periodic report during its certification period. However, except for households in which all adults are elderly or disabled with no earned income, a household certified for more than 6 months must submit a periodic report at least once every 6 months. Households in which all adults are elderly or disabled with no earned income must not be required to submit periodic reports more frequently than once a year.

(B) The periodic report form must request from the household information on any changes in circumstances in accordance with paragraphs (a)(1)(i) through (a)(1)(vii) of this section and conform to the requirements of paragraph (b)(2) of this section.

(C) If the household files a complete report resulting in reduction or termination of benefits, the State agency shall send an adequate notice, as defined in §271.2 of this chapter. The notice must be issued so that the household will receive it no later than the time that its benefits are normally received. If the household fails to provide sufficient information or verification regarding a deductible expense, the State agency will not terminate the household, but will instead determine the household's benefits without regard to the deduction.

(D) If a household fails to file a complete report by the specified filing date, the State agency will send a notice to the household advising it of the missing or incomplete report no later than 10 days from the date the report should have been submitted. If the household does not respond to the notice, the household's participation shall be terminated. The State agency may combine the notice of a missing or incomplete report with the adequate notice of termination described in paragraph (a)(5)(iii)(C) of this section.

(E) The periodic report form shall be the sole reporting requirement for any information that is required to be reported on the form, except that a household required to report less frequently than quarterly shall report when its monthly gross income exceeds the monthly gross income limit for its household size in accordance with paragraph (a)(5)(v) of this section, and able-bodied adults subject to the time limit

of §273.24 shall report whenever their work hours fall below 20 hours per week, averaged monthly.

(iv) *Processing periodic reports.* In selecting a due date for the periodic report, the State agency must provide itself sufficient time to process reports so that households will receive adequate notice of action on the report in the first month of the new reporting period.

(v) *Reporting when gross income exceeds 130 percent of poverty.* A household subject to simplified reporting in accordance with paragraph (a)(5)(i) of this section, whether or not it is required to submit a periodic report, must report when its monthly gross income exceeds the monthly gross income limit for its household size, as defined at §273.9(a)(1). The household shall use the monthly gross income limit for the household size that existed at the time of its most recent certification or recertification, regardless of any subsequent changes in its household size.

(vi) *State agency action on changes reported outside of a periodic report.* The State agency must act when the household reports that its gross monthly income exceeds the gross monthly income limit for its household size. For other changes, the State agency need not act if the household reports a change for another public assistance program in which it is participating and the change does not trigger action in that other program but results in a decrease in the household's food stamp benefit. The State agency must act on all other changes reported by a household outside of a periodic report in accordance with one of the following two methods:

(A) The State agency must act on any change in household circumstances in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section; or

(B) The State agency must act on any change in accordance with paragraph (c)(1) of this section if it would increase the household's benefits. The State agency must not act on changes that would result in a decrease in the household's benefits unless:

(1) The household has voluntarily requested that its case be closed in accordance with §273.13(b)(12);

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.12

(2) The State agency has information about the household's circumstances considered verified upon receipt; or

(3) There has been a change in the household's PA grant, or GA grant in project areas where GA and food stamp cases are jointly processed in accord with § 273.2(j)(2).

(vii) *State plan requirement.* A State agency that chooses to use simplified reporting procedures in accordance with this section must state in its State plan of operation that it has implemented simplified reporting and specify the types of households to whom the reporting requirement applies.

(6) For households eligible for the child support exclusion at § 273.9(c)(17) or deduction at § 273.9(d)(5), the State agency may use information provided by the State CSE agency in determining the household's legal obligation to pay child support, the amount of its obligation and amounts the household has actually paid if the household pays its child support exclusively through its State CSE agency and has signed a statement authorizing release of its child support payment records to the State agency. A household would not have to provide any additional verification unless they disagreed with the information provided by the State CSE agency. State agencies that choose to utilize information provided by their State CSE agency in accordance with this paragraph (a)(6) must specify in their State plan of operation that they have selected this option. If the State agency chooses not to utilize information provided by its State CSE agency, the State agency may make reporting child support payments an optional change reporting item in accordance with paragraph (a)(5) of this section. The State agency shall process the reports in accordance with procedures for the systems used in budgeting the household's income and deductions. The following requirements apply to quarterly reports:

