



Food Stamp Farm Bill Options: Local Survey Results (GAO-04-1059SP)

This document presents the results of GAO's surveys of local food stamp office supervisors. The purpose of the surveys was to determine the views of local food stamp supervisors on whether implementation of the options had achieved expected results. We developed eight surveys, one for each of the Farm Bill options, to obtain this information. We mailed out a total of 1,328 surveys to eight random samples of local food stamp office supervisors. Each of the eight samples comprised local food stamp offices in states that had implemented that option. The response rates varied between 74.0 percent and 86.1 percent. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology and a discussion of the summary of selected survey results are contained in our report entitled Food Stamp Program: Farm Bill Options Ease Administrative Burden, but Opportunities Exist to Streamline Participant Reporting Rules among Programs (GAO-04-916, Washington, D.C.: September 21, 2004).

This report can be accessed by clicking on the following link: www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-916. While this e-supplement contains information on the results from local food stamp offices, another e-supplement contains information on the results from our survey of state food stamp administrators.

This e-supplement can be accessed by clicking on the following link www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1058SP. We conducted our survey work between December 2003 and April 2004 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Links to Food Stamp Farm Bill Options: Local Survey Results

- [4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion](#)
(112 respondents, 74.0 percent response rate)
- [4102 Simplified Definition of Income](#)
(152 respondents, 79.9 percent response rate)
- [4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance](#)
(155 respondents, 86.1 percent response rate)
- [4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions](#)
(100 respondents, 78.0 percent response rate)
- [4107 Simplified Definition of Resources](#)
(141 respondents, 76.2 percent response rate)
- [4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting](#)
(157 respondents, 81.5 percent response rate)
- [4115 Transitional Benefits](#)
(134 respondents, 80.0 percent response rate)

Note: Percentages do not always sum to 100 due to rounding and/or missing data.



Introduction

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the U.S. Congress, has been asked by the Senate Agriculture Committee to review new food stamp options made available under the 2002 Farm Bill (see table below). As part of our work, we are surveying *food stamp supervisors in local offices* in order to better understand what effect these options have had on how the Food Stamp Program is administered at the local level. We would also like to know what suggestions local offices have regarding improvements to these options. This particular survey only asks questions related to the *child support expense income exclusion option*.

We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

Instructions for Completing this Survey

Please return your completed questionnaire(s) in the enclosed preaddressed, postage-paid envelope within one week of receipt. In the event the return envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. General Accounting Office
 ATTN: Anne Welch for Kathy Leavitt
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 Chicago, IL 60606

GAO will issue a report on states' use of Farm Bill options in September, 2004. You will be able to access it through our web site at www.gao.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing this questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

Agency:

Telephone number:

(____) _____

E-mail address:

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting
4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Child Support Expense Income Exclusion Option:

(Also called child support option, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4101. In this survey, we refer to this option as the child support expense income exclusion option.)

Description: This option allows states to treat legally obligated child support payments made to non-household members as an income exclusion rather than a deduction. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the child support expense income exclusion option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **68.8%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. No, we implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **8.9%**
(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)
- c. No, we have not implemented the child support expense income exclusion option yet → **21.4%**
(Please answer A and B below.)
 - A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the child support expense income exclusion option? *(Check all that apply.)*
 - a. State has delayed implementation of this option 1%
 - b. State has not informed our local office about choosing this option 17.6%
 - c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
 - d. Other *(Please describe.)* _____ 3.9%
 - B. Does your office plan to implement the child support expense income exclusion option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*
 - a. Yes 2%
 - b. No 8.8%
 - c. Unknown 10.8%

Please skip to question 16.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office's food stamp caseload the child support expense income exclusion option currently affects. (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0%
- b. Few (1-19%) 67.5%
- c. Some (20-39%) 16.9%
- d. About half (40-59%) 2.6%
- e. Most (60-79%) 1.3%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 0%
- g. All (100%) 0%
- h. Can't determine 10.4%

Effects of Child Support Expense Income Exclusion Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the child support expense income exclusion option has had on your office’s administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the child support expense income exclusion option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the child support expense income exclusion option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	0%	14.3%	80.5%	2.6%	0%	2.6%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	0%	14.3%	81.8%	1.3%	0%	2.6%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	0%	22.1%	74%	1.3%	0%	2.6%
d. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	0%	96.1%	0%	0%	3.9%

5. **Again, think about how the child support expense income exclusion option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the child support expense income exclusion option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Calculation of food stamp benefits	0%	5.2%	76.6%	15.6%	0%	2.6%
b. Determination and/or redetermination of eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	0%	5.2%	77.9%	13%	0%	3.9%
c. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	0%	98.7%	0%	0%	1.3%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the child support expense income exclusion option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? (Check one.)**

- a. Very Great Extent 27.3%
- b. Great Extent 24.7%
- c. Moderate Extent 9.1%
- d. Some Extent 14.3%
- e. Little or No Extent 10.4%
- f. Don't Know 5.2%
- g. Not Applicable 2.6%

7. **Now think about how the child support expense income exclusion option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the child support expense income exclusion option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps	0%	15.6%	81.8%	0%	0%	2.6%
b. Amount of paperwork required	0%	22.1%	74%	1.3%	0%	2.6%
c. Overall participation in the Food Stamp Program	0%	33.8%	57.1%	0%	1.3%	7.8%
d. Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	1.3%	58.4%	32.5%	0%	0%	7.8%
e. Benefit amount	3.9%	61%	22.1%	2.6%	0%	10.4%
f. Other (<i>Please explain.</i>)	0%	0%	97.4%	0%	0%	2.6%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:

8. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the child support expense income exclusion option? The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 2.6%
- c. Remained the Same 71.4%
(Please skip to question 11.)
- d. Somewhat Decreased 1.3%
- e. Greatly Decreased 0%
- f. Don't Know 24.7%
(skip to question 11.)

9. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 100%
- b. No 0%
- c. Don't know 0%

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 0%
- b. No 66.7%
- c. Don't know 33.3%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

11. Think about your state's TANF policy. Does your state's TANF program have an exclusion for child support expenses? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 23.4%
- b. No 9.1% *(Please skip to question 13)*

12. Think about the alignment of rules related to eligibility between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the child support expense income exclusion option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 10%
- c. Remained the Same 51.4%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 10%
- e. Greatly Decreased 4.3%
- f. Don't Know 22.9%

13. Think about your state's Medicaid policy. Does your state's Medicaid program have an exclusion for child support expenses? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 15.6%
- b. No 62.3% *(Please skip to question 15.)*

14. Think about alignment of rules related to eligibility between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the child support expense income exclusion option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 3.4%
- b. Somewhat Increased 13.8%
- c. Remained the Same 27.6%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 0%
- e. Greatly Decreased 0%
- f. Don't Know 34.5%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

15. If you could change the child support expense income exclusion option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **2.6%** Modify option (*Please specify.*) _____
- b. **2.6%** Eliminate option (*Please explain.*) _____
- c. **89.6%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

16. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the child support expense income exclusion option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 3.9%
- b. No 71.8%
- c. Don't Know 22.3%

17. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Comments: 9.8%

No Comments: 90.2%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



Introduction

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We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

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Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing this questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

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Telephone number:

(____) _____

E-mail address:

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions
4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting
4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Simplified Definition of Income Option:

(Also called Simplified Income, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4102. In this survey, we refer to this option as the simplified definition of income option.)

Description: This option allows states to exclude additional types of income by aligning the Food Stamp Program’s definition of income with TANF or Medicaid’s definition of income (such as educational loans, grants, scholarships, fellowships, and veteran’s educational benefits; also complementary assistance program payments that are excluded under a state’s family Medicaid program). This is not simplified or semi-annual reporting. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the simplified definition of income option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **76.6%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. We implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **5.1%** *(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)*
- c. No, we have not implemented the simplified definition of income option yet → **17.7%** *(Please answer A and B below.)*

A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the simplified definition of income option? *(Check all that apply.)*

- a. State has delayed implementation of this option 4.7%
- b. State has not informed our local office about choosing this option 12.7%
- c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
- d. Other *(Please describe.)* _____ 2%

B. Does your office plan to implement the simplified definition of income option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 1.3%
- b. No 8%
- c. Unknown 6%

Please skip to question 17.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office’s food stamp caseload the simplified definition of income option currently affects. (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0%
- b. Few (1-19%) 56.2%
- c. Some (20-39%) 14.9%
- d. About half (40-59%) 4.1%
- e. Most (60-79%) 8.3%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 5.8%
- g. All (100%) 1.7%
- h. Can’t determine 8.3%

Effects of Simplified Definition of Income Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the simplified definition of income option has had on your local office's administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the simplified definition of income option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified definition of income option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	0%	4.1%	66.1%	28.2%	0.8%	0.8%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	0%	6.6%	61.2%	29.8%	0.8%	1.7%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	0.8%	4.1%	40.5%	46.3%	6.6%	1.7%
d. Time between when a food stamp application is submitted and food stamp benefits are made available	0%	3.3%	68.6%	23.9%	2.5%	1.7%
e. Other (<i>Please explain.</i>)	0%	0.8%	96.7%	0.8%	0%	1.7%

5. **Again, think about how the simplified definition of income option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified definition of income option?**
(Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Calculation of food stamp benefits	5.8%	45.4%	41.3%	5%	1.7%	0.8%
b. Determination and/or redetermination of eligibility for Food Stamp Program	3.3%	46.4%	42.9%	5%	1.7%	0.8%
c. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	0%	98.3%	0%	0%	1.7%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the simplified definition of income option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? *(Check one.)***

- a. Very Great Extent 1.7%
- b. Great Extent 10.7%
- c. Moderate Extent 8.3%
- d. Some Extent 9.9%
- e. Little or No Extent 31.4%
- f. Don't Know 7.4%
- g. Not Applicable 14.1%

7. Now think about how the simplified definition of income option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified definition of income option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps and/or reporting changes	0%	1.7%	55.4%	38.8%	3.3%	0.8%
b. Amount of paperwork required	0%	3.3%	37.2%	55.3%	3.3%	0.8%
c. Overall participation in the Food Stamp Program	1.7%	19%	73.6%	1.7%	0%	4.1%
d. Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	3.3%	28.9%	63.6%	1.7%	0%	2.5%
e. Benefit amount	3.3%	38%	49.6%	0%	0%	9.1%
f. Other (Please explain.)	0%	0%	98.3%	0%	0%	1.7%

8. Again, think about how the simplified definition of income option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified definition of income option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting income	8.3%	55.4%	26.5%	6.6%	1.7%	1.7%
b. Other (please explain)	0%	0.8%	97.5%	0%	0%	1.7%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:

9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the simplified definition of income option? The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 3.3%
- c. Remained the Same 57.1% *(Please skip to question 12.)*
- d. Somewhat Decreased 26.4%
- e. Greatly Decreased 1.7%
- f. Don't Know 11.6% *(Please skip to question 12.)*

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 65.8%
- b. No 23.7%
- c. Don't know 10.5%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 15.8%
- b. No 68.4%
- c. Don't know 15.8%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about your state's TANF policy. Does your state's TANF program have a definition of income? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 90.9%
 - b. No 8.3%
- (Please skip to question 14)*

13. Think about the alignment of the definition of income between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the simplified definition of income option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 5.4%
- b. Somewhat Increased 45.9%
- c. Remained the Same 28.9%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 1.8%
- e. Greatly Decreased 4.5%
- f. Don't Know 10.8%

