APPENDIX F8:

Myths & Facts About CalFresh

MYTH: You have to give stamps to the cashier at the grocery store in order to use CalFresh benefits.

FACT: The CalFresh Program no longer uses paper stamps or coupons. CalFresh benefits are deposited to your Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card that looks and works like a debit card with a PIN number. You can check your balance over the phone. You can use your EBT card at most places that sell food, such as supermarkets and some farmers' markets.

MYTH: Increasing CalFresh participation will cost California taxpayers more money.

FACT: CalFresh is an entitlement program and is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

MYTH: CalFresh is like welfare and you are considered a "Public Charge" when you receive CalFresh benefits.

FACT: CalFresh is not welfare and it is not cash aid. It is funded by USDA. "Public Charge" is a term used to describe an individual who is likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence, as demonstrated by the receipt of public cash assistance or use of long-term care at government expense. CalFresh is not cash aid, and you will not be considered a "Public Charge" if you receive CalFresh.

MYTH: Receiving CalFresh will hurt my chances for becoming a U.S. citizen.

FACT: Receiving CalFresh will not hurt your chances of becoming a citizen. It is not a welfare program and is not cash aid.

MYTH: If I enroll in CalFresh, I will be taking benefits from someone else who needs it more.

FACT: CalFresh is an entitlement program, which means that all who are eligible and apply will receive benefits. You are not "taking someone else's place" if you apply. USDA sets aside funds for the program.

MYTH: The county office takes my fingerprints and sends them to the government.

FACT: As of January 1, 2012, in California you no longer need to provide fingerprints when applying only for CalFresh.

MYTH: I need to be employed or have some income to receive CalFresh.

FACT: Employment is not an eligibility requirement for CalFresh and there is no minimum income requirement. You may receive CalFresh if you earn money from a job, get unemployment benefits, get child support, own a house or a car, get disability benefits, or have money in savings.

MYTH: I can only buy certain types of food with CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You cannot use CalFresh to buy non-food items such as cigarettes or tobacco, pet food, soaps, paper products, household supplies, vitamins, and medicines, even if they are sold at food stores.

You can buy any food or drink except alcohol or foods that will be eaten in the store, including prepared hot foods. If you are age 60 or older, have a disability, or you are homeless, you may be able to use your EBT card at approved restaurants in counties that operate a Restaurant Meals Program. You can also buy seeds and plants that produce food for the household to eat.

Eligibility, Applications, and Interviews

MYTH: Everyone must go to the CalFresh office for an interview.

FACT: You may apply for CalFresh online at http://www.benefitscal.org/, by mail, or at the county CalFresh office. Intake interviews are usually done over the phone. If you don't have a phone, are unable to keep a phone appointment, or would prefer an appointment in the office, you can request one.

MYTH: You have to go to the CalFresh office every few months to continue receiving benefits.

FACT: If all adults in your household are age 60 or older or have a disability, you may get benefits for up to two years at a time. You or your authorized representative can update your case over the phone or by submitting a report to the county.

MYTH: If I am receiving Social Security Retirement or Disability benefits, I am not eligible for CalFresh.

FACT: Both Social Security (SSA) benefit and Disability (SSDI and SDI) benefit recipients may be eligible for CalFresh. In fact, households that have people age 60 or older, or people with a disability, don't have to pass the gross income test. In California, people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) also receive a state-funded Supplemental Security Payment (SSP) that includes a food benefit. SSI/SSP recipients are therefore NOT eligible for CalFresh unless the SSP amount is $0 as a result of state budget reductions. However, other household members who are not receiving SSI/SSP might still be eligible.

MYTH: I cannot receive CalFresh if I own or buy a home.

FACT: Individuals can own or buy a home and still receive CalFresh. Home ownership will not count when you apply for CalFresh.

MYTH: If I own a car or have a savings account and/or retirement account I will not qualify for CalFresh.

FACT: You can own a car, have a savings account and/or retirement account and may still qualify for CalFresh. Basic CalFresh eligibility is usually determined based on income, not assets.

Households

MYTH: CalFresh is only for mothers or families with children.

FACT: CalFresh is for everyone meeting the eligibility guidelines. Fathers, single adults, people with disabilities, homeless individuals, and people age 60 or older may qualify for CalFresh.

MYTH: I am not related to the people in my household, or the people I live with are not my immediate family, so we are not eligible to apply for CalFresh together.

FACT: For the purposes of CalFresh, a "household" can be an individual living and cooking alone or a group of individuals who live together, are not necessarily related, and buy and prepare food together. In certain cases, a residence may have more than one household, if the eligible people living together buy and prepare food separately.

Benefit Types and Amounts

MYTH: I will only receive $16 a month in CalFresh benefits.

FACT: Benefit amounts depend on each household's unique situation and individual amounts can range from $16 per month to $200 per month. In 2011, the average benefit per person was $147 per month in California.

