

Press Examples

The following published op-eds, letters to the editor and articles are good examples of the press that can be gained from conducting food stamp outreach.

Associated Press

Michigan Governor Eats Like Food Stamp Recipient October 14, 2008

LANSING, Mich. — Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm is eating like a food stamp recipient this week to raise awareness about poverty. The governor says she took her son shopping Sunday at a Meijer grocery store. They could only spend \$5.87 per day per person.

She says she bought a lot of macaroni and cheese.

Granholm is one of about 300 people statewide participating in the Michigan Food Stamp Challenge. More than 1.3 million state residents receive food stamps.

The state hopes the challenge will raise awareness and boost donations to support nine regional food banks.

The Democratic governor was asked about the program Tuesday after she announced tax credits to create about 2,500 direct jobs at seven companies and two downtown redevelopment projects in Michigan.

Seattle Times

New State Food-Stamp Rule Goes into Effect By Michelle Dupler October 2, 2008

A new rule taking effect this week allows about 23,000 more Washington families to apply for the state's food-stamp program.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) changed eligibility rules for the Basic Food program, now allowing families with incomes at or below 200 percent of poverty level to apply.

Until now, families at or below 130 percent of the poverty level could apply. For a family of four, that meant an income of \$26,900 or less. The new threshold for a family of four is \$42,400.

"While the job market in Washington has remained steadier than other areas of the country, some people here are losing their jobs," said Troy Hutson, assistant secretary for the department's Economic Services Administration, in a written statement.

"When you add increasing food and gas costs, more and more people are going to need help making ends meet. The food-stamp program is the nation's first defense against hunger."

From March 2007 to March 2008, participation in the Basic Food program rose 4 percent statewide.

To apply for food stamps, call the DSHS office or apply online at www.dshs.wa.gov.

New Jersey Star-Ledger

New food stamp campaign hits the road; Mobile office to enroll people in 6 counties

By Elizabeth Moore

September 23, 2008

A campaign to raise awareness about food stamps kicked off yesterday at a ShopRite in West Orange, where officials announced a partnership aimed at signing up more people in New Jersey for the federal anti-hunger program.

While nearly 450,000 people in New Jersey receive food stamps, officials estimated that many more state residents may be eligible.

Starting next month, Essex County's mobile Citizen Services Office, which resembles a large motor home, is to begin traveling to ShopRite supermarkets in six counties to publicize food stamps and other government aid programs, and to sign up clients on the spot.

Anibal Ramos, the county director of citizen services, said the mobile office is already used to serve residents in the urban centers of the county. The large vehicle, which was parked in the Essex Green shopping center yesterday, has a reception area and three private offices inside where people can sign up for food stamps, Medicaid and welfare payments.

Ramos said the mobile office travels to health fairs, senior citizen events and tragedies such as fires, but will expand its service base by partnering with ShopRite markets and meeting new clients wherever the markets are located.

"It's a connection to expand our base, not just in the urban cities," he said.

Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo said he was happy to lend out the county mobile office to help the poor and underserved around the state. The vehicle was purchased in 2006 with federal grants.

"The people throughout the county and throughout our state have been hurting for a very, very long time," DiVincenzo said. "There's a lot of people out there that need our help."

Jeannette Castaneda, a spokeswoman for ShopRite, said the stores will inform their customers when the mobile office would be available and also stock information about public aid programs inside their stores.

"We will use your resources to provide information directly into the hands of customers," she said. "We will make a difference in the lives of those in need."

Bruce Nigro, director of Essex County's division of welfare, said while Essex County officials would make the mobile office available at stores in Bergen, Mercer, Morris, Ocean and Sussex counties, the office would be staffed by employees from those counties, not by Essex County staff. The mobile food stamp outreach program will begin in October and is expected to continue over the next few months.

Representatives from the Community FoodBank of New Jersey praised the partnership program and said they've already seen a 20 percent increase in the number of people in the state needing supplementary food this year, compared with the first six months of 2007.