14. Think about your state's Medicaid policy. Does your state's Medicaid program have a definition of income? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 90.9%
 - b. No 7.4%
- (Please skip to question 16.)*

15. Think about alignment of the definition of income between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the simplified definition of income option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 4.5%
- b. Somewhat Increased 35.7%
- c. Remained the Same 30.4%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 5.3%
- e. Greatly Decreased 4.5%
- f. Don't Know 16.1%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

16. If you could change the simplified definition of income option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **13.3%** Add more types of income than currently allowed under this option (*If possible, please give examples of types of income*) _____
- b. **5%** Remove some types of income currently allowed under this option (*If possible, please give examples of types of income*) _____
- c. **39.6%** Allow alignment of food stamp income definitions with income definitions of programs other than TANF and Medicaid (e.g., Child Care)
- d. **12.4%** Other modification to option (*please specify*) _____
- e. **7.4%** Eliminate option
- f. **29.8%** No improvements needed

18. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 18.7%

Did not comment: 81.3%

Input into Choosing Option:

17. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the simplified definition of income option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 12%
- b. No 62.7%
- c. Don't Know 22%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



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We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

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Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing this questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

Agency:

Telephone number:

() _____

E-mail address:

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4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting
4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Simplified Standard Utility Allowance Option:

(Also called Simplified Utility, Standard Utility, or the Heat Standard, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4104. In this survey, we refer to this option as the simplified standard utility allowance option.)

Description: State agencies electing to use the standard utility allowance for all households in place of actual utility costs can adopt the simplified standard utility allowance. This option eliminates the requirement to prorate the standard utility allowance among households sharing a living space, and allows public housing residents with shared meters charged only for excess utility costs to have the benefit of the standard utility allowance as a deduction from income. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the simplified standard utility allowance option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **95.1%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. We implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **2.5%** *(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)*
- c. No, we have not implemented the simplified standard utility allowance yet → **2.5%** *(Please answer A and B below.)*
 - A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the simplified standard utility allowance option. *(Check all that apply.)*
 - a. State has delayed implementation of this option 1.3%
 - b. Our local office is not aware of our state choosing this option 0.6%
 - c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
 - d. Other *(Please specify.)* _____ 0.6%
 - B. Does your office plan to implement the simplified standard utility allowance option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*
 - a. Yes 1.2%
 - b. No 1.2%
 - c. Unknown 0%

Please skip to question 17.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office's food stamp caseload the simplified standard utility allowance option currently affects? (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0.6%
- b. Few (1-19%) 18.1%
- c. Some (20-39%) 9.7%
- d. About half (40-59%) 3.2%
- e. Most (60-79%) 11.7%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 43.5%
- g. All (100%) 7.8%
- h. Can't determine 4.5%

Effects of Simplified Standard Utility Allowance Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the simplified standard utility allowance option has had on your office's administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the simplified standard utility allowance option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	0%	3.9%	72.7%	20.1%	2.6%	0.6%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	0%	3.2%	67.6%	24.6%	4.6%	0%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	0%	2.6%	44.1%	43.6%	9.7%	0%
d. Time between when a food stamp application is submitted and food stamp benefits are made available	0%	1.9%	76.7%	18.8%	1.3%	1.3%
e. Other (<i>Please explain.</i>)	1.3%	0%	97.4%	0.6%	0%	0.6%

5. **Again, think about how the simplified standard utility allowance option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Calculation of food stamp benefits	16.3%	40.2%	37%	6.5%	0%	0%
b. Decisions on whether to apply changes in utility costs reported by clients	26%	42.3%	24%	5.8%	0.6%	1.3%
c. Other (Please explain.)	0.6%	0%	98.7%	0%	0%	0.6%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the simplified standard utility allowance option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? (Check one.)**

- a. Very Great Extent 12.3%
- b. Great Extent 24.7%
- c. Moderate Extent 7.1%
- d. Some Extent 10.4%
- e. Little or No Extent 19.5%
- f. Don't Know 1.9%
- g. Not Applicable 7.1%

Simplified Standard Utility Allowance Option

7. **Now think about how the simplified standard utility allowance option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps and/or reporting changes	0%	2.6%	70.7%	24.1%	1.3%	1.3%
b. Amount of paperwork required	0%	0.6%	48.1%	46%	5.2%	0%
c. Overall participation in the Food Stamp Program	0%	11.7%	81.2%	0.6%	0%	6.5%
d. Participation of working families in the Food Stamp Program	0.6%	11.7%	80.5%	0%	0%	7.1%
e. Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	1.3%	23.4%	70.1%	0%	0%	5.2%
f. Benefit amount	9.1%	62.3%	22.1%	2.6%	0%	3.9%
g. Other (Please explain.)	0.6%	0%	97.4%	0.6%	0%	1.3%

8. **Again, think about how the simplified standard utility allowance option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting utility expenses	18.2%	42.2%	35.8%	3.9%	0%	0%
b. Other (please explain)	0%	0%	98.1%	0%	0.6%	1.3%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:
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9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option?

The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 3.2%
- c. Remained the Same 39.1% *(Please skip to question 12.)*
- d. Somewhat Decreased 37%
- e. Greatly Decreased 6.5%
- f. Don't Know 14.2% *(Please skip to question 12.)*

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 87.4%
- b. No 4.2%
- c. Don't know 8.5%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 4.2%
- b. No 77.7%
- c. Don't know 18.2%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about your state's TANF policy. Does your state's TANF program have an allowance for utilities? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 13%
- b. No 85.7% *(Please skip to question 14)*

13. Think about the alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the simplified standard utility allowance option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 18.1%
- c. Remained the Same 40.7%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 9%
- e. Greatly Decreased 0%
- f. Don't Know 23.1%

14. Think about your state's Medicaid policy. Does your state's Medicaid program have an allowance for utilities? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 9.8%
- b. No 88.3% *(Please skip to question 16.)*

15. Think about alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the simplified standard utility allowance option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 5.5%
- c. Remained the Same 33.1%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 0%
- e. Greatly Decreased 5.5%
- f. Don't Know 28.2%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

16. If you could change the simplified standard utility allowance option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **20.2%** Allow states to choose the simplified standard utility allowance option without making the standard utility allowance mandatory for all clients. (The simplified standard utility allowance option requires that states make the standard utility allowance mandatory for all clients, including those with expenses over and under the standard utility allowance.)
- b. **9.7%** Other modification to option
(Please specify.) _____
- c. **4.5%** Eliminate option (Please explain.)

