

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Administrative Review Branch**

**Selma Street Market,**

**Appellant,**

**v.**

**Office of Retailer Operations and  
Compliance,**

**Respondent.**

**Case Number: C0232215**

**FINAL AGENCY DECISION**

It is the decision of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), that the record supports that Selma Street Market (Appellant), committed violations of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) regulations. There is sufficient evidence to sustain a six month disqualification of Appellant from the SNAP as imposed by the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance (Retailer Operations).

**ISSUE**

The issue accepted for review is whether Retailer Operations took appropriate action in its administration of the SNAP, consistent with 7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1), 7 CFR § 278.6(a), and 7 CFR § 278.6(e), when it imposed a six month period of disqualification against Appellant.

**AUTHORITY**

7 U.S.C. § 2023, and the implementing regulations at 7 CFR § 279.1, provide that a food retailer aggrieved by administrative action under § 278.1, § 278.6, or § 278.7, may file a written request for review of the administrative action with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

**CASE CHRONOLOGY**

The USDA conducted an investigation of the compliance of Appellant with federal SNAP law and regulations during the period of October 31, 2020 through November 22, 2020. The investigative report dated December 8, 2020, documented that personnel at Appellant accepted SNAP benefits in exchange for ineligible merchandise on multiple dates. The items sold are best described as common nonfood items. As a result of evidence compiled during the investigation, by letter dated March 19, 2021, Retailer Operations charged Appellant with violating the terms and conditions of the SNAP regulations. Misuse of SNAP benefits was noted in Exhibits B, C, and D, that warrants a disqualification as a SNAP retail food store for a period of six months. The letter also states that under certain conditions FNS may impose a civil money penalty (CMP) in lieu of a disqualification. On April 9, 2021, one owner submitted a reply via email. Counsel replied to the Charge letter on June 8, 2021.

Retailer Operations informed Appellant by Determination letter dated July 26, 2021, that the violations cited in the Charge letter occurred at the firm, and that a six month period of disqualification was warranted. The letter also stated that eligibility for a hardship CMP was not applicable as there are other authorized retail food stores in the area selling as large a variety of staple foods at comparable prices. Counsel requested review by letter dated July 28, 2021. The review was granted by letter dated August 26, 2021.

## **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

In an appeal of an adverse action, the Appellant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence, that the administrative action should be reversed. That means the Appellant has the burden of providing relevant, credible evidence, that a reasonable mind, considering the record as a whole, would accept as sufficient to support a conclusion that the argument asserted is more likely to be true than not true.

## **CONTROLLING LAW AND REGULATIONS**

The controlling statute in this matter is contained in the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, 7 U.S.C. § 2021 and § 278 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Sections 278.6(a) and (e)(5) establish the authority upon which a six month disqualification may be imposed against a retail food store.

7 CFR § 278.2(a) states: “SNAP benefits may be accepted by an authorized retail food store only from eligible households or the households’ authorized representative, and only in exchange for eligible food.”

7 CFR § 278.6(a) states: “FNS may disqualify any authorized retail food store if the firm fails to comply with the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, or this part. Such disqualification shall result from a finding of a violation on the basis of evidence that may include facts established through on-site investigations, inconsistent redemption data, evidence obtained through a transaction report under an electronic benefit transfer system.”

7 CFR § 278.6(e)(5) of the SNAP regulations states that a firm is to be disqualified for six months “if it is to be the first sanction for the firm and the evidence shows that personnel of the firm have committed violations such as but not limited to the sale of common nonfood items due to carelessness or poor supervision by the firm’s ownership or management.”

7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1) provides for civil money penalty assessments in lieu of disqualification in cases where disqualification would cause hardship to SNAP benefit households because of the unavailability of a comparable participating food store in the area to meet their shopping needs. It states: “FNS may impose a civil money penalty as a sanction in lieu of disqualification when the firm’s disqualification would cause hardship to SNAP benefit households because there is no other authorized retail food store in the area selling as large a variety of staple food items at comparable prices.”

## **SUMMARY OF THE CHARGES**

A report of the investigation was provided to the Appellant as Exhibits with the Charge letter. The investigative report provides details on the results of each compliance visit. The investigative report documents that SNAP violations were recorded during multiple store visits, that warrant a six month disqualification. The SNAP violations of 7 CFR § 278.2(a) involved the sale by store personnel of nonfood items for benefits. The nonfood items exchanged by store personnel included: cups and cutlery.