(i) The State agency shall provide the household a reasonable period after the end of the last month covered by the report in which to return the report. If the household does not file the report by the due date or files an incomplete report, the State agency shall provide

the household with a reminder notice advising the household that it has 10 days from the date the State agency mails the notice to file a complete report. If the household does not file a complete report by the extended filing date as specified in the reminder notice, the State agency shall determine the household's eligibility and benefits without consideration of the child support deduction. The State agency shall not terminate the benefits of a household for failure to submit a quarterly report unless the household is otherwise ineligible. The State agency shall send the household an adequate notice as defined in § 271.2 of this chapter if the household fails to submit a complete report or if the information contained on a complete report results in a reduction or termination of benefits. The quarterly report shall meet the requirements specified in paragraph (b) of this section. The State agency may combine the content of the reminder notice and the adequate notice as long as the notice meets the requirements of the individual notices.

(ii) The quarterly report form, if required, shall be the sole reporting requirement for reporting child support payments during the certification period. Households excluded from monthly reporting as specified in § 273.21(b) and households required to submit monthly reports shall not be required to submit quarterly reports.

(7) State agencies shall not impose any food stamp reporting requirements on households except as provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

(b) *Report forms.* (1) The State agency shall provide the household with a form for reporting the changes required in paragraph (a)(1) of this section to be reported within 10 days and shall pay the postage for return of the form. The change report form shall, at a minimum, include the following:

(i) A space for the household to report whether the change shall continue beyond the report month;

(ii) The civil and criminal penalties for violations of the Act in understandable terms and in prominent and bold-face lettering;

(iii) A reminder to the household of its right to claim actual utility costs if its costs exceed the standard;

§ 273.12

7 CFR Ch. II (1–14 Edition)

(iv) The number of the food stamp office and a toll-free number or a number where collect calls will be accepted for households outside the local calling area; and

(v) A statement describing the changes in household circumstances contained in § 273.12(a)(1) that must be reported and a statement which clearly informs the household that it is required to report these changes.

(vi) If the State agency has chosen to disregard reported changes that affect some deductions in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section, a statement explaining that the State agency will not change certain deductions until the household's next recertification and identifying those deductions.

(2) The quarterly report form, including the form for the quarterly reporting of the child support obligation, and the periodic report form used in simplified reporting under paragraph (a)(5)(ii) of this section, must:

(i) Be written in clear, simple language;

(ii) Meet the bilingual requirements described in § 272.4(b) of this chapter;

(iii) Specify the date by which the agency must receive the form;

(iv) Specify the consequences of submitting a late or incomplete form including whether the State agency shall delay payment if the form is not received by a specified date;

(v) Specify the verification the household must submit with the form;

(vi) Inform the household where to call for help in completing the form;

(vii) Include a statement to be signed by a member of the household indicating his or her understanding that the information provided may result in a reduction or termination of benefits;

(viii) Include a brief description of the Food Stamp Program fraud penalties;

(ix) Include a statement explaining that the State agency will not change certain deductions until the household's next recertification and identify those deductions if the State agency has chosen to disregard reported changes that affect certain deductions in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section;

(x) If the form requests Social Security numbers, include a statement of the State agency's authority to require Social Security numbers (including the statutory citation, the title of the statute, and the fact that providing Social Security numbers is mandatory), the purpose of requiring Social Security numbers, the routine uses for Social Security numbers, and the effect of not providing Social Security numbers. This statement may be on the form itself or included as an attachment to the form.

(3) Changes reported over the telephone or in person by the household shall be acted on in the same manner as those reported on the change report form.

(4) A change report form shall be provided to newly certified households at the time of certification, at recertification if the household needs a new form; and a new form shall be sent to the household whenever a change report form is returned by the household. A change report may be provided to households more often at the State agency's option.

