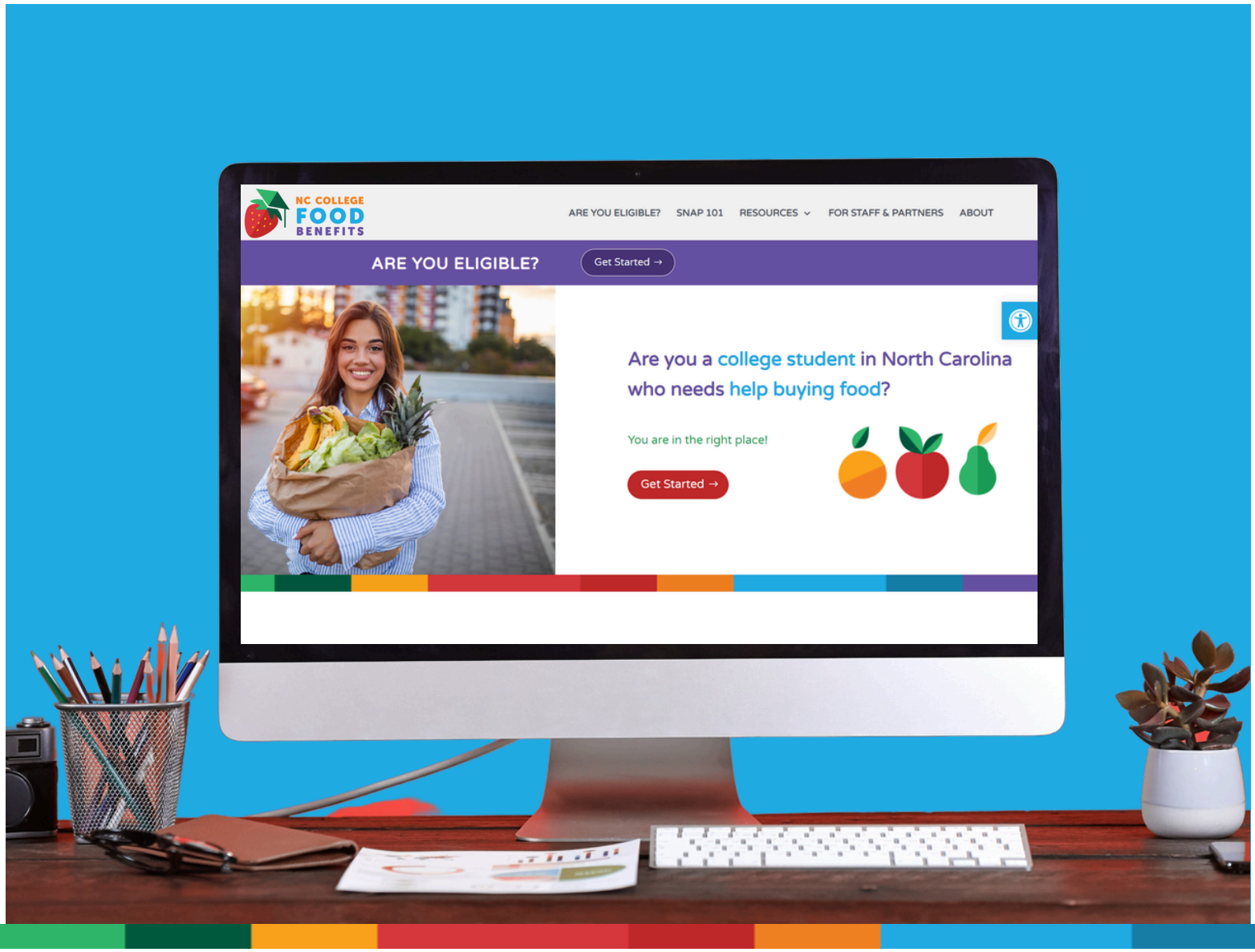


SNAP SUCCESS TOOLKIT

Facts and Assistance about SNAP/FNS for North Carolina College Communities

NC COLLEGE FOOD BENEFITS

Table of Contents

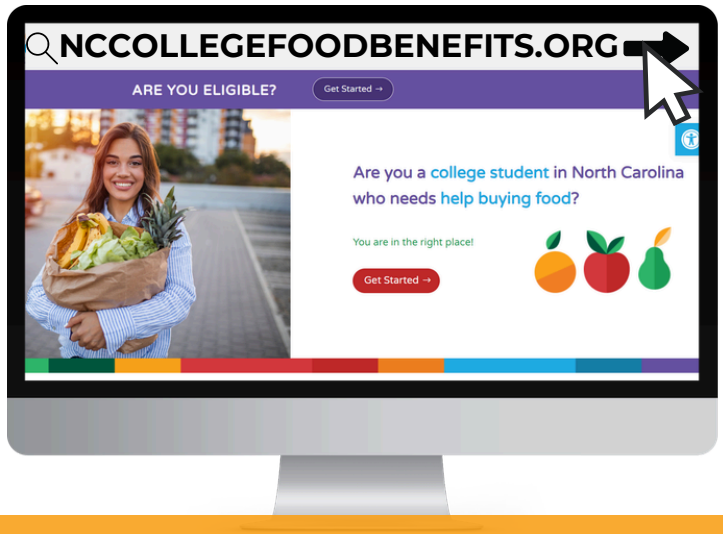
What is SNAP/FNS?	3
Food Insecurity on College Campuses	4
SNAP Terms	5
SNAP/FNS Shopping Guide	7
College Student Eligibility	8
Income Requirements & Type	9
Calculate Your Income Worksheet	14
NC College Food Benefits Eligibility Quiz	15
Applying for SNAP/FNS	16
Receiving SNAP/FNS Benefits	18
Application and Other Resources	20
Non-discrimination Statement	22

The Basics

WHAT IS SNAP/FNS?

SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is a federal program that helps low-income individuals and families access nutritious food. Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP distributes monthly benefits via an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which functions like a debit card and can be used at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmer's markets.

In North Carolina, SNAP is known as Food and Nutrition Services (FNS). NC College Food Benefits is a program dedicated to connecting North Carolina college students with information about SNAP eligibility and the application process.



Finding more details

NCCOLLEGEFOODBENEFITS.ORG

NCCOLLEGEFOODBENEFITS.ORG is a website that provides information for college students, faculty, and staff about college student eligibility requirements for SNAP/FNS benefits.

FOOD INSECURITY ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES



23% of **college students** experience **food insecurity**



67%

2 out of 3 students who are eligible for SNAP/FNS food benefits are not enrolled

About NC College Food Benfits

NC College Food Benefits connects North Carolina college students at every level to information about SNAP/FNS food benefits. It is led by the Carolina Hunger Initiative, in partnership with the NC Department of Health and Human Services, with the goal of making nutritious food more accessible to students across the state.

