through September). Requests for payment submitted after the required date for a quarter shall not be considered until the following quarter, when such requests for payments are scheduled to be processed.

§ 274.2 Providing benefits to participants.

(a) General. Each State agency is responsible for the timely and accurate issuance of benefits to certified eligible households, including EBT system compliance with the expedited service benefit delivery standard and the normal application processing standards, as prescribed by these regulations. Those households located in rural areas or comprised of elderly or disabled members who have difficulty reaching issuance offices, and households which do not reside in a permanent dwelling or of a fixed mailing address shall be given assistance in obtaining an EBT card. State agencies shall assist these households by arranging for the mailing of EBT cards to them, by assisting them in finding authorized representatives who can act on their behalf, or by using other appropriate means.

(b) Availability of benefits. All newly certified households, except those that are given expedited service, shall be given an opportunity to participate no later than 30 calendar days following the date the application was filed. An opportunity to participate consists of providing households with an active EBT card and PIN, and benefits that have been posted to the household’s EBT account and are available for spending. State agencies, utilizing a centralized mailing system, must mail EBT cards and PINs, if applicable, in time to assure that the benefits can be spent after they are received but before the 30-day standard expires. A household has not been provided an opportunity to participate within the 30-day standard if the EBT card or PIN is mailed on the 29th or 30th day. For households entitled to expedited service, the State agency shall make benefits available to the household not later than the seventh calendar day following the date of application.

(c) Combined allotments. For those households which are to receive a combined allotment, the State agency shall provide the benefits for both months as an aggregate (combined) allotment, or as two separate allotments, made available at the same time, in accordance with the timeframes specified in §273.2 of this chapter.

(d) Ongoing households. State agencies shall establish an availability date for household access to their benefits and inform households of this date. All households shall be placed on an issuance schedule so that they receive their benefits on or about the same date each month. The date upon which a household receives its initial allotment after certification need not be the date that the household must receive its subsequent allotments.

(1) State agencies may stagger issuance throughout the month, or for a shorter period. When staggering benefit delivery, however, State agencies shall not allow more than 40 days to elapse between the issuance of any two allotments provided to a household participating longer than two consecutive, complete months. Regardless of the issuance schedule used, the State agency shall adhere to the reporting requirements specified in §274.4.

(2) Upon the request of the Tribal organization that exercises governmental jurisdiction over a reservation, the State agency shall stagger the issuance of benefits for eligible households located on reservations for at least 15 days each month.

(3) When a participating household is transferred from one issuance system or procedure to another issuance system or procedure, the State agency shall not permit more than 40 days to elapse between the last issuance under the previous system or procedure, and the first issuance under the new system or procedure. The 40-day requirement does not apply to instances in which actions by recipients, such as failure to submit a monthly report, disrupt benefits. Transfers include, but are not limited to, households being moved into or out of a staggered issuance procedure and households on a fluctuating schedule within a staggered system. If the State agency determines that more than 40 days may elapse between issuances, the State agency shall divide the new issuance into two parts, with one part being issued within the

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40-day period, and the second part, or supplemental issuance, being issued on the household’s established issuance date in the new system or procedure. The supplemental issuance cannot provide the household more benefits than the household is entitled to receive.

(4) Notwithstanding the above provisions, in months in which benefits have been suspended under the provisions of §271.7 of this chapter, State agencies may stagger issuance to certified households following the end of the suspension. In such situations, State agencies may, at their option, stagger issuance from the date issuance resumes through the end of the month or over a five-day period following the resumption of issuance, even if this results in benefits being issued after the end of the month in which the suspension occurred.

(e) Household training. The State agency shall provide training to each household prior to implementation and as needed during ongoing operation of the EBT system. Training functions for an EBT system may be incorporated into certification procedures. At a minimum, the household training shall include:

1. Content which will familiarize each household with the provisions of paragraphs (e) through (h) of this section and §§274.6 and 274.7;

2. Notification to the household of the procedures for manual transactions and re-presentation as described in §274.8(d);

3. The appropriate utilization and security of the PIN;

4. Each household’s responsibilities for reporting loss or damage to the EBT card and who to report them to, both during and outside business hours. Information on a 24 hour hotline telephone number shall be provided to each household during training;

5. Written materials and/or other information, including the specific rights to benefits in an EBT system, shall be provided as prescribed under 7 CFR 272.4(b) for bilingual households and for households with disabilities. This shall include the statement of non-discrimination found in Departmental Regulation 4300-3 (available from USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, Washington, DC 20250). Written materials shall be prepared at an educational reading level suitable for SNAP households;

6. Information on the signs or other appropriate indicators located in checkout lanes that enable the household to identify lanes equipped to accept EBT cards.

7. Disclosure information regarding adjustments and a household’s rights to notice, fair hearings, and provisional credits. The disclosure must also state where to call to dispute an adjustment and request a fair hearing.

(1) EBT cards and Personal Identification Numbers (PINs). (1) State agencies which issue EBT cards by mail shall, at a minimum, use first class mail and sturdy nonforwarding envelopes or packages to send EBT cards to households.

2. The State agency shall permit SNAP households to select their PIN.

(i) PIN assignment procedures shall be permitted in accordance with industry standards as long as PIN selection is available to clients if they so desire and clients are informed of this option.

(ii) If assigning a PIN by mail in conjunction with card issuance, State agencies shall mail the PIN separate from the card one business day after the card is mailed.

(g) Adjustments. (1) The State agency may make adjustments to benefits posted to household accounts after the posting process is complete but prior to the availability date for household access in the event benefits are erroneously posted.

2. A State agency shall make adjustments to an account to correct an auditable, out-of-balance settlement condition that occurs during the redemption process as a result of a system error. A system error is defined as an error resulting from a malfunction at any point in the redemption process: from the system host computer, to the switch, to the third party processors, to a store’s host computer or POS device. These adjustments may occur after the availability date and may result in either a debit or credit to the household.

(i) Client-initiated adjustments. The State agency must act on all requests for adjustments made by client households within 90 calendar days of the
§ 274.3 Retailer management.

(a) Retailer participation. (1) All authorized retailers must be afforded the opportunity to participate in the EBT system. An authorized food retailer shall not be required to participate in an EBT system.

(2) Retailers who do not have immediate access to telephones at the time of authorization shall be accommodated by an alternative system (e.g., manual vouchers with preliminary or