(c) *State agency action on changes.* The State agency shall take prompt action on all changes to determine if the change affects the household's eligibility or allotment. However, the State agency has the option to disregard a reported change to an established deduction in accordance with paragraph (c)(4) of this section. If a household reports a change in income, and the new circumstance is expected to continue for at least one month beyond the month in which the change is reported, the State agency may act on the change in accordance with paragraphs (c)(1) and (c)(2) of this section. The time frames in paragraphs (c)(1) and (c)(2) of this section apply to these actions. During the certification period, the State agency shall not act on changes in the medical expenses of households eligible for the medical expense deduction which it learns of from a source other than the household and which, in order to take action, require the State agency to contact the household for verification. The State agency shall only act on those changes in medical expenses that it learns about from a source other than the household if

those changes are verified upon receipt and do not necessitate contact with the household. Even if there is no change in the allotment, the State agency shall document the reported change in the casefile, provide another change report form to the household, and notify the household of the receipt of the change report. If the reported change affects the household's eligibility or level of benefits, the adjustment shall also be reported to the household. The State agency shall also advise the household of additional verification requirements, if any, and state that failure to provide verification shall result in increased benefits reverting to the original allotment. The State agency shall document the date a change is reported, which shall be the date the State agency receives a report form or is advised of the change over the telephone or by a personal visit. Restoration of lost benefits shall be provided to any household if the State agency fails to take action on a change which increases benefits within the time limits specified in paragraph (c)(1) of this section.

(1) *Increase in benefits.* (i) For changes which result in an increase in a household's benefits, other than changes described in paragraph (c)(1)(ii) of this section, the State agency shall make the change effective no later than the first allotment issued 10 days after the date the change was reported to the State agency. For example, a \$30 decrease in income reported on the 15th of May would increase the household's June allotment. If the same decrease were reported on May 28, and the household's normal issuance cycle was on June 1, the household's allotment would have to be increased by July.

(ii) For changes which result in an increase in a household's benefits due to the addition of a new household member who is not a member of another certified household, or due to a decrease of \$50 or more in the household's gross monthly income, the State agency shall make the change effective not later than the first allotment issued 10 days after the date the change was reported. However, in no event shall these changes take effect any later than the month following the month in which the change is reported.

Therefore, if the change is reported after the 20th of a month and it is too late for the State agency to adjust the following month's allotment, the State agency shall issue a supplementary ATP or otherwise provide an opportunity for the household to obtain the increase in benefits by the 10th day of the following month, or the household's normal issuance cycle in that month, whichever is later. For example, a household reporting a \$100 decrease in income at any time during May would have its June allotment increased. If the household reported the change after the 20th of May and it was too late for the State agency to adjust the ATP normally issued on June 1, the State agency would issue a supplementary ATP for the amount of the increase by June 10.

(iii) The State agency may elect to verify changes which result in an increase in a household's benefits in accordance with the verification requirements of § 273.2(f)(8)(ii), prior to taking action on these changes. If the State agency elects this option, it must allow the household 10 days from the date the change is reported to provide verification required by § 273.2(f)(8)(ii). If the household provides verification within this period, the State shall take action on the changes within the timeframes specified in paragraphs (c)(1) (i) and (ii) of this section. The timeframes shall run from the date the change was reported, not from the date of verification. If, however, the household fails to provide the required verification within 10 days after the change is reported but does provide the verification at a later date, then the timeframes specified in paragraphs (c)(1) (i) and (ii) of this section for taking action on changes shall run from the date verification is provided rather than from the date the change is reported. If the State agency does not elect this option, verification required by § 273.2(f)(8)(ii) must be obtained prior to the issuance of the second normal monthly allotment after the change is reported. If in these circumstances the household does not provide verification, the household's benefits will revert to the original benefit level. Whenever a State agency increases a household's benefits to reflect

§273.12

7 CFR Ch. II (1-1-14 Edition)

a reported change and subsequent verification shows that the household was actually eligible for fewer benefits, the State agency shall establish a claim for the overissuance in accordance with §273.18. In cases where the State agency has determined that a household has refused to cooperate as defined in §273.2(d), the State agency shall terminate the household's eligibility following the notice of adverse action.

(2) *Decreases in benefits.* (i) If the household's benefit level decreases or the household becomes ineligible as a result of the change, the State agency shall issue a notice of adverse action within 10 days of the date the change was reported unless one of the exemptions to the notice of adverse action in §273.13 (a)(3) or (b) applies. When a notice of adverse action is used, the decrease in the benefit level shall be made effective no later than the allotment for the month following the month in which the notice of adverse action period has expired, provided a fair hearing and continuation of benefits have not been requested. When a notice of adverse action is not used due to one of the exemptions in §273.13 (a)(3) or (b), the decrease shall be made effective no later than the month following the change. Verification which is required by §273.2(f) must be obtained prior to recertification.