This toolkit is designed to equip students and advocates with information about SNAP/FNS eligibility. Its goal is to help eligible students access the food benefits they qualify for and to reduce food insecurity across North Carolina's college campuses.

Source: www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-107074.pdf

SNAP TERMS



You can better understand the SNAP/FNS benefits process by being familiar with these terms.

Department of Social Service (DSS)

In North Carolina, the Department of Social Services receives and reviews SNAP/FNS applications. Each county has one or more local DSS office where applications are sent for review, based on the applicant's residency.

Caseworker

The North Carolina Department of Social Services professional who reviews applications, conducts interviews, and helps determine your eligibility.

You are assigned a caseworker once you submit your application.

ePASS

ePASS is North Carolina's online application portal for public assistance programs like SNAP/FNS. You can start your application by visiting ePASS.nc.gov.

SNAP TERMS



Household

Your household size is the number of people you buy and prepare food with. If you do not buy and prepare food with the people you live with, they are not a part of your household. You do not need to include people you live with in your household unless you buy and prepare food with them.

Electronic Benefits Card (EBT)

Electronic Benefits Cards are unique debit cards SNAP/FNS participants receive to buy food online and in-store. Cards can only be used in certain stores and to buy food and drinks.

Luckily, many groceries and NC farmers markets accept EBT cards. You can even use EBT cards to order groceries online for pick-up or delivery.