- d. **59.7%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

17. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the simplified standard utility allowance option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 15.8%
- b. No 58.2%
- c. Don't Know 24.1%

18. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 21%

Did not comment: 79%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



Introduction

Instructions for Completing this Survey

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the U.S. Congress, has been asked by the Senate Agriculture Committee to review new food stamp options made available under the 2002 Farm Bill (see table below). As part of our work, we are surveying *food stamp supervisors in local offices* in order to better understand what effect these options have had on how the Food Stamp Program is administered at the local level. We would also like to know what suggestions local offices have regarding improvements to these options. This particular survey only asks questions related to the *simplified determination of deductions option*.

Please return your completed questionnaire(s) in the enclosed preaddressed, postage-paid envelope within one week of receipt. In the event the return envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. General Accounting Office
 ATTN: Anne Welch for Kathy Leavitt
 200 W. Adams, Suite 700
 Chicago, IL 60606

GAO will issue a report on states' use of Farm Bill options in September, 2004. You will be able to access it through our web site at www.gao.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- 1. Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing the questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

Agency:

Telephone number:

() _____

E-mail address:

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions	4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)
4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Simplified Determination of Deductions Option

(Also called simplified deductions, “freezing deductions,” or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4106. In this survey, we refer to this option as the simplified determination of deductions option.)

Description: This option allows states to disregard changes in certain deduction amounts during certification periods, e.g., childcare expenses, child support payments made, medical expenses, and shelter costs at the same residence. This is not simplified or semi-annual reporting. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the simplified determination of deductions option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **92.8%** (Please go to question 3.)
- b. We implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **2.9%** (**STOP!** Please mail back your survey.)
- c. No, we have not implemented the simplified determination of deductions option yet → **4.3%** (Please answer A and B below.)

A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the simplified determination of deductions option. (Check all that apply.)

- a. State has delayed implementation of this option 0%
- b. Our local office is not aware of our state choosing this option 2.2%
- c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
- d. Other (Please specify.) _____ 1.5%

B. Does your office plan to implement the simplified determination of deductions option in the next twelve months? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 0%
- b. No 2.2%
- c. Unknown 2.2%

Please skip to question 17.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office’s food stamp caseload the simplified determination of deductions option currently affects? (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0%
- b. Few (1-19%) 20.8%
- c. Some (20-39%) 30.3%
- d. About half (40-59%) 11.7%
- e. Most (60-79%) 10.9%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 10.8%
- g. All (100%) 1.5%
- h. Can’t determine 13.9%

Effects of Simplified Determination of Deductions Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the simplified determination of deductions option has had on your office's administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the simplified determination of deductions option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified determination of deductions option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	3.1%	12.6%	54.1%	28.6%	0.8%	0.8%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	2.3%	12.6%	59.5%	23.3%	1.5%	0.8%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	1.6%	8.6%	43.2%	39.6%	7%	0%
d. Frequency of food stamp benefit calculation	1.6%	11%	38.6%	38%	9.3%	1.5%
e. Other (<i>Please explain.</i>)	3.1%	1.6%	93.8%	0%	1.5%	0%

5. **Again, think about how the simplified determination of deductions option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified determination of deductions option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Decisions on whether to apply changes reported by clients	7.1%	28.7%	23%	35.1%	6.2%	0%
b. Other (Please explain.)	0%	0%	96.9%	3.1%	0%	0%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the simplified determination of deductions option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? (Check one.)**

- a. Very Great Extent 2.3%
- b. Great Extent 9.1%
- c. Moderate Extent 1.5%
- d. Some Extent 9.3%
- e. Little or No Extent 15.5%
- f. Don't Know 6.2%
- g. Not Applicable 21%

Simplified Determination of Deductions Option

7. **Now think about how the simplified determination of deductions option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified determination of deductions option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps and/or reporting changes	1.6%	4.7%	64.4%	25.5%	3.1%	0.8%
b. Amount of paperwork required	1.6%	3.1%	55.8%	34%	3.9%	1.6%
c. Benefit amount	4.7%	29.3%	52.7%	8.6%	1.6%	3.1%
d. Other (Please explain.)	1.6%	0%	98.4%	0%	0%	0%

8. **Again, think about how the simplified determination of deductions option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified determination of deductions option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting deductions	2.3%	40.5%	22.2%	24.1%	9.4%	1.5%
b. Other (please explain)	0%	0%	98.4%	0%	1.6%	0%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:
--

9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the simplified determination of deductions option? The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 1.6%
- b. Somewhat Increased 3.9%
- c. Remained the Same 47.7%
(Please skip to question 12.)
- d. Somewhat Decreased 16.9%
- e. Greatly Decreased 1.5%
- f. Don't Know 26.8%
(Please skip to question 12.)

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 66.8%
- b. No 0%
- c. Don't know 27%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 9.2%
- b. No 54.7%
- c. Don't know 30%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about your state's TANF policy. Does your state's TANF program have deductions? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 64.9%
- b. No 28.2% (Please skip to question 14)

13. Think about the alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the simplified determination of deductions option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 3.2%
- b. Somewhat Increased 15%
- c. Remained the Same 30.4%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 9.7%
- e. Greatly Decreased 5.4%
- f. Don't Know 28.8%

14. Think about your state's Medicaid policy. Does your state's Medicaid program have deductions? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 68.1%
- b. No 18% (Please skip to question 16.)