(ii) The State agency may suspend a household's certification prospectively for one month if the household becomes temporarily ineligible because of a periodic increase in recurring income or other change not expected to continue in the subsequent month. If the suspended household again becomes eligible, the State agency shall issue benefits to the household on the household's normal issuance date. If the suspended household does not become eligible after one month, the State agency shall terminate the household's certification. Households are responsible for reporting changes as required by paragraph (a) of this section during the period of suspension.

(3) *Unclear information.* During the certification period, the State agency may obtain information about changes in a household's circumstances from which the State agency cannot readily

determine the effect of the change on the household's benefit amount. The State agency might receive such unclear information from a third party or from the household itself. The State agency must pursue clarification and verification of household circumstances using the following procedure:

(i) The State agency must issue a written request for contact (RFC) which clearly advises the household of the verification it must provide or the actions it must take to clarify its circumstances, which affords the household at least 10 days to respond and to clarify its circumstances, either by telephone or by correspondence, as the State agency directs, and which states the consequences if the household fails to respond to the RFC.

(ii) If the household does not respond to the RFC, or does respond but refuses to provide sufficient information to clarify its circumstances, the State agency must issue a notice of adverse action as described in §273.13 which terminates the case, explains the reasons for the action, and advises the household of the need to submit a new application if it wishes to continue participating in the program. When the household responds to the RFC and provides sufficient information, the State agency must act on the new circumstances in accordance with paragraphs (c)(1) or (c)(2) of this section.

(iii) If the household does not respond to the RFC, or does respond but refuses to provide sufficient information to clarify its circumstances, the State agency may elect to issue a notice of adverse action as described in §273.13 which suspends the household for 1 month before the termination becomes effective, explains the reasons for the action, and advises the household of the need to submit a new application if it wishes to continue participating in the program. If a household responds satisfactorily to the RFC during the period of suspension, the State agency must reinstate the household without requiring a new application, issue the allotment for the month of suspension, and if necessary, adjust the household's participation with a new notice of adverse action.

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.12

(4) *State agency option for processing changes in deductible expenses.* (i) If the household reports a change to an established deduction amount during the first six months of the certification period, other than a change in earnings or residence, that would affect the household's eligibility for, or amount of, the deduction under § 273.9(d), the State agency may at its option disregard the change and continue to provide the household the deduction amount that was established at certification until the household's next recertification or after the sixth month for households certified for 12 months. When a household reports a change in residence, the State agency must investigate and take action on potential changes in shelter costs arising from this reported change. However, if a household fails to provide information regarding the associated changes in shelter costs within 10 days of the report, the State agency should send a notice to the household that their allotment will be recalculated without the deduction. The notice will make it clear that the household does not need to await its first regular utility or rental payments to contact the food stamp office. Alternative forms of verification can be accepted, if necessary.

(ii) In the case of a household assigned a 24-month certification period in accordance with § 273.10(f)(1) and (f)(2), the State agency must act on any disregarded changes reported during the first 12 months of the certification period at the required 12-month contact for elderly and disabled households and in the thirteenth month of the certification period for households residing on a reservation who are required to submit monthly reports. Changes reported during the second 12 months of the certification period can be disregarded until the household's next recertification.

(iii) If the State agency chooses to act on changes that affect a deduction, it may not act on changes in only one direction, i.e., changes that only increase or decrease the amount of the deduction, but must act on all changes that affect the deduction.

(iv) The State agency may disregard changes reported by the household in

accordance with paragraph (a)(1) of this section and changes it learns of from a source other than the household. The State agency must not disregard new deductions, changes in earned income or changes in shelter costs arising from a reported change in residence until the household's next recertification or after the sixth month of a 12-month certification period but must act on those reports in accordance with paragraphs (c)(1) and (c)(2) of this section. When a household reports a change in residence, the State agency must investigate and take action on potential changes in shelter costs arising from this reported change. However, if a household fails to provide information regarding the associated changes in shelter costs within 10 days of the report, the State agency should send a notice to the household that their allotment will be recalculated without the deduction. The notice will make it clear that the household does not need to await its first regular utility or rental payments to contact the food stamp office. Alternative forms of verification can be accepted, if necessary.

(v) A State agency that chooses to postpone action on reported changes in deductions in accordance with this paragraph (c) must state in its State plan of operation that it has selected this option and specify the deductions affected.

