A Message from the Regional Administrator

“SNAP provide access to healthy food ... also ensures that clients get nutrition education ...”

Something big and exciting has happened at the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). On October 1, the new name of the federal Food Stamp Program changed to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

It was the perfect time to change the program’s name. SNAP is stronger than ever, with record low error rates and record high participation among those eligible for nutrition assistance.

Not only does SNAP provide access to healthy food but it also ensures that clients get nutrition education to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices.

FNS nutrition assistance programs touch the lives of one in five Americans each year and represent a significant opportunity to reach participants with nutrition education and healthy lifestyle messages.

Nutrition Programs through training and technical assistance for foodservice, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

Every day, we work together with you, our committed partners at the federal, state and local level and dedicated community and faith-based groups, to make sure that healthy food is within reach for everyone, especially those who need extra help during these tough times. No one in America should ever go hungry.

Thank you for what you do every day to care for the low-income people of our great country.

Allen Ng
Regional Administrator
Food and Nutrition Service, Western Region
A Message from the Under Secretary

Our Nation has provided nutrition assistance to low income individuals for many years. Now more than ever, strong partnerships are critical to the success of programs that work at the grass roots level to reach members of vulnerable populations. Federal, State and local government, food banks, local faith and community-based organizations, and others on the front lines should work together to ensure everyone who is eligible for nutrition assistance can access it with dignity and respect.

A very positive example of results gained by strong partnerships is the response of Federal, State and local officials working with community organizations and individual citizens to provide crucial support to those affected by the Midwest floods, as well as Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Our commitment to ensure all Americans have access to good nutrition is not reserved for natural disasters, nor is the generosity of the American people seen only during the holiday season. The work of FNS and the food community is one of constant dedication, involving volunteers from a variety of organizations and backgrounds to answer a critical call to action when necessary.

Since 2001, funding for nutrition assistance has increased to $60.1 billion – representing a 76 percent increase. During this timeframe, almost 10.5 million more low-income children and individuals received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (previously known as Food Stamp) benefits. At the same time, the percentage of eligible individuals participating in the program rose from 54 percent in 2001 to its current rate of 67 percent. Our partners at food pantries and soup kitchens work tirelessly to help low-income families begin the enrollment process and distribute needed food packages or warm meals. Compassionate efforts such as these put healthy food within reach for over 29 million individuals each month in SNAP and empower them to achieve self-sufficiency.

Child nutrition programs have experienced increases in participation and access as well. Today, 31 million children participate in school lunch each day, and more than 10 million participate in school breakfast. Since 2001, more than 2.4 million more low-income children ate a free or reduced-price school lunch and 1.75 million more ate a free or reduced-price school breakfast. School meals are nutritionally balanced based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and ensure that children have access to the healthful foods they need to support academic achievement.

Federal programs like SNAP and the child nutrition programs are the foundation of USDA’s efforts to fight hunger and improve nutrition. Individual and corporate donations to food banks and other emergency feeding sites are just as important. Citizen volunteers who give their time, money, and knowledge to improve the lives of their neighbors and communities are the cornerstone of our critical partnerships.

During this holiday season and beyond, our nutrition assistance network is collaborating through a variety of channels to combat food insecurity. If you wish to help, we encourage you to volunteer time, donate food items, and spread the word about our important nutrition assistance programs. Together, we can build healthier communities and a stronger nation by ensuring that no one in America goes hungry. To find ways you can help, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/fns.

USDA’s Recipe Finder Available in Spanish
The SNAP-Ed Connection released “Buscador de Recetas,” the Spanish translation of the Recipe Finder Database. Users now have the option of searching the database of over 400 recipes in both Spanish and English. Recipes included generally use low cost, readily available ingredients; can be prepared quickly; use simple measurements and basic equipment; and are compatible with the existing Dietary Guidelines for Americans. To access the Spanish version of the Recipe Finder, visit the web site at recipefinder.nal.usda.gov.

(On October 1, 2008, the Food Stamp Nutrition Connection became the SNAP-Ed Connection.)
On June 27, Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer announced that USDA will award $30 million to states for demonstrating excellence in administering Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. The overall national payment accuracy rate for FY 2007 was 94.36 percent, a historic high for the program.

As authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, each year USDA awards $24 million among the seven states with the best payment accuracy rates and the three states with the most improved payment accuracy rates. The payment accuracy rate measures overpayments and underpayments to SNAP recipients. The states with the best payment accuracy rates in FY 2007 were South Dakota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Missouri, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and Washington. The most improved states were Florida, Arizona, and Kansas.

USDA awarded an additional $6 million among the four states with the lowest negative error rates and the two states with the most improved negative error rates. The negative error rate measures improper denials or termination of SNAP benefits. The states with the lowest negative rate in FY 2007 were Nebraska, which had a zero negative error rate for the second consecutive year; South Dakota; Alabama; and Minnesota. The most improved states were Oregon and Kansas.

