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Field Operations Memo 98-15
March 12, 1998

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: Verifying Qualifying Quarters of Work for Food Stamp Program Eligibility

Overview

The federal welfare reform law requires certain Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) to have 40 qualifying quarters of work to be eligible for the Food Stamp Program (FS). See 106 CMR 362.220(A)(2)(b) and (c).

Since October 1996, the Department has accepted a self-declaration by a noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on qualifying quarters of work. **Although the self-declaration will continue to be used to determine initial eligibility, effective immediately a federal mandate requires that the Department verify a noncitizen's claim for Food Stamp Program eligibility based on qualifying quarters of work.**

Note: The method of determining FS Work quarters differs from the TAFDC method.

This field operations memo:

- ◆ explains that the Social Security Administration (SSA) has developed the Quarters of Coverage History System (QCHS) to verify a noncitizen's qualifying work quarters;
 - ◆ explains that noncitizens who have the necessary documentation may verify their 40 quarters of coverage without using the QCHS;
 - ◆ reviews procedures for determining eligibility based on qualifying quarters of work; and
 - ◆ describes the report and procedures workers must use to verify a noncitizen's work quarters.
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QCHS Records

The federal welfare reform law mandated that SSA develop a mechanism for states to verify qualifying quarters. SSA developed the QCHS by modifying the existing State Verification and Exchange System (SVES) query file to allow the Department to match LPRs claiming FS eligibility based on qualifying quarters against QCHS records.

QCHS records contain information on work covered by the Social Security Act and all federal, state or local wages since 1983. Types of covered employment include agricultural, military, railroad and self-employment.

QCHS records *will not include* current year earnings, last year earnings or possibly self-employment if the employer report or self-employment tax return has not been processed by SSA. QCHS records *will also not include* earnings from the foreign countries listed in Attachment A. In addition, qualifying quarters of a nonrecipient spouse or parent *will not be included* in the QCHS match. (For policy on nonrecipient spouse or parent quarters see 106 CMR 362.220(A)(2)(c).) ***Noncitizens may use qualifying quarters from any of the sources described above once verified and developed in accordance with Attachment B. See Attachment E for instructions if a nonrecipient spouse or parent refuses to cooperate with the qualifying quarters requirement.***

**Eligibility
Based on
Qualifying
Quarters**

Workers must ask LPRs claiming FS eligibility based on qualifying quarters of work the following:

Ask: How many years in total have the noncitizen, the noncitizen's spouse, and the noncitizen's parents (before the noncitizen's birth up to the noncitizen's turning 18) collectively lived in this country and earned money through work, or worked in any of the foreign countries listed in Attachment A?

A) Noncitizen ____ + B) Spouse ____ + C) Parents ____ = ____
Yrs /Mos # Yrs/Mos # Yrs /Mos Total#

**Eligibility
Based on
Qualifying
Quarters
(Continued)**

If the total is less than 10 years, **STOP:** the noncitizen is not eligible for FS based on qualifying quarters.

If the total is 10 years or more, the noncitizen is presumed to meet the 40-quarter requirement.

Note: Noncitizens who are otherwise eligible for FS, i.e., **refugees, asylees, deportees, Cuban/Haitians or Amerasians within the first five years of such status being granted, or noncitizens with a claim to eligibility based on military service** are not subject to the 40 quarters requirement. *In addition, LPRs who before becoming LPRs were refugees, asylees, deportees, and are within the first five years of being granted their respective status are not subject to the 40 quarters requirement.*

**PRISM II
Coding**

If a noncitizen cannot meet the qualifying quarters requirement for FS eligibility, select "No" on PRISM II in the Quarter Coverage Requirement field on the Citizenship Screen. Be sure to determine the noncitizen's eligibility for the SSFSP in accordance with Field Operations Memo 97-66.

If a noncitizen claims FS eligibility based on the qualifying quarters and brings in documentation of 40 qualifying quarters, the worker must develop quarters in accordance with Attachment B and select "Verified" on PRISM II in the Quarter Coverage Requirement field on the Citizenship Screen. Verified indicates that the 40-quarter requirement has been met. Establish the noncitizen on PACES for FS benefits.