AARP Bulletin Today

Good News About Food Stamp Benefits

By Rebecca Kern
August 13, 2008

The 28.4 million Americans using food stamps in 2008 should receive a boost in benefits as of Oct. 1. The \$290 million farm legislation passed in June includes funds to improve the food stamp program and expand access and eligibility for low-income Americans.

The increase in the minimum monthly benefit from \$10 to \$14—the first hike in approximately 30 years—is a result of Congress' override of President Bush's veto of the Farm Bill. The new maximum for a family of four is \$542 a month.

In addition to the benefit increase, the new law will raise the standard deduction, thereby allowing eligible recipients to receive slightly higher benefits. The deduction will for the first time be indexed to inflation. Neither retirement nor education savings will be counted as income when considering whether applicants are eligible for food stamps. This is important because eligibility is based on both income and assets.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, not everyone who is eligible for the food stamp program is taking advantage of it. In 2006 (the most recent year for which data are available), approximately 37 million people were eligible, but only 25 million participated. About 9 percent of participants were age 60 and older.

The law changes the name of the food stamp program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This change will make the program more appealing to older people, says Lori Strauss, national coordinator of the AARP Foundation Benefits Outreach Program. "The term

food stamps has such a negative connotation for seniors,” Strauss says. “We’ve heard through speaking to them that changing the name would make it more attractive.”

Larry White, a senior legislative representative at AARP, stresses the importance of educating the public about the changes to the program. Only one-third of those 60 and over who are eligible for food stamps are participating, he says.

“The outreach that needs to take place will have to be managed in such a way that seniors who participate in the program won’t feel stigmatized as they did with food stamps,” White says. Additionally, all benefits will be distributed through electronic benefit cards that act like debit cards, with the benefits added each month. These electronic cards, which were initially introduced in the 1990s, are a more efficient, client-friendly and modern method of using food benefits, says Ellen Vollinger, legal director for the Food Research and Action Center in Washington. But people with paper coupons or vouchers will be able to use them for one more year before they become void.

To be eligible for food stamps, households may have up to \$2,000 in cash resources, such as a bank account, or \$3,000 in monetary resources if the household includes someone disabled or age 60-plus, according to the USDA. The amount of benefits provided is based on income: The higher the income, the lower the benefits.

Seniors can determine whether they are eligible for food stamps by visiting www.aarp.org/quicklink and filling out a questionnaire on public benefit programs. Users can find food stamp applications for each state by entering their Zip Code. The site will provide updated food stamp applications starting Oct. 1.

Of those age 60 and older who participated in the food stamp program in 2006 (the most recent year for which statistics are available):

- Women were the majority, at more than 65 percent.
- Fifty percent were white, 24 percent were African American, 15 percent were Hispanic and 7 percent were Asian.
- Sixty-eight percent received Social Security, 55 percent received Security Supplemental Income (SSI) and 31 percent received both Social Security and SSI.
- The average monthly gross income for older households (before allowable deductions) was \$715.

Portland Press Herald

To get by, more Mainers turning to food stamps

The state sees an increase of 7.2 percent this month, compared with last year.

By Ann Kim

August 12, 2008

Keven Gillette shopped the supermarket aisles Monday with a calculator in hand. He had budgeted \$60 for this trip to Paul's Food Center on Portland's Congress Street, more than a third of his monthly food stamp benefit of \$160.

"The calculator is very important," he said.

Gillette, 40, generally uses his food stamp card for what he considers staples – items such as peanut butter and coffee.

His paycheck from his job as a laundry worker at the Barron Center pays for perishable items, like meat and vegetables, which he keeps in a mini-fridge in his room at the YMCA.

He has been in the food stamp program for about three months, since he left a supermarket cashier's position without having another job.

Gillette is among the growing number of people in Maine and the nation who are turning to food stamps – a federal program administered by state and local agencies – in these difficult economic times. In Maine, 181,814 people are using food stamp benefits in August, an increase of 7.2 percent from last year, according to data from the state Office of Integrated Access and Support. The benefits for August are worth \$17 million.