15. Think about alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the simplified determination of deductions option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 8.5%
- c. Remained the Same 25.7%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 11.3%
- e. Greatly Decreased 2.8%
- f. Don't Know 41.3%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

16. If you could change the simplified determination of deductions option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **11%** Expand the number or type of deductions in this option *(If possible, please give examples of types of deductions)*

- b. **3.9%** Reduce the number or type of deductions in this option *(If possible, please give examples of types of deductions)*

- c. **44.3%** Allow states to act on reported changes in expenses that would increase a household's food stamp benefit
- d. **23.1%** Allow deductions "frozen" under this option to be aligned with your state's TANF deduction rules
- e. **20%** Align deductions "frozen" under this option to be aligned with your state's Medicaid deduction rules
- f. **4.6%** Align simplified deductions to rules for programs other than Medicaid or TANF
- g. **7.8%** Other modification to option *(Please specify)*

- h. **11%** Eliminate option
- i. **21.6%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

17. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the simplified determination of deductions option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 14.2%
- b. No 62.9%
- c. Don't Know 21.4%

18. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 24.8% Did not comment: 75.2%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



Introduction

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the U.S. Congress, has been asked by the Senate Agriculture Committee to review new food stamp options made available under the 2002 Farm Bill (see table below). As part of our work, we are surveying *food stamp supervisors in local offices* in order to better understand what effect these options have had on how the Food Stamp Program is administered at the local level. We would also like to know what suggestions local offices have regarding improvements to these options. This particular survey only asks questions related to the *simplified definition of resources option*.

We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

Instructions for Completing this Survey

Please return your completed questionnaire(s) in the enclosed preaddressed, postage-paid envelope within one week of receipt. In the event the return envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. General Accounting Office
 ATTN: Anne Welch for Kathy Leavitt
 200 W. Adams, Suite 700
 Chicago, IL 60606

GAO will issue a report on states' use of Farm Bill options in September, 2004. You will be able to access it through our web site at www.gao.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing this questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

Agency:

Telephone number:

(____) _____

E-mail address:

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4107 Simplified Definition of Resources	4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)
4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Simplified Definition of Resources Option:

(Also called Simplified Resources, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4107. In this survey, we refer to this option as the simplified definition of resources option.)

Description: This option allows states to exclude additional types of resources by aligning the Food Stamp Program’s definition of resources with TANF or Medicaid’s definition of resources. Any resources not counted under section 1931 of Medicaid or TANF can be excluded with some exceptions. Resources that cannot be excluded using this particular option include cash and licensed vehicles. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the simplified definition of resources option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **63.4%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. We implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **9.6%** *(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)*
- c. No, we have not implemented the simplified definition of resources option yet → **24.4%** *(Please answer A and B below.)*

A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the simplified definition of resources option? *(Check all that apply.)*

- a. State has delayed implementation of this option 7.1%
- b. State has not informed our local office about choosing this option 16.3%
- c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
- d. Other *(Please describe.)* _____ 3.6%

B. Does your office plan to implement the simplified definition of resources option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 1.4%
- b. No 12.8%
- c. Unknown 7.1%

Please skip to question 17.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office’s food stamp caseload the simplified definition of resources option currently affects. (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0%
- b. Few (1-19%) 49.5%
- c. Some (20-39%) 16.1%
- d. About half (40-59%) 7%
- e. Most (60-79%) 11.2%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 8%
- g. All (100%) 1%
- h. Can’t determine 7.1%

Effects of Simplified Definition of Resources Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the simplified definition of resources option has had on your local office’s administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the simplified definition of resources option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified definition of resources option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	0%	6%	65.7%	20.1%	3%	5.1%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	0%	7.1%	61.7%	25.2%	2%	4.1%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	0%	4%	42.7%	41.4%	7.9%	4%
d. Time between when a food stamp application is submitted and food stamp benefits are made available	0%	4%	75.7%	12.2%	6.1%	2%
e. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	0%	97%	1%	1%	1%

5. **Again, think about how the simplified definition of resources option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the simplified definition of resources option?**
(Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Calculation of food stamp benefits	3%	32.2%	60.8%	1%	1%	2%
b. Determination and/or redetermination of eligibility for Food Stamp Program	4.1%	40.2%	50.7%	2%	1%	2%
c. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	1%	99%	0%	0%	0%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the simplified definition of resources option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? *(Check one.)***

- a. Very Great Extent 6.1%
- b. Great Extent 12.2%
- c. Moderate Extent 6%
- d. Some Extent 17.2%
- e. Little or No Extent 31.4%
- f. Don't Know 7%
- g. Not Applicable 7%

7. Now think about how the simplified definition of resources option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified definition of resources option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps and/or reporting changes	0%	2%	57.6%	32.3%	4%	4.1%
b. Amount of paperwork required	0%	1%	45.4%	45.5%	6.1%	2%
c. Overall participation in the Food Stamp Program	0%	38.2%	50.7%	3%	0%	8.1%
d. Participation of working families in the Food Stamp Program	0%	31.1%	57.7%	2%	0%	9.1%
e. Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	2%	45.3%	45.6%	1%	0%	6.1%
f. Other (Please explain.)	0%	0%	99%	0%	1%	0%

8. Again, think about how the simplified definition of resources option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the simplified definition of resources option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting resources	9.1%	43.4%	37.4%	4.1%	1%	5.1%
b. Other (please explain)	0%	0%	99%	0%	0%	1%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:

9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the simplified definition of resources option? The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0%
- b. Somewhat Increased 2%
- c. Remained the Same 55.5% (Please skip to question 12.)
- d. Somewhat Decreased 21.2%
- e. Greatly Decreased 1%
- f. Don't Know 20.3% (Please skip to question 12.)