Eligibility criteria

Conditions that determine whether a student qualifies for SNAP/FNS benefits (e.g., age, work requirements, student status). To learn more about eligibility criteria, see page 8 or visit **NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org** to take our screener.

SNAP/FNS SHOPPING GUIDE: APPROVED RETAILERS AND FOOD ITEMS

GROCERY STORES

In North Carolina, SNAP/FNS benefits can be used at major retailers and online for grocery pickup or delivery. Use the **SNAP Retail Locator** to find participating stores.

FARMERS MARKETS

Some farmers' markets accept SNAP/FNS benefits. Check the **NC Farm Fresh** directory for contact info or a website link to confirm with your local market.

GROCERY SHOPPING

SNAP/FNS benefits in North Carolina can be used to buy most groceries, including fresh produce, dairy, meat, bread, and pantry staples. Items like hot foods, alcohol, and non-food products aren't covered.







Not Eligible to Buy:

- **Alcohol and tobacco**
- **Hot and prepared foods**
- **Cleaning products and toiletries**

How do you know if a student is eligible?

SNAP COLLEGE STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

College students have specific requirements to be eligible for SNAP/FNS benefits. In addition to meeting income thresholds, students must qualify under specific criteria outlined by SNAP.



Who is a student?

For SNAP/FNS eligibility, a college student is defined as anyone enrolled ***at least half-time in an educational program requiring a GED or high school diploma.*** This means a student must be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours for undergraduate or community college students and 4.5 credit hours for graduate students.

STUDENTS MUST MEET AT LEAST ONE OF THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS BELOW TO QUALIFY:

- **17 YEARS OR YOUNGER; OR 50 YEARS OR OLDER.**
- **PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY UNFIT FOR WORK.**
- **WORK A MINIMUM OF 20 HRS/WEEK OR 80 HRS/MONTH.**
- **RESPONSIBLE FOR A CHILD 6-11 YEARS OLD, AND CHILDCARE IS UNAVAILABLE.**
- **FULL-TIME SINGLE PARENT WITH A CHILD UNDER 12 YEARS OLD**
- **PARTICIPATING IN ON-THE-JOB TRAINING.**
- **PARTICIPATING IN A WORK-STUDY PROGRAM.**

Important Note - Meal Plans

If a student receives the majority of their meals (more than 50% of 3 meals daily) through either a mandatory or optional meal plan, they are ineligible for SNAP. Additional information is available on the **USDA SNAP Eligibility Page for Students**.



Income Requirements & Type

INCOME REQUIREMENTS

What are income requirements?

To receive SNAP benefits, college students must **meet the household income limits** and **at least one of the criteria** outlined on the SNAP College Student Eligibility page (see page 8).

Income limits are based on your household size and are calculated as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). For SNAP/FNS benefits, a household includes people who live together and purchase and prepare meals together.

"**Household**" for SNAP means the people you regularly buy and prepare meals with, not necessarily everyone you live with.

For example, if a student lives with roommates but shops and cooks on their own, their roommates wouldn't be counted in their SNAP household.

Household Income Criteria effective October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2026

INCOME TABLE

SNAP/FNS Maximum Income Eligibility Limits are the highest monthly gross income a household can have to qualify for benefits, based on household size. Gross income includes all income before taxes or deductions. If a student's household has a gross monthly income that exceeds the maximum eligibility limit by even one cent, the student is considered ineligible for SNAP/FNS benefits

Household Size	Maximum Income Eligibility Limits
1	$2,660
2	$3,608
3	$4,554

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

Your eligibility for SNAP/FNS benefits is based on household income, which includes the gross income of everyone you regularly buy and prepare meals with, not necessarily everyone you live with.

For additional help, visit the "**Application Resources**" page (see page 20).

What counts as income?

INCOME TYPES



Many different types of income may or may not be included to determine your eligibility. When you apply, casework can help determine any additional income to include or exclude.

Earned income comes from work, like wages or a salary. Unearned income comes from other sources, like Social Security, child support, or unemployment benefits. Both are considered to determine SNAP eligibility.