The numbers show that more people are finding it difficult to get by at a time when wages are not keeping up with the cost of living, said Christopher St. John, executive director of the Maine Center for Economic Policy.

"This is particularly the case for low-wage workers. Those wages at the bottom are growing much more slowly than wages in the middle or at the top," he said. "The food stamp data is just another way of telling that story."

Food stamp use is up nationwide. In May, more than 28.44 million people were using the program – an increase of more than 7.7 percent from the same time last year, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Food Research and Action Center.

The center said the May 2008 figure almost set a record high, surpassed only by 29.85 million in November 2005, which included emergency assistance after hurricane season. The weak economy, high food and fuel prices, and a lack of jobs with good pay and benefits are helping to drive the increase, said Ellen Vollinger, the center's food stamp director.

"I think we'd have to have a very strong economic rebound to see the trend go the other way," she said.

People qualify for food stamps through a complex formula that considers income, work status, assets and other factors. Adjustments in that formula and outreach efforts might play a role in the growing number of people using food stamps, but advocates for low-income people are worried that the economy is the main reason.

Factors such as regular adjustments to the federal poverty level, the way utility costs factor into benefits and a six-year-old system to determine eligibility for multiple assistance programs also play a role, said Barbara Van Burgel, director of the Maine Office of Integrated Access and Support, which administers the food stamp program in the state.

Van Burgel said people working in social services are worried about how high heating costs will further squeeze household budgets. Joe Baril, a manager at Paul's Food Center, said he has noticed an increase in customers using food stamp cards in recent months. It's clear when customers have just received their benefits because they come in and buy large quantities, he said.

"Hopefully it lasts a month, but it usually doesn't," he said. "Toward the end of the month, they start paying us in quarters, nickels and dimes."

Stephen LaChance, a 43-year-old advocate for the homeless, has seen how his monthly food stamp benefit of \$160 buys less these days.

"If you just walk around in here, food's expensive," he said. "Everything."

Gillette and three others at the YMCA share shopping and cooking duties. It's more economical to cook for a group, and they help each other when one of them is struggling financially, he said.

Monday was Gillette's turn to cook, and he bought sausages and peppers for the group meal. His total for two grocery bags and a gallon of milk came to \$61.92 – just a touch over his \$60 budget.

"I used to just pull things off the shelf," he said. "I don't do that anymore."

FOOD STAMP ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

ELIGIBILITY FOR FOOD STAMP benefits, also known as the supplemental nutrition assistance program, is determined by factors including income, work status and assets.

PEOPLE MAY BE ELIGIBLE if they earn low wages, are unemployed or work part time, receive welfare or other public assistance payments, are elderly or disabled and live on a small income, or are homeless.

THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS, but generally:

Able-bodied adults between 16 and 60 years old must register for work, accept an offer of suitable work, and take part in an employment and training program.

Able-bodied adults ages 18 to 50 who do not have children and are not pregnant are limited to three months of benefits in a three-year period unless they are working or in a work or workfare program.

Able-bodied students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled in institutions of higher education at least half-time are ineligible.

WHAT YOU MAY BUY:

THE FOOD STAMP BENEFIT can be used at most stores that sell food.

THE PROGRAM WILL PAY for food and for plants and seeds to grow food for the household.

THE PROGRAM DOES NOT PAY for non-food items, including pet food, toiletries and paper products, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, vitamins and medicines. Also excluded are foods that will be eaten in the store, hot ready-to-eat foods, and foods that are marketed to be heated in the store.

PINE TREE CARDS

IN MAINE, people receive plastic "Pine Tree Cards" that are used like debit cards:

At stores that have a Quest logo on the door or window.

At some farmers markets (ask the seller if they accept food stamps before buying).

For the Meals on Wheels Program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION or to apply, call 1-800-442-6003 and ask for the food stamp program manager. More information is available at online.