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 50.1%
- b. No 41.5%
- c. Don't know 8.4%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 25.1%
- b. No 50.1%
- c. Don't know 24.8%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about your state's TANF policy. Does your state's TANF program have a definition of resources? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 81.8%
- b. No 13.2% (Please skip to question 14)

13. Think about the alignment of the definition of resources between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the simplified definition of resources option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 4.9%
- b. Somewhat Increased 47.6%
- c. Remained the Same 29.1%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 3.7%
- e. Greatly Decreased 1.2%
- f. Don't Know 12.2%

14. Think about your state's Medicaid policy. Does your state's Medicaid program have a definition of resources? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 84.8%
- b. No 13.2% (Please skip to question 16.)

15. Think about alignment of the definition of resources between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the simplified definition of resources option, alignment has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 3.5%
- b. Somewhat Increased 34.9%
- c. Remained the Same 34.8%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 6.9%
- e. Greatly Decreased 3.5%
- f. Don't Know 15.2%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

16. If you could change the simplified definition of resources option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **13.2%** Add more types of resources than currently allowed under this option (*If possible, please give examples of types of resources*) _____
- b. **8%** Remove some types of resources currently allowed under this option (*If possible, please give examples of types of resources*) _____
- c. **16.2%** Allow alignment of food stamp resource definitions with resource definitions of programs other than TANF and Medicaid (e.g., Child Care)
- d. **7%** Other modification to option (*please specify*) _____
- e. **7.1%** Eliminate option
- f. **45.4%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

17. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the simplified definition of resources option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 18.2%
- b. No 54.9%
- c. Don't Know 19.1%

18. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 28.1%

Did not comment: 71.9%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



Introduction

Instructions for Completing this Survey

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the U.S. Congress, has been asked by the Senate Agriculture Committee to review new food stamp options made available under the 2002 Farm Bill (see table below). As part of our work, we are surveying *food stamp supervisors in local offices* in order to better understand what effect these options have had on how the Food Stamp Program is administered at the local level. We would also like to know what suggestions local offices have regarding improvements to these options. This particular survey only asks questions related to the *expanded simplified reporting option*.

We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

Please return your completed questionnaire(s) in the enclosed preaddressed, postage-paid envelope within one week of receipt. In the event the return envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. General Accounting Office
 ATTN: Anne Welch for Kathy Leavitt
 200 W. Adams, Suite 700
 Chicago, IL 60606

GAO will issue a report on states' use of Farm Bill options in September, 2004. You will be able to access it through our web site at www.gao.gov.

Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

- 1. Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing the questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.**

Name:

Title:

Agency:

Telephone number:

() _____

E-mail address:

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting	4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)
4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4115 Transitional Benefits

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Expanded Simplified Reporting Option

(Also called Semi-annual Reporting, 6-month Reporting, and Streamlined Reporting, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4109. In this survey, we refer to this option as the expanded simplified reporting option.)

Description: Prior to passage of the Farm Bill, the Food Stamp Program contained the option to use a reporting system with reduced reporting for earned income households on a semi-annual schedule. Under this option, simplified reporting was expanded from earned-income households to all households (with some exceptions), requiring households to report changes only when income rises above 130% of the poverty level. The option to expand simplified reporting became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the expanded simplified reporting option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **98.2%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. We implemented a policy that expanded simplified reporting to more households than just those with earned income earlier than October 1, 2002 → **0%** *(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)*
- c. No, we have not implemented the expanded simplified reporting option yet → **1.8%** *(Please answer A and B below.)*

A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the expanded simplified reporting option. *(Check all that apply.)*

- a. State has delayed implementation of this option 0.6%
- b. Our local office is not aware of our state choosing this option 1.2%
- c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
- d. Other (please describe) _____ 0%

B. Does your office plan to implement the expanded simplified reporting option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 0.6%
- b. No 1.2%
- c. Unknown 0%

Please skip to question 15.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office's caseload the expanded simplified reporting option currently affects? (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 0.6%
- b. Few (1-19%) 6.8%
- c. Some (20-39%) 7.4%
- d. About half (40-59%) 15.4%
- e. Most (60-79%) 33.3%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 18.3%
- g. All (100%) 3%
- h. Can't determine 15.1%

Effects of Expanded Simplified Reporting Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, that the expanded simplified reporting option has had on your office’s administration of the program or on program participants.

4. **Think about how the expanded simplified reporting option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the expanded simplified reporting option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	1.8%	8.6%	32.7%	47.6%	9.2%	0%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	3.6%	15.4%	60.5%	17.4%	2.4%	0.6%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	9.1%	12.3%	37.4%	35.7%	5.6%	0%
d. Frequency of food stamp benefit calculation	1.2%	7.4%	28.6%	47%	15.7%	0%
e. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	3%	1.2%	93.3%	0%	0.6%	1.8%

5. **Again, think about how the expanded simplified reporting option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the expanded simplified reporting option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Decisions on whether to apply changes reported by clients	4.4%	17.7%	31.2%	27.1%	19.7%	0%
b. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	0%	0%	91.4%	3.2%	3.6%	1.8%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the expanded simplified reporting option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? (Check one.)**

- a. Very Great Extent 1.2%
- b. Great Extent 3.6%
- c. Moderate Extent 4.4%
- d. Some Extent 8.2%
- e. Little or No Extent 38%
- f. Don't Know 5.4%
- g. Not Applicable 12.7%