Included Student Income

- Wages, tips and salary
- Federal loans or educational scholarships used for living expenses (room & board)

Excluded Student Income

- Educational Stipends
- Work Study
- Educational loans, grants, scholarships used for tuition & fees

Note :

Income counted for SNAP eligibility can vary depending on each person's unique situation. **To find out if specific funds or benefits are counted as income, it's best to connect with a SNAP caseworker who can provide personalized guidance.**

What is earned income?

EARNED INCOME

Earned income is any payment made for labor or services. Examples of earned income include wages, salaries, tips, and self-employment.

Gross earned income is the money you make for labor and services before taxes and deductions are made.



Wages, Tips and Salary

These are fixed amounts paid to you for your job and are typically documented on pay stubs or direct deposit records. This should be **counted** when you report your gross income.



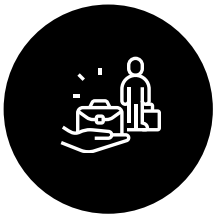
Self-employment, Contract/Freelance

Self-employment refers to income earned from freelancing, owning a small business, or providing services independently. Contract work, which includes jobs like dog-sitting or tutoring, falls under self-employment. It should be **counted** when you report your gross income.



Educational Stipends

Educational stipends, such as payments for teaching or research assistance in a graduate program, are regular payments tied to educational activities and are **NOT counted** when you report your gross income.



Work Study

Work-study earnings, paid for part-time jobs through a federal or state financial aid program are **NOT counted** when you report your gross income.

What is unearned income?

UNEARNED INCOME

Unearned income is income that comes from sources other than labor or services. Examples of unearned income include interest, dividends, rental income, and government benefits.

Your total gross unearned and earned income must be equal to or less than the maximum household income limit.



Federal student Loans, Scholarships & Grants

Federal educational loans, grants, and scholarships are **excluded from counting as income if used for tuition, fees, books, transportation, or other educational expenses.** If funds are **used for living expenses** like housing, food, or utilities, **count as income**.



Child support, Unemployment Benefits & Disability

Unearned income like child support, unemployment benefits, and (non-social security) disability payments are **counted** as income when you apply for SNAP benefits.



GI Bill

GI Bill benefits that provide educational assistance are **NOT counted** as income. However, other forms of military payment may count as income, like basic pay or living allowances.



Retirement Benefits

Retirement benefits refer to payments made to individuals from a qualified retirement plan, which can be established by employers, insurance companies, government agencies, or other organizations. Retirement benefits should be **counted** as income.

Calculate Your Income

You should report all countable income received in the last 30 days of the date of your application. This includes various types of income that may affect your eligibility for SNAP. **Refer to pages 7-8 of this guide for common examples of student income** to help you identify what to report. Use the worksheet below to record your income sources.

In the last 30 days, have you received a paycheck for a job?

You may exclude income earned from graduate stipends and work study jobs.

- **If yes,** count how much you earn before taxes? _____

In the last 30 days, have you received any scholarships or grants for meals and housing costs paid directly to you?

This includes athletic and outside scholarships, federal loans & grants.

