

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

**Airport Mini Mart,**

**Appellant,**

**v.**

**Office of Retailer Operations and  
Compliance,**

**Respondent.**

**Case Number: C0247697**

**FINAL AGENCY DECISION**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) finds that there is sufficient evidence to support the determination by the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance to withdraw the authorization of Airport Mini Mart (“Appellant”) to participate as an authorized retailer in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

**ISSUE**

The purpose of this review is to determine whether the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance took appropriate action, consistent with Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 278.1(l)(1)(iii), in its administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when it withdrew Appellant’s authorization to participate as a retailer in SNAP in a letter dated June 14, 2021.

**AUTHORITY**

According to 7 U.S.C. § 2023 and its implementing regulations at 7 CFR § 279.1, “A food retailer or wholesale food concern aggrieved by administrative action under § 278.1, § 278.6 or § 278.7 . . . may . . . file a written request for review of the administrative action with FNS.”

**CASE CHRONOLOGY**

In a letter dated June 14, 2021, the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance informed Appellant that its authorization to participate as a retailer in SNAP would be withdrawn due to the firm’s failure to meet minimum SNAP eligibility requirements. This withdrawal decision was based on observations during a store visit on June 7, 2021 as well as information provided on the firm’s reauthorization application.

The Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance determined that the firm did not meet eligibility Criterion A or Criterion B under 7 CFR § 278.1(b)(1) of the SNAP regulations. The withdrawal letter stated Appellant failed to meet the requirements of Criterion A because it did not offer for sale on a continuous basis a variety of foods in each of the four staple food categories. Also, Appellant failed to meet the requirements of Criterion B because staple food sales did not comprise more than 50 percent of its gross retail sales.

As the firm failed to meet either eligibility criterion for approval, Appellant was informed that the firm could not submit a new application to participate in SNAP for a period of six months as provided in 7 CFR § 278.1(k)(2). This determination letter also stated that the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance considered Appellant's eligibility under the need for access provision at Section 278.1(b)(6) of the SNAP regulations. However, the letter stated Appellant did not qualify for SNAP authorization under this provision.

On June 21, 2021, Appellant appealed the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance determination and requested an administrative review of this action. The appeal request was granted and implementation of the withdrawal has been held in abeyance pending completion of this review.

## **STANDARD OF REVIEW**

In an appeal of an adverse action, Appellant bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence that the administrative action should be reversed. That means Appellant has the burden of providing relevant 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 untrue.

## **CONTROLLING LAW**

The controlling law in this matter is contained in the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended (7 U.S.C. § 2018), and implemented through regulation under Title 7 CFR Part 278. In particular, 7 CFR § 278.1(l)(1) establishes the authority upon which the authorization of any firm to participate in SNAP may be withdrawn if it fails to meet established eligibility requirements.

7 CFR § 278.1(b)(1)(i) relays specific program requirements for retail food store participation, which reads, in part:

An establishment . . . shall . . . effectuate the purposes of the program if it . . . meets one of the following criteria: Offer for sale, on a continuous basis, a variety of qualifying foods in each of the four categories of staple foods . . . including perishable foods in at least [two<sup>1</sup>] of the categories (Criterion A); or have more than 50 percent of the total gross retail sales of the establishment . . . in staple foods (Criterion B).

7 CFR § 271.2 defines staple food, in part, as:

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the current implementation of the regulations.

Those food items intended for home preparation and consumption in each of the following food categories: meat, poultry, or fish; bread or cereals; vegetables or fruits; and dairy products.

7 CFR § 278.1(b)(1)(ii)(A) of the SNAP regulations as currently implemented define continuous basis as offering for sale no fewer than three different varieties of food items in each of the four staple food categories with a minimum depth of stock of three stocking units for each qualifying staple variety on any given day of operation.

7 CFR § 278.1(b)(1)(ii)(C) of the SNAP regulations define “variety”, in part, as:

Different types of foods within each staple food category. For example: Apples, cabbage, tomatoes, bananas, pumpkins, broccoli, and grapes in the vegetables or fruits category; or cow milk, almond milk, soy yogurt ... butter, sour cream, and cow milk yogurt in the dairy products category; or rice, bagels, pitas, bread, pasta, oatmeal, and whole wheat flour in the bread or cereals category; or chicken ... beef, pork, eggs, and tuna in the meat, poultry, or fish category. Variety of foods is not to be interpreted as different brands, nutrient values (e.g., low sodium and lite), flavorings (e.g., vanilla and chocolate), packaging types or styles (e.g., canned and frozen) or package sizes of the same or similar foods. Similar food items such as, but not limited to, tomatoes and tomato juice, different types of rice, whole milk and skim milk, ground beef and beefsteak, or different types of apples (e.g., Empire, Jonagold, and McIntosh), shall count as depth of stock but shall not each be counted as more than one staple food variety for the purpose of determining the number of varieties in any staple food category. Accessory foods shall not be counted as staple foods for purposes of determining eligibility to participate in SNAP as a retail food store.