Source: Office of Integrated Access and Support, Department of Health and Human Services

Connecticut Post Fight Against Hunger Must Continue Letter to the Editor August 7, 2008

In response to the July 30 news article, " Rell pitches in to help state's food banks," we applaud Gov. M. Jodi Rell's efforts to restock food bank shelves, but much more is needed to address the serious economic downturn and the hunger that is affecting more Connecticut families every day. Food banks are an excellent resource, but every person who is turning to a food bank should also be aware of the benefits they can receive from the food stamp program. For some people, though, we realize this isn't a viable solution because they are just outside of the program's eligibility requirements -- but they're still going hungry as a result of the skyrocketing food prices.

We recommend that the state take the following steps:

1. The state should expand food stamp eligibility during this downturn to include those people who might have modest savings but can't afford enough food at today's prices.
2. More staff should be assigned to the state Department of Social Services to process food stamp applications and keep the process moving smoothly. Delays simply put more pressure on food banks and keep families from obtaining the help they need.
3. As a new school year is about to start, more efforts must be made to connect children with

school breakfast and lunch programs. Ensuring that low-income children have enough food to eat during the day helps families make their food dollars go further. The governor is on the right track and we appreciate her willingness to take innovative steps such as matching funds for food banks, but the innovation can't stop there.

-- *Lucy P. Nolan, End Hunger Connecticut!* &
Tracy Helin, Connecticut Association for Human Services

Washington Post

A Food Stamp Challenge That We All Can Help With

Opinion-Editorial

August 3, 2008

Marylanders are struggling to feed themselves.

Walk down the aisles of Safeway, Giant or Santoni's in Baltimore, and you'll see shoppers clutching coupons, comparing items and eliminating some of them from their lists after discovering that prices have jumped yet again.

Bread is up more than 15 percent over last year, and eggs cost 23 percent more. According to the U.S. Agriculture Department, the Consumer Price Index for food -- which measures the average cost of food in the United States -- rose 5.1 percent from May 2007 to May 2008, the highest annual increase in 17 years. Steep increases are expected to continue for the remainder of the year.

This burden is being felt by many across the state, but for those who were already living paycheck to paycheck, the increase in food, energy and gas prices has become a crisis. In Maryland, almost one in 10 households now face a constant struggle against hunger. As prices continue to rise, so will hunger.

The federal food stamp program, which helps low-income people and families afford nutritious food, is a first line of defense against this hunger. More Marylanders are signing up every month, with enrollment increasing 13.8 percent over the past year, the fourth-highest increase in the nation. Food stamps are not being used just by unemployed individuals but also by workers who face layoffs, reduced hours, stagnating wages and a rising cost of living. Nationwide, more than 41 percent of people on food stamps came from working families in 2006, up from 30 percent 10 years ago.

This is a crucial program, but it hasn't kept up with the times. We saw this firsthand when we participated in the Food Stamp Challenge in March. The Challenge, which has been taken by members of Congress, state and local representatives, faith groups, advocates, students and others, required us to live on an average food stamp benefit -- just \$3 a day -- for one week. Living on such a budget meant meals consisting of peanut butter on white bread, night after night of pasta and drinking enormous amounts of water in an effort to fend off hunger.

The Challenge also highlighted choices that many lower-income people face every day. The most heart-breaking choices involve families. Parents will often eat less so their children have more, a sacrifice that can sap the adults' energy, making them less efficient at work and more likely to get sick.

The Food Stamp Challenge was an eye-opening experience, one that both of us were relieved to see end for ourselves. But for low-income people, making ends meet is a challenge that never ends. There is some good news. Congress recently passed a farm bill that includes almost \$10.4 billion in new funds for food stamps and other essential nutrition programs. The bill will increase the minimum monthly food stamp benefit, improving benefits for most households, and raise the limits on resources that households may have and still qualify for food stamps.

With the new provisions going into effect Oct. 1, all of us in Maryland must work to make sure that those eligible for food stamps know how to get them. Weakness in the economy and rising food prices probably will continue in the near future, so the program is more important than ever.