“I am extremely proud of our state partners for achieving an all-time high national payment accuracy rate of 94.36 percent,” said USDA Under Secretary Nancy Montanez Johner. “This achievement indicates continued focus on customer service and providing critical nutrition assistance to those most in need.”

At a press conference in Phoenix, Arizona, on July 28, FNS Regional Administrator Allen Ng presented a large mock check of $2,005,164 to The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Governor of Arizona, for achieving the Most Improved Payment Accuracy Rate in SNAP. Approximately 15 Department of Economic Security (DES) employees, DES Director Tracy L. Wareing, DES Deputy Director Sharon Sergent, and DES Assistant Director Veronica Bossack attended the media event.

On July 29 at an Accuracy Summit for SNAP staff in Salem, Oregon, Under Secretary Johner presented a large mock check of $1,755,504 to Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) staff for achieving the Most Improved Negative Error Rate in SNAP. There were approximately 150 DHS employees at the summit. DHS Director Dr. Bruce Goldberg; Interim DHS Assistant Director for the Children, Adults and Families Division Erinn Kelley-Siel; DHS Administrator of the Office of Self-Sufficiency Programs Vic Todd; and Mr. Ng also attended. On September 26, USDA announced that Oregon would also receive $1,908,681 for the Best Program Access Index in FY 2007.

Under Secretary Johner presented a large mock check of $2,436,247 on July 30 to Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams for achieving the Best Payment Accuracy Rate in SNAP. DSHS Assistant Secretary for Economic Services Administration Troy Hutson and Mr. Ng also attended the press conference, which took place in Tumwater, Washington.

On September 26, USDA announced that Hawaii would receive $462,480 for two awards for Outstanding Customer Service in SNAP during FY 2007: the Best Program Access Index and Most Improved Program Access Index.
On October 10, USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Deputy Under Secretary Kate Houston was the keynote speaker at the 2008 Summit on Hunger and Food Insecurity in Idaho hosted by the Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force (IHRTF). She talked about the Federal nutrition safety net, which includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). FNS Regional Administrator Allen Ng and Idaho Governor Butch Otter and over 250 leaders from business, government, non-profit agencies, schools, and faith communities, and Idahoans who have experienced hunger and food insecurity attended the meeting. The Final Summit Report will be compiled and available at the IHRTF website, www.idahohunger.org, in November.

As Idaho’s second gathering of anti-hunger advocates, the purpose of this summit was to:

1. **bring together** leaders from business, government, non-profit agencies, schools, and faith communities
2. **celebrate successes** from the 2006 Summit on Hunger
3. **educate and raise awareness** of hunger and food insecurity in Idaho
4. **present best practices** in anti-hunger programs and policies
5. learn how to **make a difference**
6. **identify ‘next steps’** in program and policy solutions for Idaho

On Saturday, June 21, approximately 2,000 people were able to enjoy Spring Fest 2008 in Vancouver, Washington. Spring Fest began as the brainchild of young people who wanted to fill a parking lot with fun activities that could teach valuable lessons. Over the last six years, we have stayed true to our vision and our values; everything is free, everything is positive, and everything gives a struggling family a chance to celebrate life for a bit. Spring Fest shows in a strong and clear way that our community welcomes and celebrates all.

Spring Fest 7 will take place on Saturday, June 20, 2009.

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By Kris Henriksen
Clark County Youth House
On July 12, USDA Under Secretary Nancy Montanez Johner; Food and Nutrition Service, Western Region; California Department of Social Services; Network for a Healthy California, Los Angeles Region; and Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services participated in the “Vive Tu Vida! Get Up! Get Moving!” health fair in Los Angeles, California, to promote the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) among low-income Latinos, which is among one of the traditionally underserved populations. Currently, the U.S. Hispanic population has the lowest SNAP participation rates among ethnic groups. Compared to a national participation rate of 67 percent, the Hispanic participation rate is 56 percent.

The health fair is the nation’s premier annual physical activity and Hispanic family health celebration. The Network for a Healthy California demonstrated how to prepare healthy foods and bilingual case workers helped potential applicants with SNAP forms. Under Secretary Johner was interviewed by the local media. She also received an award from the health fair sponsor for USDA’s support for the fair and supporting programs to improve the health of low-income Latino households.

SNAP helps low-income households supplement their food purchases to obtain a more nutritionally adequate diet. The Nation’s largest nutrition assistance program, it delivered benefits to 26.7 million persons each month in fiscal year 2006, at a total cost of nearly $33 billion. About 19 percent of all SNAP participants were Hispanic in 2006.

Although many low-income Latinos participate in USDA’s nutrition assistance programs, a large number do not. In 2004, about 5 out of 10 people in SNAP-eligible households with a Hispanic head participated in the program. People in Hispanic-headed households represent a large proportion—about one-quarter—of all SNAP-eligible persons who do not participate. The bottom line is that while 11 percent of all U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2005, the prevalence of food insecurity among Hispanic families was nearly 18 percent.

“About 19 percent of all SNAP participants were Hispanic in 2006.”