(d) *Failure to report.* If the State agency discovers that the household failed to report a change as required by paragraph (a) of this section and, as a result, received benefits to which it was not entitled, the State agency shall file a claim against the household in accordance with § 273.18. If the discovery is made within the certification period, the household is entitled to a notice of adverse action if the household's benefits are reduced. A household shall not be held liable for a claim because of a change in household circumstances which it is not required to report in accordance with § 273.12(a)(1). Individuals shall not be disqualified for failing to report a change, unless the individual is disqualified in accordance with the disqualification procedures specified in § 273.16.

(e) *Mass changes.* Certain changes are initiated by the State or Federal government which may affect the entire caseload or significant portions of the caseload. These changes include, but are not limited to, adjustments to the income eligibility standards, the shelter and dependent care deductions, the maximum food stamp allotment and the standard deduction; annual and seasonal adjustments to State utility standards; periodic cost-of-living adjustments to Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (RSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other Federal benefits; periodic adjustments to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or General Assistance (GA) payments; and other changes in the eligibility and benefit criteria based on legislative or regulatory changes.

(1) *Federal adjustments to eligibility standards, allotments, and deductions, and State adjustments to utility standards.* (i) State agencies shall implement these changes for all households at a specific point in time. Adjustments to Federal standards shall be implemented prospectively regardless of the household's budgeting system. Annual and seasonal adjustments in State utility standards shall also be implemented prospectively for all households.

(A) Adjustments in the maximum food stamp allotment shall be effective in accordance with § 273.10(e)(4)(ii).

(B) Adjustments in the standard deduction shall be effective in accordance with § 273.9(d)(7).

(C) Adjustments in the shelter deduction shall be effective in accordance with § 273.9(d)(8).

(D) Adjustments in the income eligibility standards shall be effective in accordance with § 273.9(a)(3).

(ii) A notice of adverse action shall not be used for these changes. At a minimum, the State agencies shall publicize these mass changes through the news media; posters in certification offices, issuance locations, or other sites frequented by certified households; or general notices mailed to households. At its option, the State agency may send the notice described in paragraph (e)(4) of this section or some other type of written explanation

of the change. A household whose certification period overlaps a seasonal variation in the State utility standard shall be advised at the time of initial certification of when the adjustment will occur and what the variation in the benefit level will be, if known.

(2) *Mass changes in public assistance and general assistance.* (i) When the State agency makes an overall adjustment to public assistance (PA) payments, corresponding adjustments in households' food stamp benefits shall be handled as a mass change in accordance with the procedures in paragraphs (e) (4), (5) and (6) of this section. When the State agency has at least 30 days, advance knowledge of the amount of the PA adjustment, the State agency shall make the change in benefits effective in the same month as the PA change. If the State agency does not have sufficient notice, the food stamp change shall be effective no later than the month following the month in which the PA change was made.

(ii) State agencies which also administer a general assistance (GA) program shall handle mass adjustments to GA payments in accordance with the schedules outlined in paragraph (e)(2)(i) and the procedures in paragraphs (e) (4), (5) and (6) of this section. However, where State agencies do not administer both programs, mass changes in GA payments shall be subject to the schedule in paragraph (e)(3) and the procedures in paragraphs (e) (4), (5) and (6) of this section.

(3) *Mass changes in Federal benefits.* The State agency shall establish procedures for making mass changes to reflect cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) in benefits and any other mass changes under RSDI, SSI, and other programs such as veteran's assistance under title 38 of the United States Code and the Black Lung Program, where information on COLA's is readily available and is applicable to all or a majority of those programs' beneficiaries. A State agency may require households to report the change on the appropriate monthly report or may handle the change using the mass change procedures in this section. If the State agency requires the household to report the information on the monthly report, the

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.12

State agency shall handle such information in accordance with its normal procedures. Households that are not required to report the change on the monthly report, and households not subject to monthly reporting, shall not be responsible for reporting these changes. The State agency shall be responsible for automatically adjusting these households' SNAP benefit levels in accordance with either paragraph (e)(3)(i) or (e)(3)(ii) of this section.

(i) The State agency may make mass changes by applying percentage increases communicated by the source agency to represent cost-of-living increases provided in other benefit programs. These changes shall be reflected no later than the second allotment issued after the month in which the change becomes effective.