7 CFR § 278.1(l)(1) reads, in part:

FNS shall withdraw the authorization of any firm authorized to participate in the program for any of the following reasons . . . . [t]he firm fails to meet the requirements for eligibility under Criterion A or B, as specified in paragraph (b)(1)(i) of this section . . . for the time period specified in paragraph (k)(2) of this section.

7 CFR § 278.1(k) reads, in part:

FNS shall deny the application of any firm if it determines that . . . . [t]he firm has failed to meet the eligibility requirements for authorization under Criterion A or Criterion B, as specified in paragraph (b)(1)(i) of this section . . . for a minimum period of six months from the effective date of the denial.

### **APPELLANT’S CONTENTIONS**

Appellant’s responses regarding this matter are essentially as follows:

- The firm has been SNAP authorized for many years and this is the first time there has been an issue with SNAP compliance.
- At the time of the store visit, Appellant met the minimum stocking requirements.
- Appellant requests another chance because the store is located in an area where many people use SNAP.

These explanations may represent only a brief summary of Appellant's contentions. However, in reaching a decision, full consideration has been given to all contentions presented, including any others that have not been specifically listed here.

## **ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

Appellant contends the firm has been SNAP authorized for many years and this is the first time there has been an issue with SNAP compliance. Prior compliance with SNAP regulations cannot serve as a basis to reverse the current determination that Appellant did not meet the minimum stocking requirements.

Appellant insists that at the time of the store visit Appellant met the minimum stocking requirements. A review of the store visit documentation illustrates that on the day of the visit the store was deficient in the dairy products category and the meats, poultry or fish category. Appellant contends it carried milk, butter, yogurt, and plenty of canned fish. At the time of the store visit, Appellant carried only milk (no butter or yogurt), and only two cans of mackerel. Appellant also only carried one stocking unit of eggs and one stocking unit of chicken at the time of the store visit.

Therefore, the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance correctly concluded Appellant did not meet Criterion A because the store did not offer "qualifying staple foods on a continuous basis."

An evaluation of the percentages of staple food sales reported on Appellant's retailer application, as well as the photographs and store inventory provided from the store visit, indicate that Appellant did not receive more than 50 percent of its projected annual sales from the sale of staple foods. Accordingly, the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance correctly determined Appellant was not eligible for authorization under Criterion B.

## **No Need for Access**

Appellant has requested another chance because the store is located in an area where many people use SNAP. SNAP regulation 7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1) provides for civil money penalties in lieu of disqualification in cases where disqualification would cause hardship to SNAP households because of the unavailability of a comparable participating retail food store in the area to meet their needs. However, 7 CFR § 278.6(f)(1) only applies to firms that are "selling a substantial variety of staple food items."

As Appellant failed to meet Criterion A and B, the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance did consider whether Appellant is located in an area with significantly limited access to food as

required under SNAP regulation 7 CFR § 278.1(b)(6). In determining whether Appellant is located in such an area, the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance considered factors such as the distance from Applicant to the nearest currently SNAP-authorized firm and the extent of Appellant's stocking deficiencies in meeting Criterion A and Criterion B. The Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance determined Appellant did not qualify for SNAP authorization under 7 CFR § 278.1(b)(6).

Some degree of inconvenience to SNAP benefit users is inherent in the failure to authorize a retailer, since the distance to the nearest SNAP-authorized firm may be longer for some SNAP benefit holders. A review of the factors and evidence considered by the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance under 7 CFR § 278.1(b)(6) supported that authorization of Appellant was not necessary for access.

Therefore, the earlier determination that authorization of Appellant was not required to ensure access to food for SNAP participants, as differentiated from potential inconvenience, is sustained.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the discussion above, the determination by the Office of Retailer Operations and Compliance to withdraw the authorization of Airport Mini Mart to participate as a retailer in SNAP is sustained. Appellant was inappropriately withdrawn from the SNAP program for one month after its timely request for administrative review. Therefore, the six-month period of disqualification is reduced to five months.

According to 7 CFR § 278.1(l)(1)(iii) of the SNAP regulations, Appellant is ineligible to submit a new application for the subject store for a minimum period of five months from the effective date of withdrawal. In accordance with the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, and its associated regulations, this withdrawal action shall become effective 30 days after delivery of this letter.

## **RIGHTS AND REMEDIES**

Applicable rights to a judicial review of this decision are set forth in 7 U.S.C. § 2023 and 7 CFR § 279.7. If Appellant desires a judicial review, the complaint must be filed in the U.S. District Court for the district in which Appellant's owner resides, is engaged in business, or in any court of record of the State having competent jurisdiction. This complaint, naming the United States as the defendant, must be filed within thirty (30) days of receipt 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.

RICH PROULX  
ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OFFICER

September 7, 2021