

Change In Food Stamp Allocation Rules Could Impact CalFresh Program

By [John Ramos](#) July 23, 2019 at 6:02 pm

PITTSBURG (KPIX 5) — Newly proposed rules that would take away the power that states have to determine eligibility for federal food stamp money could potentially create a major problem for California.

Traditionally, states have had the power to decide who will be eligible to receive federal food stamp money.

Each week, the Fresh Approach “Mobile Farmers Market” truck arrives in Pittsburg, offering bargain produce for low-income residents. And many of them pay for it with the money they receive from the CalFresh food assistance program, the modern version of food stamps.

But now, a new rule proposed by the Department of Agriculture would prohibit payments to anyone making more than \$32,640 for a family of four. In Contra Costa County, that would eliminate at least 4,000 households from the program.

“We still consider them low-income,” said Kathy Gallagher, Director of Contra Costa County’s Employment and Human Services Department. “But the threshold that we use is set in statute and law, and that’s what we have to abide by.”

The rule change is intended to prevent abuse of the system by states that automatically enroll anyone receiving any kind of welfare services. It would restrict food stamps only to people making no more than 130 percent of the national poverty level.

That may work in other states, but raising a family on \$32,000 is almost impossible in the Bay Area.

“It doesn’t work here,” said local CalFresh recipient Suni Nelson. “California is very different than the rest of the country, because it is so over-priced.”

In addition, people owning any kind of asset worth more than \$2,250 would also be eliminated, including seniors with a small nest egg or even someone owning a car.

And while it’s meant to save money, Contra Costa County’s Human Services director says it would create a lot of paper work to keep track of who’s eligible.

“Which would mean hiring more staff and creating more bureaucracy,” Gallagher said. “It could actually cost more.”

It’s estimated that 3 million people nationwide could be denied food assistance if the new rule is enacted. Food banks, which are on the front lines of feeding the needy, are concerned they will be overwhelmed.

“They could be turning up at our distributions,” said Lisa Sherrill with the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. “And we could see increases in people that we don’t anticipate and then potentially are not able to meet that demand.”

“It seems ridiculous,” said Gallagher. “It’s hard to believe that we would be getting this kind of draconian proposal for the large numbers of low-income individuals and households in our state.”

So while the federal government spends \$20 billion a year subsidizing farmers to grow food, it seems to consider it a waste of money to help people actually buy food.

The new regulations were announced after the budget deal was struck Monday to lift caps on federal spending. A 60-day comment period has begun on the proposed rule changes. But with an expected fight from Congress, the new regulations could take months to implement if approved.