(ii) The State agency may update household income information based on cost-of-living increases supplied by a data source covered under the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988 (CMA) in accordance with § 272.12 of this chapter. The State agency shall take action, including proper notices to households, to terminate, deny or reduce benefits based on this information if it is considered verified upon receipt under § 273.2(f)(9). If the information is not considered verified upon receipt, the State agency shall initiate appropriate action and notice in accordance with § 273.2(f)(9).

(4) *Notice for mass change.* When the State agency makes a mass change in SNAP eligibility or benefits by simultaneously converting the caseload, or that portion of the caseload that is affected, using the percentage increase calculation provided for in § 273.12(e)(3)(i), or by conducting individual desk reviews using information not covered under the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act (CMA) in place of a mass change, it shall notify all households whose benefits are reduced or terminated in accordance with the requirements of this paragraph, except for mass changes made under § 273.12(e)(1); and

(i) At a minimum, the State agency shall inform the household of:

- (A) The general nature of the change;
- (B) Examples of the change's effect on households' allotments;

(C) The month in which the change will take effect;

(D) The household's right to a fair hearing;

(E) The household's right to continue benefits and under what circumstances benefits will be continued pending a fair hearing;

(F) General information on whom to contact for additional information; and

(G) The liability the household will incur for any overissued benefits if the fair hearing decision is adverse.

(ii) At a minimum, the State agency shall notify the household of the mass change or the result of the desk review on the date the household is scheduled to receive the allotment which has been changed.

(iii) In addition, the State shall notify the household of the mass change as much before the household's scheduled issuance date as reasonably possible, although the notice need not be given any earlier than the time required for advance notice of adverse action.

(5) *Fair hearings.* The household shall be entitled to request a fair hearing when it is aggrieved by the mass change.

(6) *Continuation of benefits.* A household which requests a fair hearing due to a mass change shall be entitled to continued benefits at its previous level only if the household meets three criteria;

(i) The household does not specifically waive its right to a continuation of benefits;

(ii) The household requests a fair hearing in accordance with § 273.13(a)(1); and

(iii) The household's fair hearing is based upon improper computation of food stamp eligibility or benefits, or upon misapplication or misinterpretation of Federal law or regulation.

(f) *PA and GA households.* (1) Except as provided in paragraph (f)(2) of this section, PA households have the same reporting requirements as any other food stamp household. PA households which report a change in circumstances to the PA worker shall be considered to have reported the change for food stamp purposes. All of the requirements pertaining to reporting

§273.12

7 CFR Ch. II (1-1-14 Edition)

changes for PA households shall be applied to GA households in project areas where GA and food stamp cases are processed jointly in accordance with provisions of §273.2(j)(3).

(2)(i) State agencies may use a joint change reporting form for households to report changes for both PA and food stamp purposes. Whenever a joint change reporting form is used, the State agency shall insure that adjustments are made in a household's eligibility status or allotment for the months determined appropriate given the household's budgeting cycle.

(ii) State agencies may combine the use of a joint PA/food stamp change reporting form with a PA reporting system that demands the regular submission of reports, such as a monthly reporting system. The State agency shall insure that the procedures in §273.21(h) are followed.

(3) The State agency may not terminate a household's food stamp benefits solely because it has terminated the household's PA benefits without a separate determination that the household fails to satisfy the eligibility requirements for participation in the Program. Whenever a change results in the reduction or termination of a household's PA benefits within its food stamp certification period, the State agency must follow the procedures set forth below:

(i) If a change in household circumstances requires a reduction or termination in the PA payment and the State agency has sufficient information to determine how the change affects the household's food stamp eligibility and benefit level, the State agency must take the following actions:

(A) If the change requires a reduction or termination of food stamp benefits, the State agency must issue a single notice of adverse action for both the PA and food stamp actions. If the household requests a fair hearing within the period provided by the notice of adverse action, the State agency must continue the household's food stamp benefits on the basis authorized immediately prior to sending the notice. If the fair hearing is requested for both programs' benefits, the State agency must conduct the hearing according to PA procedures and timeliness stand-

ards. However, the household must re-apply for food stamp benefits if the food stamp certification period expires before the fair hearing process is completed. If the household does not appeal, the State agency must make the change effective in accordance with the procedures specified in paragraph (c) of this section.

