



**October 2, 2009**

**General questions:** Gene Evans, 503-269-7950

## **Food Stamp program receives national award for third year in a row**

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The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) announced today that the state has received national recognition for exceptional administration of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the food stamp program. Oregon was honored as one of the top states in ensuring that those eligible for these benefits received them.

This is the third consecutive year the state has been recognized for excellence. In 2007, the state received a bonus award of \$1.9 million and another one of \$1.7 million last year. This year, the bonus award totaled more than \$2 million.

Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director of DHS Children, Adults and Families Division, said the award is particularly welcome at this time because Oregon's need for food stamps continues to increase. Since last year, there has been an increase of about 32 percent in food stamp recipients. Last month, more than 635,000 Oregonians received benefits, meaning that about one in six Oregonians is receiving food stamp benefits.

"During the time when the economy has created record need, DHS staff members have continued to do everything they can to help," Kelley-Siel said. "Our strong partnerships with the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services and with community advocates in the Governor's Hunger, Health and Nutrition Initiative are helping staff better meet the needs of more Oregonians, and this bonus money enhances that work."

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Oregon has used bonus award funds to implement projects as part of the Governor's Hunger, Health and Nutrition Initiative. Those projects promoted the benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, but also helped recipients improve their diet and overall well-being. The projects have included funding for Oregon State University Extension Service, Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Hunger Task Force, Farmers Markets, Department of Agriculture and Childhood Hunger Coalition.

"I want to celebrate the hard work of our staff and community partners to ensure that Oregonians can meet their most basic need -- food for their families," Erinn Kelley-Siel said. "It is important that we are sure that every Oregonian who is eligible for assistance has the opportunity to benefit from it."

In Washington, D.C., Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a total of \$18 million in bonus awards to states for outstanding and timely customer service in providing SNAP benefits: "The states we recognize today can serve as models for other states," he said.

Each year, USDA awards performance bonuses to states with the best and most improved program access index. The program access index is the ratio of participants to the number of persons below 125 percent of poverty and reflects state performance in reaching those eligible for these important nutrition benefits. USDA also awards states with the highest rate of timely processed applications, an important indicator of customer service in administering the program.

**Background:** To be eligible for food stamps, families must earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, along with other factors. For a family of four, the income limit is less than \$3,400 per month. The maximum benefit for a household of four totals \$668 per month. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, based on household income, and are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card," which is used like a debit card to purchase food. Food stamp benefits are intended to act as a supplement to a family's overall food budget, not to cover it entirely. In many households with little or no income, it can be the primary means to meet the family's nutritional needs. The overall average food stamp benefit per household is approximately \$250 per month. Approximately three-fourths of all food stamp households have some form of income, which results in the actual benefit level received being reduced from the maximum. The name of the food stamp program is being changed to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, but the benefits remain the same. The Oregon Legislature also changed the name of the program from "Food Stamps" to "Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program." This name change officially takes effect in January 2010.  
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- To learn if you might be eligible for food stamps, TANF, Oregon Health Plan or other services, visit your local DHS office. You may also go online to OregonHelps and see if you may be eligible for these and other programs at <http://oregonhelps.org/>
- To download applications for TANF and food stamps, go to: [www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/).
- DHS also partners with SafeNet to help people to find local resources such as local food pantries or other assistance. The number is 800-SAFENET (800-723-3638).

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