*If a noncitizen claims FS eligibility based on the qualifying quarters but does not have documentation of 40 qualifying quarters, select "Yes" on PRISM II in the Quarter Coverage Requirement field on the Citizenship Screen. "Yes" indicates that the 40 quarters requirement has been claimed. **The Department will match LPRs coded on PRISM II with a "Yes" against QCHS records.** Establish the noncitizen on PACES for FS benefits. The 40-quarter requirement will be verified through the QCHS match. Matches will be received by workers in the form of a paper report described below.*

Report

The *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report will be sent to TAOs during the week of March 16, 1998. The Department matched LPRs coded on PRISM II with a "Yes" against QCHS records. See Attachment C for a sample of this report. The report will be divided into the following sections:

- ◆ The Department information section will contain the regular case information as seen on other match reports, such as the case name and SSN.
- ◆ The SSA information section will list the year, starting with 1937 (37), and four quarters (QRTR). Each quarter for each year will contain one of the following codes:

C = Covered Earnings

"C" will appear in each quarter with sufficient wages from private sector, public (federal, state or local government), agricultural, military, railroad and self-employment to be considered a qualifying quarter;

N = Noncovered Earnings

"N" will appear in each quarter with no earnings or insufficient earnings to be considered a qualifying quarter; and/or

Q = Questioned

"Q" will appear in each quarter that SSA does not have enough information to determine whether there is a potential qualifying quarter.

- ◆ To help workers determine the number of qualifying quarters, SSA information will be totaled at the bottom of the report. TOTALS will include:

C = total number of covered earnings qualifying quarters

M = Maximum Number of Qualifying Quarters 1937-1950

R = Railroad Service Qualifying Quarters 1937-1946

TOTAL QUARTERS: The total of C, M and R quarters will be listed. **This total is the number of qualifying quarters for the noncitizen.**

**Report
(Continued)**

Q = Questioned quarters will be totaled.

Note: "Q" and "N" codes may need to be investigated by SSA, if the noncitizen needs these quarters to obtain a total of 40 quarters. Refer to Attachment D of this memo for procedures on requesting an SSA investigation.

**Responding
to the Report**

Workers have 30 days from the date they receive the report to review and/or respond to the information to verify 40 qualifying quarters.

- ◆ *If 40 qualifying quarters are verified for the noncitizen on the report, change the "Yes" to "Verified" on PRISM II and file the report in the case record.*
- ◆ *If 40 qualifying quarters are not verified for the noncitizen on the report, more information must be obtained. Send an SSA Quarters of Coverage History Match Appointment Letter to the noncitizen saying that:*
 - *the match information has been received, indicating that according to SSA the noncitizen does not have a total of 40 qualifying quarters; and*
 - *an appointment has been scheduled to discuss the match information and review eligibility.*
- ▶ *If the grantee fails to keep the appointment, close the category 9 food stamp case or PA/FS using action reason 41.*
- ▶ *If the grantee keeps the appointment, review the match information with the noncitizen:*

If the noncitizen claims to meet the 40 quarters requirement and brings in documentation of missing quarters, coded N or Q, verify and develop qualifying quarters in accordance with Attachment B.

**Responding to
the Report
(Continued)**

- If qualifying quarters are verified, change the "Yes" to "Verified" on Prism II.
- If the qualifying quarters are not verified, change the "Yes" to "No" on PRISM II. Take the appropriate action to close the case or household member on PACES. Be sure to determine the noncitizen's eligibility for SSFSP in accordance with Field Operations Memo 97-66.

If the noncitizen claims to meet the 40 quarters requirement through a combination of the report and documentation of current year, last year, self-employment, foreign country and/or nonrecipient spouse or parent qualifying quarters, verify and develop qualifying quarters in accordance with Attachment B.

- If qualifying quarters are verified, change the "Yes" to "Verified" on Prism II.
- If the qualifying quarters are not verified, change the "Yes" to "No" on PRISM II. Take the appropriate action to close the case or household member on PACES. Be sure to determine the noncitizen's eligibility for the SSFSP in accordance with Field Operations Memo 97-66.