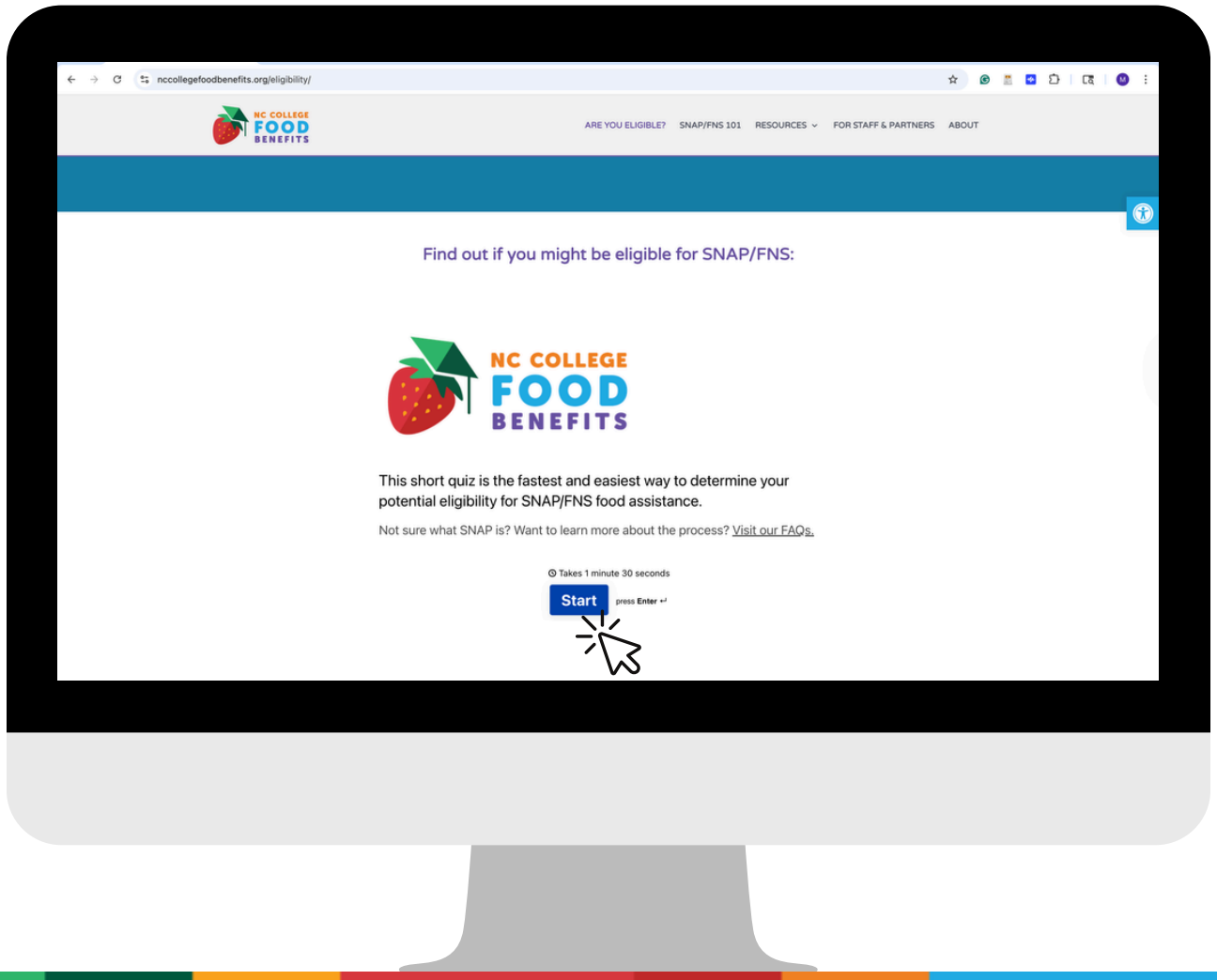
- **If yes,** count how much you earn before taxes? _____

In the last 30 days, have you received any child support payments or unemployment benefits?

- **If yes,** count how much you earn before taxes? _____

Add up your total monthly income. Your total income must be at or below the maximum gross income limit for your household size (see page 10).

Important Note: This worksheet covers common types of income for students, but you may need to report other forms of income not listed here. If you are unsure whether something counts as income, consult your caseworker to ensure all required information is accurately reported.



NC COLLEGE FOOD BENEFITS ELIGIBILITY QUIZ

To determine if you may be eligible for SNAP/FNS benefits, you can visit **NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org** to take the Eligibility Quiz. This short quiz serves as a quick online tool designed to help students assess whether they meet the basic SNAP/FNS requirements. It only takes a few minutes to complete.

While the screener doesn't guarantee eligibility and is not the official application, it's a practical first step for students who want to better understand if they might qualify for benefits. After completing the quiz, students can explore next steps for applying through **ePASS.nc.gov** or connect with support services listed in the toolkit.