## **APPELLANT'S CONTENTIONS**

Consideration was made of all contentions as presented, whether recapitulated here or not.

- just today received letter from you and i see that matter i am extremely so sorry for that . who run register he was under training on that time and i was updating my system same time he was trying to learn may be by mistake he made mistake. we try take care of proper way and make sure not happening again even by mistake . and so sorry for that once again .
- Our client(s) did not intentionally commit any violation(s). An employee(s), who on at least one occasion, if not all, that was running the register was elderly and under training on a new system as Selma Street Market was in the process of updating their system. As I think you will agree, no business runs perfectly all the time, and the alleged violations were nothing more than a combination of an employee(s) being trained and a system being updated at the same time, simplistically speaking, this was the perfect storm.
- My client(s) requests that the disqualification from SNAP be rescinded and that they only receive a warning. In the alternative, my client(s) would request that if you are not inclined to rescind the disqualification, at least please consider a reduction of the time of suspension.
- My clients(s) have trained all their employee(s) on the new system and have not committed any violations since said training. My client(s) did not intentionally violate any of the regulations set forth in the SNAP regulations.

## **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This review is to either validate or to invalidate the determination made by Retailer Operations, and it is limited to the facts at the basis of Retailer Operations' determination at the time it was made. The documentation under review supports that the violative transactions were conducted at Appellant by store personnel on different dates. The record includes photos of the items purchased by the investigator, copies of the EBT total receipts with the store name and address, and donation sheets of the items donated by the investigator to a non-profit signed by a non-profit representative. All of the EBT transactions were verified in the USDA system database. The preponderance of the evidence supports that the transactions did occur at and were processed at Appellant.

Retailers are informed that it is their responsibility to ensure that store personnel are properly trained regarding the SNAP rules. Regardless of whom the owners of a store may utilize to handle store business, the firm's owners are accountable for the proper training of personnel, and the effective monitoring and handling of SNAP benefit transactions. Three violations are considered evidence of carelessness and/or poor supervision. There are no provisions in the SNAP regulations that allow a waiver or reduction of an administrative penalty assessment based

on an admission to the violations charged. These violations are not considered violations that warrant a warning letter.

Under review, the evidence supports that Appellant's personnel established a record of selling nonfood items on multiple occasions, as defined by Section 271.2 of the regulations. The violations in this case warrant a disqualification period of six months. The regulations at 7 CFR § 278.6(e)(5) specify that FNS shall "disqualify the firm for six months if it is to be the first sanction for the firm and the evidence shows that personnel of the firm have committed violations such as, but not limited to, the sale of nonfood items due to carelessness or poor supervision by the firm's ownership or management."

### **CIVIL MONEY PENALTY**

Retailer Operations rendered a finding that it was not appropriate to impose a CMP in lieu of a six month period of disqualification from SNAP. The record documents that there are other authorized stores within a nearby radius of Appellant that stock as large a variety of comparable staple foods at comparable prices. Retailer Operations concluded that the evidence does not support that it will cause hardship for SNAP recipients if Appellant is disqualified. Therefore, Appellant was deemed not eligible for a hardship CMP.

### **CONCLUSION**

The preponderance of the evidence in the record supports that the program violations charged did occur at Appellant. The record documents that Retailer Operations properly evaluated Appellant's eligibility for a hardship CMP according to the terms of Section 278.6(f)(1) of the regulations. On review, it is decided that Retailer Operations properly denied a CMP. Therefore, the six month disqualification of Appellant from participation as an authorized retail food store in the SNAP is sustained.

This penalty shall become effective thirty (30) days after delivery of this decision. A new application for participation in the SNAP may be submitted ten days prior to the expiration of the six (6) month period of disqualification. The Retailer Center may be contacted at 877-823-4369 with general questions regarding the SNAP application process.

### **RIGHTS AND REMEDIES**

Attention is called to Section 14 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. § 2023), and to the regulations at 7 CFR § 279.7 with respect to the owners' right to judicial review of this decision. If a judicial review is desired, the Complaint, naming the United States as the defendant, must be filed in the U.S. District Court for the district in which the owners reside or are engaged in business, or in any court of record of the State having competent jurisdiction. If any Complaint is filed, it must be filed within thirty (30) days of delivery of this Decision.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, we are releasing this information in a redacted format as appropriate. FNS will protect, to the extent provided by law, personal information that could constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

M. Viens  
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OFFICER

October 6, 2021