If the noncitizen requests that quarters be investigated by SSA to total 40, change the "Yes" to "SSA Investigation" on PRISM II. Attachment D contains instructions for requesting an SSA investigation.

Note: A noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on 40 quarters can participate in the Food Stamp Program for up to six months once a request to SSA for investigation has been verified and is pending.

- If qualifying quarters are verified by SSA, change the "Yes" to "Verified" on Prism II.
- If the qualifying quarters are not verified by SSA, change the "Yes" to "No" on PRISM II. Take the appropriate action to close the case or household member on PACES. Be sure to determine the noncitizen's eligibility for SSFSP in accordance with Field Operations Memo 97-66.

If the noncitizen needs the quarters of a nonrecipient spouse or parent verified by SSA since the nonrecipient spouse or parent will not cooperate with the 40 quarters requirement, a manual investigation by SSA must be requested. Change the "Yes" to "Nonrecipient Inquiry" on PRISM II.

Attachment E contains instructions for requesting an SSA investigation when a nonrecipient spouse or parent refuses to cooperate or cannot be located.

Note: A noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on 40 quarters can participate in the Food Stamp Program for up to six months once a request to SSA for an investigation is pending.

- If qualifying quarters are verified by SSA, change the "Yes" to "Verified" on Prism II.
- If the qualifying quarters are not verified by SSA, change the "Yes" to "No" on PRISM II. Take the appropriate action to close the case or household member on PACES. Be sure to determine the noncitizen's eligibility for SSFSP in accordance with Field Operations Memo 97-66.

**Exception
Report**

The Work Quarters History / Food Stamp Eligibility Exception Report lists cases which could not be processed by SSA for one of the following reasons:

SSA cannot verify SSN - These cases must be reviewed in accordance with Field Operations Memo 96-14. Many of these cases have a client name (block 82) which must be changed. See *Systems User's Guide*, Volume I, Chapter III, PACES Turnaround Document, Pages 60 and 61 for instructions.

Earnings Record Not Found - SSA has no record of earnings for these cases. More information must be obtained from the noncitizen. Follow the instructions on Pages 5-6 of this memo - Responding to the Report.

Overpayments

If a noncitizen claimed food stamp eligibility based on 40 qualifying quarters of work but the verification provided does not prove 40 qualifying quarters, any overpayments are subject to recovery in accordance with 106 CMR 367.495 et seq.

Questions

Policy questions must be referred to the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478. Systems questions should be referred to the Systems Customer Support Services at (617) 348-5290.

WORK QUARTERS IN CERTAIN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Noncitizens may use qualifying quarters from the following countries as of the effective dates listed:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Effective Date</u>
Austria	November 1, 1991
Belgium	July 1, 1984
Canada	August 1, 1984
Finland	November 1, 1992
France	July 1, 1988
Germany	January 1, 1978
Greece	September 1, 1994
Ireland	September 1, 1993
Italy	November 1, 1978
Luxembourg	November 1, 1993
The Netherlands	November 1, 1990
Norway	July 1, 1984
Portugal	August 1, 1989
Spain	April 1, 1988
Sweden	January 1, 1987
Switzerland	November 1, 1980
United Kingdom	January 1, 1985

Quarters earned in any other country may not be counted toward the 40 qualifying quarters.

See Attachment B for instructions on verifying and developing foreign country quarters.

VERIFYING AND DEVELOPING QUALIFYING QUARTERS

If the noncitizen claims FS eligibility based on 40 qualifying quarters, current year, last year's quarters, self-employment, foreign country and/or nonrecipient quarters:

- ◆ The worker must ask the noncitizen to obtain documentation regarding these qualifying quarters. **The following types of verification are acceptable:**
 - A current employer-prepared wage statement as proof of earnings.
 - W-2 and/or W-2c, employer-prepared wage statement or an IRS copy of the individual's tax return.
 - A timely-filed tax return for a self-employed individual.
 - Note:* Be sure that the proof of filing, canceled check, money order or copy of IRS Schedule C form bearing the IRS Time Stamp indicates the return was filed within 3 years 3 months and 15 days after the end of the year in which the self-employment income was derived.
 - Other evidence of self-employment that allows you to determine that a business did exist and that a profit was earned. Comparison of bills, payment vouchers, and receipts are examples of evidence you might use to make a determination.
 - Records of unemployment agencies in Massachusetts or any other state.
 - Any other evidence of earnings including pay envelopes, pay vouchers, union records, or an individual's copy of a Federal or State tax return.
 - Social Security Administration records of a nonrecipient.
 - Documentation of employment and earnings from a foreign country listed in Attachment A.
- ◆ **The worker must file copies of the verification in the case record.**

A quarter of coverage is any calendar quarter (January 1-March 31, April 1-June 30, July 1-September 30, or October 1-December 31) in which an individual has earned a specified amount of wages or can be credited with a specified amount of self-employment income.

The worker must develop qualifying quarters by dividing the individual's total earned income for the year by the SSA-determined quarterly amount for that year as listed below.

- The amounts of earnings required for each quarter of coverage for 1978 through 1998 are as follows:

Year	Quarterly Amount	Year	Quarterly Amount	Year	Quarterly Amount	Year	Quarterly Amount
1978	\$250.00	1983	\$370.00	1988	\$470.00	1993	\$590.00
1979	\$260.00	1984	\$390.00	1989	\$500.00	1994	\$620.00
1980	\$290.00	1985	\$410.00	1990	\$520.00	1995	\$630.00
1981	\$310.00	1986	\$440.00	1991	\$540.00	1996	\$640.00
1982	\$340.00	1987	\$460.00	1992	\$570.00	1997	\$670.00
						1998	\$700.00

- The amount of earnings required for each quarter of coverage for 1937 through 1977 is as follows:
 - ▶ For each year from 1937 through 1977, the quarterly amount is \$50.
 - ▶ For each year from 1937 through 1977, the quarterly *self-employment* amount is \$100.

A noncitizen can be credited no more than 4 quarters of coverage per year.

For example: A noncitizen worked in 1997 but these quarters appeared as noncovered on the *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report because these quarters have not been processed by SSA. The noncitizen provides a W-2 verifying that she earned \$3,840 in 1997. To obtain the number of qualifying quarters for 1997, divide \$3,840 by \$640. *See* chart on previous page. The total number of qualifying quarters equals 6. **The noncitizen can be credited with only 4 quarters for 1997.**

Note: However, if the *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report shows that the noncitizen's spouse or parent (if the noncitizen is under age 18) *also* worked 4 quarters in 1997, **the spouse's or parent's quarters could be added to the noncitizen quarters, giving the noncitizen a total of 8 qualifying quarters for 1997.**

If an individual earns the annual amount before the year ends, the individual cannot be credited with subsequent quarters of coverage until the quarter begins.

For example: A noncitizen applies on September 1, 1997, which is the third quarter of 1997. The noncitizen supplies documentation that he earned \$2,680 in 1997. To obtain the number of qualifying quarters for 1997 divide \$2,680.00 by \$670.00. *See* chart on previous page. The total equals 4. However, only three quarters can be counted immediately. The fourth quarter cannot be credited until the start of the fourth quarter which begins on October 1, 1997.

A noncitizen can be credited with the qualifying quarters of a nonrecipient spouse or parent.

For example: A 25-year-old noncitizen applies on November 1, 1997 claiming FS eligibility based on a combination of her own quarters and her mother's quarters while she was under age 18. The *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report verifies that the noncitizen has 20 qualifying quarters of her own. The noncitizen obtains documentation of her mother's quarters to meet the 40-quarter requirement. The noncitizen's mother can request her quarters of coverage directly from SSA or can provide acceptable verifications so that the worker can develop the quarters. **The noncitizen can be credited with her mother's complete work quarter history accrued while the noncitizen was under age 18 (including prior to her birth).**

See Attachment E for instructions if a nonrecipient spouse or parent refuses to cooperate in obtaining documentation of qualifying quarters.