APPLYING FOR SNAP/FNS

APPLYING IN NC

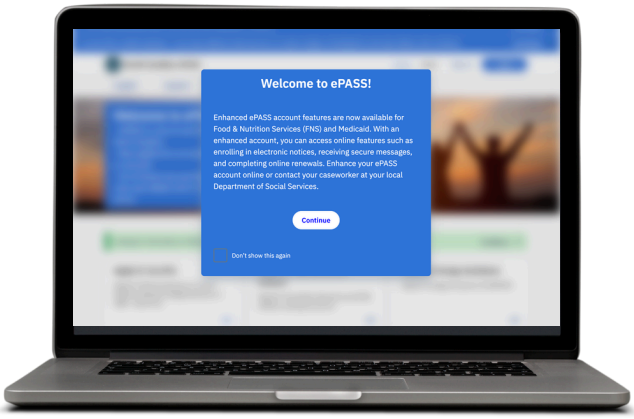
There are three ways to apply for SNAP/FNS benefits in North Carolina: online, in-person, or by mail application.

Online

Apply for SNAP benefits online in North Carolina at **ePass.nc.gov**, the state's online system for applying for assistance programs like SNAP. For a tutorial and additional resources on using ePass, visit **NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org**.

In-Person or Mail Application

Apply in person at your local Department of Social Services (DSS) office or mail your application there. The application form is available on the NCDHHS website under the Child and Family Well-Being Division, where you can select Food and Nutrition Services (FNS).



What to Expect

A complete application only requires your name, address, and signature. However, it's beneficial to provide as much information as possible to simplify the process. After you submit your application, a caseworker will contact you within 30 days.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED TO APPLY

Verifying documents are materials that confirm a student's identity, income, expenses, and enrollment status. Caseworkers use these documents to determine which documents to review and whether a student qualifies for SNAP/FNS benefits and how much assistance they may receive.

Everyone's situation is unique, so students or those helping them may need to share additional documents with a caseworker to determine eligibility for food stamps (SNAP). Below are commonly requested documents for the application process. Copies of these documents can be submitted by mail to your local DSS or online through **ePASS.nc.gov**.

1. **Identity**: Driver's License, Work/School ID
2. **Residency**: Voter Registration, Rent/Mortgage receipt, ID/License
3. **Earned Income**: Paystubs, Letters or note from your Employer, or Financial Aid documents
4. **Unearned Income**: Bank Statement, Benefit Award Letter/Benefit Payment Check, Child Support Agreement, Income Tax Forms
5. **Student Status**: Enrollment letter or invoice or payment receipt for tuition
6. **Expenses**: Bills for heating, cool or electricity, cell phone bill, and other household utility bills
7. **Citizenship**: You will need to provide your social security number or immigration and naturalization papers to verify your eligibility for federal aid.

HOW IS MY ALLOTMENT DETERMINED?

SNAP/FNS decides how much money you get for groceries each month based on your income and living expenses. They subtract certain expenses, called deductions, from your monthly income to calculate your benefit amount.



Monthly SNAP benefits may be equal to or less than the maximum for a household size. Certain living expenses, known as deductions, are subtracted from income to determine the final benefit amount.

<u>Common deductions:</u>

Shelter deductions

- Provide copies of your rent or mortgage agreements and statements as proof of your housing costs.

Utility deductions

- Submit copies of your utility bills, including heating, cooling, electricity, and even phone bills, to demonstrate these expenses.

Other deductions may apply depending on a person's situation, such as expenses for childcare or medical needs. To help determine the full benefit amount, students or people assisting them should share all requested documents with the caseworker.

HOW MUCH ASSISTANCE CAN YOU RECEIVE

Once a SNAP application is submitted, a caseworker is assigned to review it. They'll follow up by mail or phone and may ask for more documents to confirm details. Students—or those helping them—might also have a brief interview to go over the information provided. After all documents are reviewed, the applicant will be contacted about their eligibility. If approved, they'll receive an EBT card in the mail to use for groceries in-store or online.