7. Now think about how the expanded simplified reporting option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the expanded simplified reporting option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent reporting changes	2.6%	4.4%	30.4%	46.6%	12.4%	3.6%
b. Amount of paperwork required	1.8%	9.4%	26.3%	41.3%	18.8%	2.4%
c. Overall participation in the Food Stamp Program	3%	30.4%	44.5%	3.8%	0.6%	17.7%
d. Participation of working families in the Food Stamp Program	1.2%	27.3%	49.9%	1.8%	0%	19.8%
e. Benefit amount	10.4%	29.8%	35.7%	1.8%	0%	22.2%
f. Other (Please explain.)	3%	0.6%	90.3%	0%	0%	6%

8. Again, think about how the expanded simplified reporting option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the expanded simplified reporting option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting changes	16.8%	29.5%	7.9%	31.9%	12.1%	1.8%
b. Other (please explain.)	0%	0%	97%	0.6%	0.6%	1.8%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:

9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the expanded simplified reporting option? The error rate in your local office has: *(Check one.)*

- a. Greatly Increased 1.8%
- b. Somewhat Increased 9.7%
- c. Remained the Same 34% *(Please skip to question 12.)*
- d. Somewhat Decreased 20.6%
- e. Greatly Decreased 2.4%
- f. Don't Know 30.9% *(Please skip to question 12.)*

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 58.6%
- b. No 32.8%
- c. Don't know 6.9%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 13.8%
- b. No 60.3%
- c. Don't know 24.1%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about the alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's TANF program. As a result of the expanded simplified reporting option, alignment has: *(Check one.)*

- a. Greatly Increased 4.2%
- b. Somewhat Increased 17.2%
- c. Remained the Same 27.1%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 18.8%
- e. Greatly Decreased 27.7%
- f. Don't Know 4.4%

13. Think about alignment of rules for reporting changes between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program. As a result of implementing the expanded simplified reporting option, alignment has: *(Check one.)*

- a. Greatly Increased 3.6%
- b. Somewhat Increased 26%
- c. Remained the Same 31.5%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 9.1%
- e. Greatly Decreased 22.4%
- f. Don't Know 6.8%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

14. If you could change the expanded simplified reporting option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **45.8%** Align the simplified reporting option to reporting rules for Medicaid
- b. **42.2%** Align the simplified reporting option to reporting rules for TANF
- c. **11.6%** Align the simplified reporting option to reporting rules for programs other than Medicaid or TANF
- d. **22.7%** Eliminate waiver to act on all reported changes (if your state requires your local office to act on all reported changes)
- e. **41.8%** Expand the simplified reporting option to all households
- f. **10%** Other modification to option (*Please specify*) _____
- g. **6.7%** Eliminate option (*Please explain*) _____
- h. **5.2%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

15. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state's decision to choose the expanded simplified reporting option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 12.9%
- b. No 72.7%
- c. Don't Know 12.6%

16. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 43.5%

Did not comment: 56.5%

**Thank you very much for your participation.
Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.**



Instructions for Completing this Survey

Introduction

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 ATTN: Anne Welch for Kathy Leavitt
 200 W. Adams, Suite 700
 Chicago, IL 60606

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Thank you for your assistance.

Background Information

1. Please enter the name, title, agency, telephone number, and e-mail address of the key person completing the questionnaire in the event we need to clarify an answer.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Agency: _____

Telephone number: _____
 (____) _____

E-mail address: _____

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of the U.S. Congress, has been asked by the Senate Agriculture Committee to review new food stamp options made available under the 2002 Farm Bill (see table below). As part of our work, we are surveying *food stamp supervisors in local offices* in order to better understand what effect these options have had on how the Food Stamp Program is administered at the local level. We would also like to know what suggestions local offices have regarding improvements to these options. This particular survey only asks questions related to the *transitional benefits option*.

We greatly appreciate your time in filling out this survey. If you are not a food stamp supervisor or someone with similar knowledge, please designate the appropriate person from your local office to fill out this survey. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Kathy Leavitt at (202) 512-8433 or Beth Morrison at (202) 512-9641.

List of Major Farm Bill Options	
**4115 Transitional Benefits	4105 Simplified Housing Costs (Homeless)
4101 Child Support Expense Income Exclusion	4106 Simplified Determination of Deductions
4102 Simplified Definition of Income	4107 Simplified Definition of Resources
4104 Simplified Standard Utility Allowance	4109 Expanded Simplified Reporting

** Indicates the option to be discussed on this questionnaire

Transitional Benefits Option

(Also called Transitional Food Stamps, or known by the section number in the Farm Bill: 4115. In this survey, we refer to this option as the transitional benefits option.)

Description: This option helps support families as they move off Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance. Under this option, food stamp benefits can be continued after a family moves off TANF for up to 5 months in an amount equal to the amount received prior to TANF termination with adjustments for the loss of TANF income. This option became available to states on October 1, 2002; your state might have implemented it on or after that date.

2. Has your local office implemented the transitional benefits option, which became available as of October 1, 2002? (Check one.)

- a. Yes → **93.1%** *(Please go to question 3.)*
- b. We implemented a similar policy earlier than October 1, 2002 → **2.8%** *(STOP! Please mail back your survey.)*
- c. No, we have not implemented the transitional benefits option yet → **4.1%** *(Please answer A and B below.)*

A. Listed below are reasons a local office might not have implemented this option. Please indicate why your local office has not implemented the transitional benefits option. *(Check all that apply.)*

- a. State has delayed implementation of this option 0%
- b. Our local office is not aware of our state choosing this option 0.7%
- c. Our local office has a waiver not to implement this option 0%
- d. Other *(Please specify.)* _____ 2.8%

B. Does your office plan to implement the transitional benefits option in the next twelve months? *(Check one.)*

- a. Yes 0.7%
- b. No 1.4%
- c. Unknown 1.4%

Please skip to question 14.

3. Please estimate how much of your local office's food stamp caseload the transitional benefits option currently affects? (Check one.)