It is up to all of us to spread the word about the importance of food stamps and to make sure our fellow Marylanders survive the challenge of this economic downturn.

-- Kimberley Chin & Kevin McGuire

Kimberley Chin is director of Maryland Hunger Solutions. Kevin McGuire is executive director of the Family Investment Administration in the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

The Patriot News
State's hungry rely on Farm Bill
Opinion-Editorial
July 30, 2008

As an advocate for a strong nutrition title in the 2008 Farm Bill, I have been reading with increasing alarm the criticism levied against the bill and those who voted for it. I commend Congressman Tim Holden, a conferee, along with Sens. Arlen Specter and Bob Casey, and the additional 16 Pennsylvania congressmen who voted in favor of the Farm Bill.

The Farm Bill isn't simply about farming anymore. There may be subsidies that don't benefit several counties in Pennsylvania, but the strong nutrition title will benefit all hungry Pennsylvanians.

Approximately 70 to 75 percent of the Farm Bill is allocated to the nutrition title. While critics may not think nutrition should be included in the Farm Bill, this is the only place these funds are appropriated and, therefore, this is where we need a strong title.

The "Food Security and Energy Act," the official title of the 2008 Farm Bill, provides \$10.361 billion in funding over the next five years. This bill will benefit many more of our hungry

friends, families and neighbors during a time when increased funding is much needed to meet the challenges of rising food and energy prices and a difficult economy.

The 2008 Farm Bill provides significant new investment in and makes critical improvements to TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program), a program that provides farm commodities to literally millions of our neighbors in need.

As for the Food Stamp Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the Farm Bill expands access to these programs for more low-income Pennsylvanians. There are a number of significant changes to the Food Stamp Program, which include changing the name to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), thus decreasing the stigma associated with the program, allowing more access for assistance in rural areas, and decreasing the opportunity for fraud.

As director of a food bank that serves nearly 40 percent of the geographic area of Pennsylvania, much of it rural, I can tell you that the 2008 Farm Bill does benefit Pennsylvania. Our member agencies that consist of food pantries, soup kitchens, day care centers for low-income children, senior centers, and other nonprofit charitable organizations are reporting increases in demand for food assistance -- anywhere from 25 to 35 percent.

In the winter of 2007/08, people were frequently forced to choose between "heating or eating." With gasoline forecasted at \$4.50 per gallon, fuel oil expected to cost \$4.75 per gallon, and food prices rising exponentially, our neighbors are now truly in a crisis mode. People who have never had to ask for help are finding themselves in a situation where their income just doesn't stretch far enough.

According to the Economic Cost of Hunger in America, commissioned in June 2007, the researchers investigate what is the economic cost to our nation when we permit so many of our fellow citizens to go hungry? What are the costs of the charity that is required to help families get through another day? What are the costs of impaired educational outcomes that scientific research has linked to children not getting enough to eat? And what is the bill for the mental and physical illnesses that are linked to inadequate nutrition?

This analysis calculates the cost burden of hunger in the United States at a minimum of \$90 billion annually. This means that, on average, each person living in the U.S. pays \$300 annually for the hunger bill.

National experts calculate that federal policymakers could end hunger as a serious national problem by strengthening existing federal nutrition programs by \$10 billion to \$12 billion over current spending. This means that virtually ending hunger in our nation would be far less costly than paying the current annual bill that lets so many people suffer this preventable fate.

I commend the 17 of our 19 Pennsylvania congressmen, and our two senators, for identifying and addressing this critical need among our neighbors. They voted yes for strengthening the nutrition title and our ability to feed our hungry neighbors, and I compliment them for their courage and resoluteness.

-- Kendall Hanna is executive director of the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank.

New York Daily News
Queens Families to Get Notice by Mail of Food Stamp Eligibility
By Donald Bertrand
July 27, 2008

Nearly 200,000 Queens families will soon be getting mail that could help them put food on the table in these tough economic times.