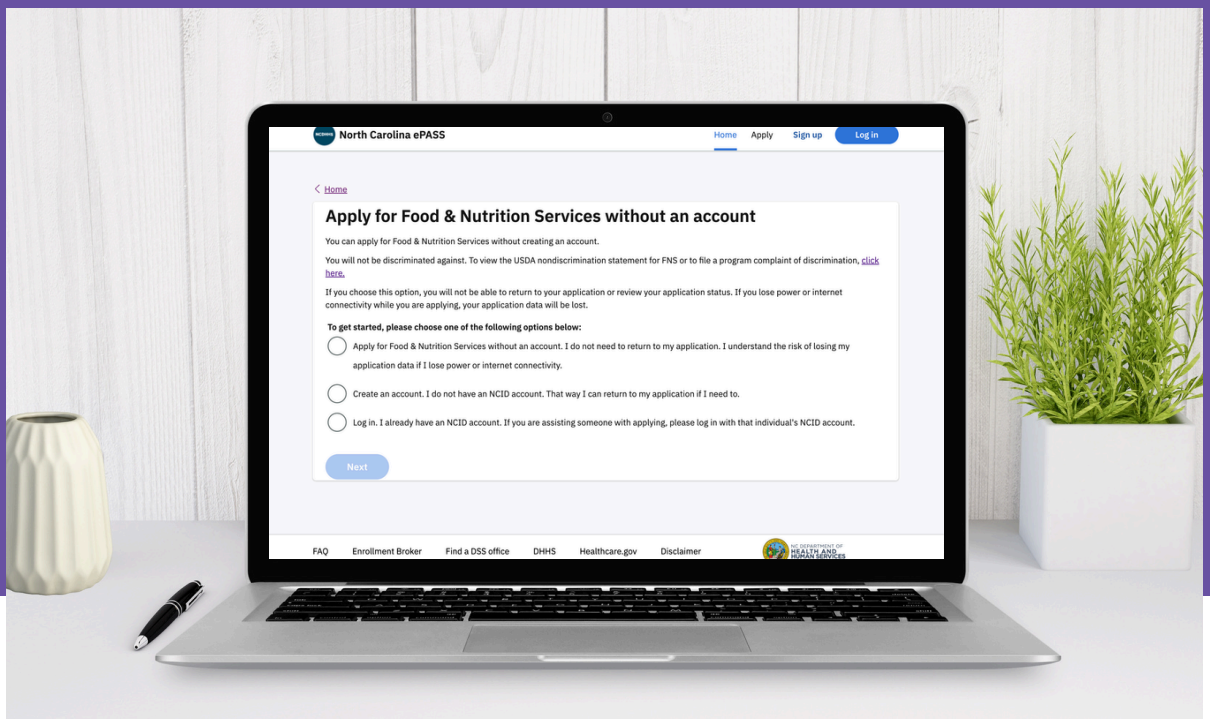
Household Size	Maximum Allotment
1	$306
2	$562
3	$808

Effective October 1, 2025 - September 30, 2026

HOW MUCH ASSISTANCE WILL YOU RECEIVE?

Maximum allotments, the total amount of food assistance you can receive, are based on your household size, income, and living expenses. To see a complete list of the maximum allotment, visit **NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org**.

Certain living expenses are considered when you apply for benefits like rent/mortgage, telephone bills, and utilities.



Helping Students Access SNAP

APPLICATION RESOURCES

NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org aims to equip students, faculty, staff, and key informants with the tools to help students access SNAP. Students may need support to ensure they can access SNAP benefits.

Find a screener designed specifically for college students to help them determine their potential eligibility on NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org under the menu option "**Are You Eligible?**" Additioanl resources are available on the website under the menu option "**Resources**" to provide students, faculty, staff, and key informants with the knowledge to navigate the application process.

Application Assistance

If you or a student you know struggles to apply for SNAP benefits, there are tutorials and FAQs at NCFoodBenefits.org. More In My Basket is a North Carolina State University program that offers assistance to students applying for benefits. Students can set up appointments at MoreFood.org.

OTHER RESOURCES

EMAIL US: **nccollegefoodbenefits@unc.edu**

WEBSITES :

NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org

Morefood.org

ePass.nc.gov

SNAP Retail Locator

NC Farmer Fresh

FOOD PANTRY LOCATIONS
nc211.org

NC 211, is a service provided by United Way, is a free, confidential resource that connects North Carolinians to community services, including food pantries.



THANK YOU!

Notes

Nondiscrimination Statement



IIn accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the State or local Agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: USDA Food and Nutrition Administration, George Washington Carver Center, 5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Beltsville, MD 20740; or (2) email: FNACIVILRIGHTSCOMPLAINTS@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.



NC COLLEGE FOOD BENEFITS

NCCollegeFoodBenefits.org