- a. None (0%) 4.5%
- b. Few (1-19%) 75.5%
- c. Some (20-39%) 13.4%
- d. About half (40-59%) 2.2%
- e. Most (60-79%) 1.5%
- f. Almost all (80-99%) 0%
- g. All (100%) 0.7%
- h. Can't determine 1.5%

Effects of Transitional Benefits Option:

We are interested in understanding what effects, if any, the transitional benefits option has had on your office's administration of the program or on the participants.

4. **Think about how the transitional benefits option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the transitional benefits option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Number of contacts with client(s)	0%	12.6%	52.7%	32.4%	2.2%	0%
b. Time spent with client(s) during contacts	0%	8.9%	68.3%	19.6%	3.2%	0%
c. Time spent on paperwork (including verification)	4.5%	21.3%	40.6%	18.8%	14.1%	0.7%
d. Other <i>(Please explain.)</i>	1.5%	3%	94.1%	0%	0%	1.5%

5. **Again, think about how the transitional benefits option has affected food stamp caseworkers in your local office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp caseworkers as a result of implementing the transitional benefits option? (Check one for each change that applies.)**

Changes for the Caseworker	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Calculation of food stamp benefits	14.6%	27.2%	30.9%	26.5%	0.7%	0%
b. Decisions on whether to apply changes reported by clients	15.4%	22%	26%	29.2%	7.4%	0%
c. Other (Please explain.)	0%	0.7%	96.3%	2.2%	0%	0.7%

6. **If you checked “Remained the Same” anywhere in questions 4 and/or 5, to what extent is it because the implementation of the transitional benefits option was mostly or entirely automated through your computer system? (Check one.)**

- a. Very Great Extent 6.7%
- b. Great Extent 13.6%
- c. Moderate Extent 9.9%
- d. Some Extent 5.9%
- e. Little or No Extent 23.5%
- f. Don't Know 1.5%
- g. Not Applicable 14.4%

7. Now think about how the transitional benefits option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the transitional benefits option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Increased (1)	Somewhat Increased (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Decreased (4)	Greatly Decreased (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Time spent applying for food stamps and/or reporting changes	0%	7.4%	40.4%	39.4%	12.1%	0.7%
b. Amount of paperwork required	0%	9.2%	40.6%	34.2%	15.4%	0.7%
c. Participation of working families in the Food Stamp Program	6.9%	43.6%	42.6%	0%	0.7%	6.2%
d. Eligibility for the Food Stamp Program	13.4%	49.7%	36.1%	0%	0%	0.7%
e. Other (please explain.)	0.7%	0%	97.8%	0%	0%	1.5%

8. Again, think about how the transitional benefits option has affected food stamp clients at your office. Which of the following changes, if any, have occurred for your food stamp clients as a result of implementing the transitional benefits option? (Check one for each change that applies.)

Changes for the Clients	Greatly Simplified (1)	Somewhat Simplified (2)	Remained the Same (3)	Somewhat Complicated (4)	Greatly Complicated (5)	Don't Know (6)
a. Rules related to reporting or documenting changes	15.8%	33.4%	29.2%	14.4%	3.7%	3.5%
b. Other (please explain.)	0%	0%	97%	0.7%	0.7%	1.5%

Effect of Option on Error Rate:

9. In your opinion, which of the following, if any, has occurred as a result of your state implementing the transitional benefit option? The error rate in your local office has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 0.7%
- b. Somewhat Increased 5.4%
- c. Remained the Same 50.7% *(Please skip to question 12.)*
- d. Somewhat Decreased 15.6%
- e. Greatly Decreased 1.5%
- f. Don't Know 23.8% *(Please skip to question 12.)*

10. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to calculating the benefit amount? (also known as the payment accuracy rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 68%
- b. No 14.6%
- c. Don't know 8.7%

11. Was the increase or decrease in the error rate related to terminations and denials? (also known as the negative error rate) (Check one.)

- a. Yes 14.6%
- b. No 73.8%
- c. Don't know 2.9%

Effect of Option on Alignment Between Assistance Programs:

12. Think about your state's Medicaid policy on certification periods (also known as eligibility review periods). As a result of implementing the transitional benefit option, alignment of certification periods or eligibility review periods between the Food Stamp Program and your state's Medicaid program has: (Check one.)

- a. Greatly Increased 1.5%
- b. Somewhat Increased 16.6%
- c. Remained the Same 34.9%
- d. Somewhat Decreased 11.9%
- e. Greatly Decreased 12.4%
- f. Don't Know 17.3%

Changes to Option to Improve the FSP:

13. If you could change the transitional benefits option to improve how the Food Stamp Program is administered, would you do any of the following? (Check all that apply.)

- a. **36.4%** Increase duration of transitional food stamps to 6 months
- b. **5.7%** Decrease duration to shorter than 5 months
- c. **35.9%** Align transitional benefits period with your state’s transitional Medicaid benefit period
- d. **9.6%** Align transitional benefits period with your state’s transitional child care benefit period
- e. **12.1%** Change benefit calculation of transitional benefits to include former TANF benefit when recalculating transitional food stamp benefit amount (i.e., decrease transitional food stamp benefit amount)
- f. **8.4%** Change benefit calculation of transitional food stamp benefit amount in another way *(Please explain.)*

- g. **10.9%** Other modification to option *(Please specify.)* _____
- h. **10.6%** Eliminate option *(Please explain.)* _____
- g. **11.4%** No improvements needed

Input into Choosing Option:

14. Did your local office have the opportunity to provide any input, direct or indirect, into your state’s decision to choose the transitional benefits option? (Check one.)

- a. Yes 8.8%
- b. No 70.4%
- c. Don’t Know 17.3%

15. If you have any comments about this questionnaire, or about the issues we have addressed, please write them here.

Commented: 33.2%

Did not comment: 66.8%

Thank you very much for your participation.

Please return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.