The city recently completed an initiative to identify families that may be eligible for food stamps. The first letters notifying families they may qualify for those benefits were mailed in Queens, officials said.

"With skyrocketing food prices adding to the burden of rising rents, gas prices and other costs, hardworking New Yorkers are forced to stretch their dollar further," City Council Speaker Christine Quinn said Thursday in announcing the outreach effort at the Center of Hope International Church in Long Island City.

The city Human Resources Administration identified the needy families by tapping into the database of those enrolled in Medicaid or the Family Health Plus program, which have eligibility requirements similar to the food stamp program.

The city found 197,869 households in Queens that may be eligible for food stamps but have yet to enroll. It found more than 600,000 families citywide. Three Queens zip codes stood out as having the most number of such families - 11355 (Flushing) with 11,130; 11368 (Corona) with 13,390 and 11373 (Corona and Elmhurst) with 13,540.

Advocates said the helping hand is much needed with the economy in the doldrums.

"It is getting harder and harder to put food on the table," said Bishop Mitchell Taylor, pastor of Center of Hope.

Officials urged those who qualify for the benefit to apply.

"There is no shame in applying for food stamps," said Councilman David Weprin (D-Hollis).

Weprin said he was surprised to learn that some 2,300 families in his district alone participated in Medicaid but did not receive food stamps.

In addition to the letter, families will receive a brochure detailing the food stamp program and information on how to apply.

"Now more than ever it's easier for new Yorkers who qualify for food stamps and don't even know it to get access to them to feed their families," said City Councilman Eric Gioia (D-Sunnyside).

Boston Globe
Food Stamp Use Soars in Mass.
Fastest-Growing Program in Nation
By Jonnelle Marte
July 23, 2008

Massachusetts, which earlier this decade had the lowest percentage of eligible residents using food stamps, now has the fastest-growing food-stamp program in the country, a dramatic turnaround that state officials attribute to soaring food prices and a simplified application process.

As food and fuel costs continue to rise, the officials say, people who would not normally use food stamps are turning to the federal program to make ends meet.

"I think low-income families are faced and will be faced this winter with the difficult choice of eating or heating a home," said Patricia Baker, senior policy analyst for the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the poor. "We're seeing prices escalating, and anything that a family can access to help them buy basic food for their families is critical."

More than 500,000 people statewide received food stamps in April, a 67-percent increase from 2003 and 11 percent more than last year, according to state records.

Food-stamp participation increased across the country between 2003 and 2008, with the exception of Hawaii and Wyoming. In New England, New Hampshire saw the next-fastest growth, with a 41-percent rise from five years ago, and Rhode Island saw the smallest change, with a 13-percent increase over that period.

In Massachusetts, residents received about \$48 million in food stamp benefits in April 2008, more than double the \$22 million they received in April 2003. The figures reflect a drastic change for the state, which had the lowest food stamp participation in the country from 2000 to 2002.

"Certainly the economy, the lack of jobs - people not being able to buy food and needing help - that's a significantly contributing factor," Baker said. But changes in state application procedures, including a simplified online form, are also making the program more accessible, she said. The online applications made available in November, combined with the state's eight new satellite offices, help working families and disabled people who might have difficulty going into state offices for interviews and paperwork, officials say. Four of the new centers - in Boston, Lynn, Chelsea, and Fall River - are dedicated solely to food stamps. The state is also waiving the

need for face-to-face interviews more frequently for working families and the disabled.

In June, the state changed its asset requirements for recipients and no longer considers bank accounts, retirement accounts, or property ownership when determining eligibility.

Sam Longnecker, a 23-year-old man with a degenerative nerve disorder that requires him to use a wheelchair, is among those who have benefited from the new application process. He applied online in March with the help of a fellow volunteer at the Center for Law and Education in Boston and had the in-person interview waived.

Longnecker, who gets a stipend for the work he does at the center, said he would not have been able to afford food and rent for his handicap-accessible apartment in Boston without the food assistance.