MYTH: People age 60 and older do not receive credit for medical and prescription drug bills.

FACT: Certain medical expenses may be deducted from the household's gross income for people age 60 or older or people with a disability.

MYTH: Elderly households who receive CalFresh will not be able to receive home-delivered meals.

FACT: Households can receive both CalFresh and home-delivered meals.

MYTH: I applied for CalFresh in the past and did not qualify. I cannot apply again.

FACT: There may have been changes to your circumstances and/or to regulations. It is appropriate to reapply if you are in need.

Citizenship or Legal Residency

MYTH: If I am undocumented and if I go to the county office on behalf of my family, the workers will turn me in. Immigration authorities check the CalFresh office records.

FACT: Confidentiality is strictly enforced at the CalFresh office and client records cannot be checked or shared with immigration authorities. The only time you should be concerned is if there is a warrant for your arrest; if so, your name will be turned in to the authorities.

MYTH: If a citizen or legal resident in my household applies for CalFresh, undocumented members of the household will be deported.

FACT: CalFresh is intended to make sure that those who are eligible have access to CalFresh. Confidentiality is strictly enforced and client records are not shared or reported to Immigration. For example, an undocumented mother can apply for CalFresh on behalf of her citizen child and does not need to be concerned about deportation.

MYTH: Signing up for CalFresh will affect my immigration status or be used against me when I go to get Legal Permanent Residency or U.S. citizenship.

FACT: Non-cash benefits like CalFresh, Medi-Cal, and WIC will not affect immigration status and will not be used against you.

Children

MYTH: My children will have to repay CalFresh benefits when they turn 18.

FACT: CalFresh is not a loan. You do not need to pay back benefits that you were legally entitled to receive.

MYTH: My children will be drafted into the military in order to repay their CalFresh.

FACT: Your children will not be drafted because of CalFresh or other benefits received.

MYTH: My children might be taken away from me if I receive CalFresh.

FACT: Your children will not be taken away from you if you apply for CalFresh. CalFresh helps to ensure that your children have healthy food to eat.

MYTH: If I get CalFresh benefits my kids will not be able to get reduced-price lunch at school. I will not be able to get WIC if I get CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You may get WIC, free or reduced-price meals, and CalFresh at the same time. In fact, if you are eligible for CalFresh, you are automatically eligible for free school meals. All of these programs help to ensure that you and your family can access healthy food.

People without Homes

MYTH: People who are without housing are not eligible for CalFresh because you must have housing and a mailing address.

FACT: You do not have to have a permanent address to apply for CalFresh. County offices are required to provide options regarding mailing alternatives for applicants to facilitate participation in the program. These options may include the use of P.O. boxes, alternative mailing addresses, general delivery pick-up (USPS), and pick-up at the local county office. If you live in a shelter, you can bring a letter from a shelter employee that says you live there when you apply. You may also bring a letter from a family member or friend to have mail sent to their home on your behalf.

MYTH: People who live in shelters can't get CalFresh because they already get free meals.

FACT: You can get CalFresh even if you live in a shelter with meals.

MYTH: I need to have a kitchen or place to prepare the food I buy with CalFresh benefits.

FACT: You can receive CalFresh even if you do not have a place to prepare food. Those age 60 or older, homeless individuals, or individuals with a disability who do not have a place to prepare food may be able to use their CalFresh benefits to purchase prepared food at authorized restaurants through the Restaurant Meals Program in certain counties.

Ex-offenders and Felonies

MYTH: People with criminal records are not eligible for CalFresh.

FACT: Many people with criminal or felony records are eligible for CalFresh. However, drug felons who are convicted for manufacturing and selling illegal drugs will be disqualified, as well as someone who is considered a "fleeing felon."

Potentially ELIGIBLE drug felons include the following:

- Those whose crime and conviction occurred before 8/22/1996 or
- Those individuals who:
  - have completed a government-recognized drug treatment program;
  - are participating in a government-recognized drug treatment program;
  - are enrolled in a government-recognized drug treatment program;
  - are on a waiting list for a government-recognized drug treatment program; or
  - have other evidence that the illegal use of controlled substances has ceased.

INELIGIBLE drug felons include the following:

- Those whose crime and conviction occurred on or after 8/22/1996 or
- Those who were convicted for one of the following:
  - unlawful transporting or importing of drugs;
  - selling, furnishing, administering, or giving away drugs;
  - possession of drugs for purpose of sales;
  - manufacturing/cultivating drugs or marijuana; and
  - soliciting/encouraging minor(s) to participate in any of the above activities.

Military Members and Families

MYTH: Members of the military and their families cannot receive CalFresh.

FACT: Military members and their families can apply and receive CalFresh benefits if they meet eligibility requirements. Military pay can be complicated; some types of pay are included in the income reported on the CalFresh application, and some are not.