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
 WORK QUARTERS HISTORY / FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY
 TAO 999 CAN 999**

**98-15
 Attachment C**

DTA INFORMATION

CAT CASE	CASE NAME
SSN	CASE ADDR
2 999-99-9999	Doe Jane 1 Main St. USA 00000

PERSON NAME	PA STAT/AR/DATE
DEP#/SSN	FS STAT/AR/DATE
DOB	MA STAT/AR/DATE
Doe Jane	2/13 99/99/99
0 / 999-99-9999	4/38 99/99/99
99/99/99	2/13 99/99/99

SSA INFORMATION

PERSON NAME	PERSON: DTA SSN	PERSON: SSA SSN	YR	QRTR	YR	QRTR	YR	QRTR
Doe Jane	999-99-9999	999-99-9999						
		99/99/99						
			1234	1234	1234			
			37	NNNN	38	NNNN	39	NNNN
			40	NNNN	41	NNNN	42	NNNN
			43	NNNN	44	NNNN	45	NNNN
			46	NNNN	47	NNNN	48	NNNN
			49	NNNN	50	NNNN	51	NNNN
			52	NNNN	53	NNNN	54	NNNN
			55	NNNN	56	NNNN	57	NNNN
			58	NNNN	59	NNNN	60	NNNN
			61	NNNN	62	NNNN	63	NNNN
			64	NNNN	65	NNNN	66	NNNN
			67	NNNN	68	NNNN	69	NNNN
			70	NNNN	71	NNNN	72	NNNN
			73	NNNN	74	NNNN	75	NNNN
			76	NNNN	77	NNNN	78	NNNN
			79	NNNN	80	NNNN	81	NNNN
			82	NNNN	83	NNNN	84	NNNN
			85	NNNN	86	NNNN	87	NNNN
			88	NNNN	89	CCCC	90	CCCC
			91	CCCC	92	CCCC	93	CCCC
			94	CCCC	95	CCCC	96	QQNN
			97	NNNN	98	NNNN	99	NNNN
			00	NNNN	01	NNNN	02	NNNN
			03	NNNN	04	NNNN	05	NNNN
			06	NNNN	07	NNNN	08	NNNN
			09	NNNN	10	NNNN	11	NNNN
			12	NNNN	13	NNNN	14	NNNN
			15	NNNN	16	NNNN	17	NNNN
			18	NNNN	19	NNNN	20	NNNN
			21	NNNN	22	NNNN	23	NNNN
			24	NNNN	25	NNNN		

TOTAL C: 27
TOTAL M: 0
TOTAL R: 0
TOTAL QUARTERS: 27
TOTAL Q: 2

REQUESTING AN SSA INVESTIGATION

If the noncitizen needs additional quarters to obtain a total of 40, SSA will conduct an investigation on:

- ◆ quarters coded "Q" and quarters coded "N" on the *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report if the noncitizen disagrees with the SSA information.

Note: SSA will not investigate current or last year's quarters.

- ◆ quarters in which wages were earned but not reported to SSA (unreported earnings).

Note: If the noncitizen is able to verify the additional quarters in accordance with Attachment B, no SSA Action is required.

A noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on 40 quarters can participate in the Food Stamp Program for up to six months once a request to SSA for investigation has been verified and is pending.

- If the noncitizen needs a "Q" code investigated for 1977 or earlier, the worker must:
 - ▶ Help the noncitizen complete an SSA-512, *Request to Resolve Questionable Quarters of Coverage* form including the following information:
 - Name
 - Social Security Number
 - Date of Birth
 - Year or Years in Question
 - Return Address
 - ▶ Attach a copy of the *Work Quarter History for Determining Food Stamp Eligibility* report
 - ▶ Attach proof of earnings such as W-2s, pay stubs, tax returns or statements from employers.
 - ▶ Make a copy of the SSA-512 and attached documents for the case record.

- ▶ Mail the SSA-512 along with the documentation to:

SSA, OCRO
P.O. Box 17750
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001

- ▶ Change the "Yes" to "SSA Investigation" on the PRISM II Citizenship Screen - Citizenship Tab. This entry will alert Systems that this case has been sent to SSA for an investigation. The case will be selected again to go back to SSA for QCHS verification. SSA will update the QCHS once the investigation is completed.
- ▶ Establish a tickler file for cases coded "SSA Investigation" on PRISM II.