"Even with the money I got from the job and the money I get through Social Security, I wouldn't have enough to live in Boston," he said in a phone interview. "It's made quite a difference for me."

Typically, a family of four that includes children under 19 must make less than \$42,408 annually to qualify for food stamps. In April, Massachusetts households enrolled in the program receive an average of \$181 a month, up from \$158 in 2003.

Recipients get plastic cards that can be used at grocery stores like bankcards or credit cards. They are prohibited from using food stamps to buy alcohol, cigarettes, vitamins, medicines, pet foods, or cosmetics.

Local food banks have contributed to the increased enrollment by streamlining the application process for clients. The American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay hired some part-time workers four years ago and recruited more translators to help people at their food pantries apply for food stamps.

Food banks had hoped that making food stamps available to more people who qualify would make them less dependent on food pantries. But food has become so expensive that stamps alone are not enough, activists say. The Food Research and Action Center, a nonprofit organization that monitors national food programs, says the maximum food stamp assistance for a family of four in May was \$40 short of what the government estimates a family of four needs for a basic diet.

"The theory is that when people are using food stamps they have more sustenance coming in and the dependence on food banks is less," said Catherine D'Amato, president of the Greater Boston Food Bank, which is also guiding people through the application. "But the increased cost in food and the increased cost in fuel is such that some people still need the food banks."

Massachusetts Community Advocate

New senior income guidelines for food stamps
July 18, 2008
By Angela Greiner Community Reporter

With gas prices over \$4 a gallon and basic food costs increasing every day, seniors in the community are feeling the pinch. Thankfully, help is on the way. A recent change in the Food Stamp Program has increased its income requirements, allowing more of the retired population to participate in the program.

Janice Long, director of the Senior Center in Hudson, said that the new guidelines offer a significant increase for seniors over the age of 60. The new income requirements to qualify are a gross monthly incomes of less than \$1,734 for an individual and \$2,334 for a two-person household.

"Food and gas prices have gone up so much, and seniors' incomes really do not change," Long said.

Director of the Shrewsbury Senior Center Sharon Wager echoed Long's concern for rising food prices.

"Another good thing about the food stamp program is it really promotes healthy food," Wager said. "It helps out with the food that is typically more costly, ... food that many of the seniors with dietary restrictions really need to eat."

The other change in the program, Long explained, is that assets are no longer included in the requirements. Even if a senior owns a car or a house or has some savings in the bank, that senior could still qualify. In the past, seniors with liquid assets over \$3,000 have been excluded from the program; now financial assets in the bank are capped at \$17,000.

"This is a big deal," Long said. "As a result, thousands more people will qualify."

With more seniors qualifying for food assistance, Long encouraged even seniors with incomes exceeding the posted income levels to apply.

"It is a good thing to go through the process and just see," Long said. "I say [the money is] better in their pocket."

Wager is hopeful that more seniors will consider applying for the benefit.

"This benefit is significantly underutilized in the community," she said. "It is a very good program and hopefully the changes will encourage more people to look into it."

To determine whether a person qualifies, a formula is used that deducts the costs of living, such as medical expenses, insurance premiums, mortgage and rent, from monthly gross income. Long said it is easy to get a print-out of what was spent on medical expenses from pharmacies and financial statements from banks back to July 2007. Both directors explained that they have staff

in place to assist in the process and stressed that getting assistance with the application through the center is a confidential process.

"I don't know why they even call it 'food stamps' anymore," Long said. "It is an electronic benefit card that looks like a regular credit card."

Wagner said that she is hopeful that the movement to the electronic system and adjustment of income level will help dispel the myth that food stamps are only for those who are destitute. She explained that often seniors do not use the benefits because of the stigma attached to food stamps.

"Seniors are too proud and shy away, ... but it is the tax dollars that they paid for years that are used to support this program," Wagner said.

Long was also pleased that the new regulations have extended the length of time between recertifying, from six months to two years.