(B) If the household's food stamp benefits will increase as a result of the reduction or termination of PA benefits, the State agency must issue the PA notice of adverse action, but must not take any action to increase the household's food stamp benefits until the household decides whether it will appeal the PA adverse action. If the household decides to appeal and its PA benefits are continued, the household's food stamp benefits must continue at the previous level. If the household does not appeal, the State agency must make the change effective in accordance with the procedures specified in paragraph (c) of this section, except that the time limits for the State agency to act on changes which increase a household's benefits must be calculated from the date the PA notice of adverse action period expires.

(ii) Whenever a change results in the termination of a household's PA benefits within its food stamp certification period, and the State agency does not have sufficient information to determine how the change affects the household's food stamp eligibility and benefit level (such as when an absent parent returns to a household, and the household asks to have its TANF case closed without providing any information on the income of the new household member), the State agency must take the following action:

(A) If the situation requires a reduction or termination of PA benefits, the State agency must issue a request for contact (RFC) in accordance with paragraph (c)(3)(i) of this section at the same time it sends a PA notice of adverse action. Before taking further action, the State agency must wait until the household's PA notice of adverse action period expires or until the household requests a fair hearing, whichever occurs first. If the household requests a fair hearing and elects to have its PA benefits continued pending

Food and Nutrition Service, USDA

§ 273.13

the appeal, the State agency must continue the household's food stamp benefits at the same level. If the household decides not to request a fair hearing and continuation of its PA benefits, the State agency must resume action on the changes as required in paragraph (c)(3) of this section.

(B) If the situation does not require a PA notice of adverse action, the State agency must issue a RFC and take action in accordance with paragraph (c)(3) of this section.

(iii) Depending on the household's response to the RFC, the State agency must take appropriate action, if necessary, to close the household's case or adjust the household's benefit amount.

[Amdt. 132, 43 FR 47889, Oct. 17, 1978]

EDITORIAL NOTE: For FEDERAL REGISTER citations affecting § 273.12, see the List of CFR Sections Affected, which appears in the Finding Aids section of the printed volume and at www.fdsys.gov.

§ 273.13 Notice of adverse action.

(a) *Use of notice.* Prior to any action to reduce or terminate a household's benefits within the certification period, the State agency shall, except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, provide the household timely and adequate advance notice before the adverse action is taken.

(1) The notice of adverse action shall be considered timely if the advance notice period conforms to that period of time defined by the State agency as an adequate notice period for its public assistance caseload, provided that the period includes at least 10 days from the date the notice is mailed to the date upon which the action becomes effective. Also, if the adverse notice period ends on a weekend or holiday, and a request for a fair hearing and continuation of benefits is received the day after the weekend or holiday, the State agency shall consider the request timely received.

(2) The notice of adverse action shall be considered adequate if it explains in easily understandable language: The proposed action; the reason for the proposed action; the household's right to request a fair hearing; the telephone number of the food stamp office (toll-free number or a number where collect calls will be accepted for households

outside the local calling area) and, if possible, the name of the person to contact for additional information; the availability of continued benefits; and the liability of the household for any overissuances received while awaiting a fair hearing if the hearing official's decision is adverse to the household. If there is an individual or organization available that provides free legal representation, the notice shall also advise the household of the availability of the service. A notice of adverse action that combines the request for verification of information received through an IEVS computer match shall meet the requirements in § 273.2(f)(9). A notice of adverse action that combines the request for verification of information received through a SAVE computer match shall meet the requirements in § 273.2(f)(10).

(3) The State agency may notify a household that its benefits will be reduced or terminated, no later than the date the household receives, or would have received, its allotment, if the following conditions are met:

(i) The household reports the information which results in the reduction or termination.

(ii) The reported information is in writing and signed by the household.

(iii) The State agency can determine the household's allotment or ineligibility based solely on the information provided by the household as required in paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section.

(iv) The household retains its right to a fair hearing as allowed in § 273.15.

(v) The household retains its right to continued benefits if the fair hearing is requested within the time period set by the State agency in accordance with § 273.13(a)(1).

(vi) The State agency continues the household's previous benefit level, if required, within five working days of the household's request for a fair hearing.

(4) The State agency shall notify a household that its benefits will be reduced if an EBT system-error has occurred during the redemption process resulting in an out-of-balance settlement condition. This notification shall be made no later than the date the action is initiated against the household account. The State agency shall adjust