Note: If the QCHS report has not been updated after 60 days from the date of request, the worker may call 1-800-775-7802 (SSA-OCRO, Earnings Discrepancy) to find out the status of the investigation.

- If the noncitizen needs an "N" code investigated for any year listed on the report or a "Q" code investigated for 1978 or later, the worker must:

- ▶ Help the noncitizen complete an SSA-7008, *Request for Correction of Earnings* form.
- ▶ Attach proof of earnings such as W-2s, pay stubs, tax returns or statements from employers.
- ▶ Write "Welfare Reform" on the top of the SSA-7008.
- ▶ Make a copy of the SSA-7008 and attached documents for the case record.
- ▶ Mail the SSA-7008 along with the documentation to:

SSA, OCRO
P.O. Box 17752
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001

- ▶ Change the "Yes" to "SSA Investigation" on the PRISM II Citizenship Screen - Citizenship Tab. This entry will alert Systems that this case has been sent to SSA for an

investigation. The case will be selected again to go back to SSA for QCHS verification. SSA will update the QCHS report once the investigation is completed.

- ▶ Establish a tickler file for cases coded "SSA Investigation" on PRISM II.

Note: If the QCHS report has not been updated after 60 days from the date of request, the worker may call 1-800-775-7802 (SSA-OCRO, Earnings Discrepancy) to find out the status of the investigation.

- If the noncitizen has no documentation of earnings, the worker must instruct the noncitizen to contact the local Social Security Office or call 1-800-772-1213 to arrange an appointment.

or

- If the noncitizen indicates that more than one SSN was used or that others were allowed to use his/her SSN, the worker must instruct the noncitizen to contact the local Social Security Office or call 1-800-772-1213 to arrange an appointment.

Note: The worker must instruct the noncitizen to contact SSA directly to request an investigation. The noncitizen must obtain verification that a request for an investigation has been made. The noncitizen must submit a copy of the verification to the worker within 10 days.

Once verification of an investigation has been received, change the "Yes" to "SSA Investigation" on the PRISM II Citizenship Screen - Citizenship Tab. This entry will alert Systems that this case has been sent to SSA for an investigation and must be sent back to SSA for QCHS verification. Once SSA completes the investigation, the QCHS report will be updated with the results of the investigation. Establish a tickler file for cases coded "SSA Investigation" on PRISM II.

If the report has not been updated after 60 days from the date of request, the worker may call 1-800-775-7802 (SSA-OCRO, Earnings Discrepancy) to find out the status of the investigation.

IF A NONRECIPIENT REFUSES TO COOPERATE OR CANNOT BE LOCATED

When a nonrecipient spouse or parent refuses to cooperate or cannot be located (after applicant's/recipient's reasonable efforts to contact), the worker must:

- ◆ Determine the relationship of the nonrecipient to the noncitizen applicant/recipient.
- ◆ Using Section II A of the SSA-513, *Request for Quarters of Coverage History Based on Relationship* form determine the years and quarters that can be credited to the noncitizen.
- ◆ Once you have determined the quarters which can be credited, complete the SSA-513 form.
 - Print the name of the nonrecipient spouse or parent: last name, first name and middle initial; SSN; and date of birth.
 - Print the relationship of the nonrecipient spouse or parent to the applicant/recipient in the space provided.
 - Complete the year column and circle the quarters that could be credited to the applicant/recipient. (There is sufficient space to request 20 years. If you need more, complete a second form and staple the forms together before mailing them to SSA.)
 - Print the name of the noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on quarters of a nonrecipient spouse or parent quarters on the lower left-hand side of the form for tracking purposes.
 - Make a copy of the SSA-513 for the case record.
 - Mail the SSA-513 to:

Social Security Administration
P.O. Box 17750
Baltimore, MD 21235-0001

A noncitizen claiming FS eligibility based on 40 quarters can participate in the Food Stamp Program for up to six months once a request to SSA for investigation is pending.

- Once the investigation is completed, SSA will mail the results of the investigation to the worker.