For those uncomfortable with discussing their financial information with the local Senior Center councilors, Long suggested that they contact the Project Bread Food Source Hot line at 1-800-645-8333. With the amount allotted varying on a case-by-case basis, Long said the average amount is \$88 a month.

"That is \$1,056 a year," she said. "... That is a major help. We want the seniors to put the money in their pocket."

Bronx Daily News

Many families are eligible for food stamps and don't even know it

By Tanyanika Samuels

June 18th 2008

Thousands of Bronxites may be eligible for food stamps without even knowing it, says a new citywide study.

Dubbed the Bronx Medicaid/Food Stamp Data Match, the study cross-referenced people on Medicaid with those receiving food stamps to identify people who may qualify for food stamps but are not enrolled in the program.

"This is something that impacts a tremendous number of New Yorkers and Bronxites," City Council Majority Leader Joel Rivera said at a news conference Tuesday at Part of the Solution, a soup kitchen and food pantry in Bedford Park.

The study found that more than 635,000 New Yorkers may qualify for food stamps, with nearly 120,000 living in neighborhoods such as Williamsbridge, Morrisania and Highbridge.

"People need food stamps - not because they're not working, not because they're hanging out on the corner. They're here because rents are so high, and food costs are going so high," said Sister Alice Hannan of Part of the Solution.

To encourage more people to enroll, the city will send letters to households identified in the study beginning in August.

"This [data] gives us a road map to help us reduce hunger in the city of New York," said Council Speaker Christine Quinn, who initiated the study with the Human Resources Administration.

In recent years, city officials have worked to simplify food stamp enrollment.

For example, the application process has been shortened; materials are available in nine languages, up-to-date information is online and service centers have longer business hours.

Still, only 43,000 people citywide have signed up for the program over the past two years.

On Tuesday, city officials noted that the stigma of living on food stamps may keep some from applying.

"Food stamps are there to benefit and help in a time of need," Rivera said.

"We need to send the message that this is not a stigma. We need everyone who qualifies to access food stamps."

For Linda Whirl, 39, of Bedford Park, the food stamp program has been a lifesaver. Over the last eight years, Whirl has been on and off medical disability.

"It's saved me at times," she said. "I'm not ashamed. I've even referred some of my friends."

Getting access to a decent meal is a basic right to which people are entitled, Quinn said.

For information about enrolling in the food stamp program, call 311.

KGO-TV San Francisco - ABC News
Pelosi Highlights Needs of Food Banks
By Anne Makovec
May 30, 2008

A different kind of danger is in the spotlight - children going hungry. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is visiting the San Francisco Food Bank to highlight the need for volunteers and donations.

Nancy Pelosi was speaking to local students about a shortage of food in the United States and worldwide. She spent sometime volunteering at the food bank - helping move beans from a bulk bag to smaller individual bags that will feed local families. She is hoping to bring attention to the food crisis.

Even with pallets full of food on the shelves, things are lean at the San Francisco Food Bank. "These kinds of changes in the food markets make it typically very, very hard for us to acquire more food to feed everyone who needs our help," said Paul Ash, executive director, SF Food Bank.

April saw the biggest jump in food prices in 18 years according to the Labor Department - leaving the food bank with customers who never thought they would have to turn to charity. In the mean time, corporate donations, which make up the bulk of their spoils, are down - mainly dry products canned and packaged food. So to make up for the shortfall, they are working harder to find leftovers.

"Going out and talking to farmers and growers and packers and shippers, and asking them do you have something extra - it needs to be edible, it needs to be good food, but it's food you can't take to market. And we have been having some luck with that," said Ash.

But Paul Ash said it's not only that people are not giving, it's that there isn't as much food on the market. Corn is going to make ethanol and there has been a rice shortage for months. But the food bank is thinking ahead - workers brought seven truck loads of rice when they first heard that.

"So we are trying to take advantage of things like that, but those are only temporary fixes and as prices go up we are going to be suffering at the same time everyone else is," said Ash. Some relief is on the way; Congress has just authorized another \$100 million in emergency food assistance, but that is not going to be available until October.