USDA Food and Nutrition Service has reached out to underserved groups to raise awareness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, including significant efforts to reach the Spanish-speaking population. These include the following:

- A national media campaign to promote the nutrition benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and educate non-participating eligible people, including radio advertisements in English and Spanish. Advertising carries the program’s national toll-free number and/or State-specific toll-free information numbers.
- A web-based pre-screening tool in English and Spanish. Individuals using the prescreening tool receive estimates of their SNAP eligibility and benefit amounts. This tool is online at www.snap-step1.usda.gov/fns.

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• A national toll-free number offering recorded information about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Spanish or English. Callers may order informational materials in Spanish or English.

• Educational posters and flyers in English and Spanish which may be ordered for use in local outreach campaigns, along with a photo library, including pictures of Hispanic individuals and families, that can be used in promotional and informational materials. These resources are available at www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm.

• A Hispanic outreach plan, to better reach and educate the Hispanic audience about the nutrition benefits of SNAP. A small Hispanic-owned business is working closely with our national media campaign contractor to prepare a 3-year outreach plan to complement our existing national efforts by identifying community activities to reach potentially eligible Hispanic households.

• A national SNAP Outreach Coalition to bring together national and local organizations working with low-income audiences. Coalition members share effective outreach strategies to educate eligible, non-participating, low-income Hispanic people about the benefits of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

• Participation Grants for projects that look at ways that State partnerships can promote participation and make the application and intake process more user-friendly; and

• Outreach Grants for small organizations to study the effectiveness of strategies to inform eligible low-income people about the program. Fiscal Year 2006 grantees plan to do outreach to Hispanic families.

Since 2004, USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has been recognizing schools that have taken a leadership role in helping students learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices through the HealthierUS School Challenge. Schools have been awarded a gold, silver or bronze level award for making changes to their school nutrition environments, improving the quality of the foods served, and providing students with more nutritious, healthy choices.

The criteria for the HealthierUS Challenge has recently been updated and revised to reflect the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans including requirements for competitive, a la carte foods and physical education. The new criteria also include requirements for a new higher award level: Gold Award of Distinction. To ease the transition, the new 2008 criteria will be effective January 1, 2009. All applications from schools received by state offices by December 31, 2008, may be reviewed using the 2004 criteria. Application forms and materials are available on the Team Nutrition website http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/HealthierUS/index.html.

MyPyramid for Preschoolers Now Available!

Use MyPyramid to help your preschooler eat well, be active, and be healthy.
USDA Nutrition Education Campaign

The U.S. Department of Agriculture promotes America’s health through food assistance for low-income people, and nutrition education, guidance and promotion for the general public and targeted groups. The Department teaches, informs and motivates Americans to use this information to improve their diets and physical activity patterns. USDA also expands research and scientific knowledge about the contribution of food and human nutrition to public health. By promoting better diets, reaching children early and ensuring access to healthy food, the Department contributes to the Nation’s health.

In an effort to promote healthier lifestyles, the USDA and the Ad Council launched a campaign to encourage parents to provide healthy options for their families and to motivate their children to seek proper nutrition and levels of physical activity. The USDA Nutrition Education Campaign contains complementary public service advertising (PSA) efforts which emphasize that a bright future starts with a healthy lifestyle for their families. “Good Nutrition Can Lead to Great Things” PSAs reinforce that healthy eating and physical activity fuel kids’ mind and body. While “Bare Necessities of Healthy Living” PSAs feature characters from Disney’s The Jungle Book and demonstrate the importance of balancing good nutrition, and physical activity. Viewers are encouraged to visit www.MyPyramid.gov and use the USDA’s MyPyramid Food Guidance System as an effective tool to help their children make healthy choices.

For more information, visit www.adcouncil.org/default.aspx?id=475.

USDA Partners with Ad Council and Collaborates with Disney to Promote Nutrition Education

As we all know, today’s obesity and overweight statistics are staggering. For example, 17 percent of children and adolescents are overweight. Less than 25% of adolescents eat the daily recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Few get regular physical activity.

Recent focus group data indicates that mothers and caregivers are aware of many weight loss methods, as well as healthy eating habits, but report struggling with the best way to implement them for their families. It is important now, more than ever, to provide women with detailed information and realistic tips for making and sustaining healthy choices for their children.

USDA Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) and The Ad Council partnered with Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment on a series of public service advertising (PSA) featuring the lovable characters and memorable songs from Disney’s original classic The Jungle Book. An extension of the USDA’s Nutrition Education Campaign, these spots, which are available for television, radio, outdoor and internet media, highlight the importance of balancing good nutrition and physical activity, by emphasizing the “Bare Necessities” of healthy living and sending a message to parents and children that leading a healthy lifestyle can help them be the best at everything they love to do.

For more information, visit www.prnewswire.com/mnr/adcouncil/31020.
FNS Hosted Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Listening Sessions

The USDA is preparing for the 2009 Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The reauthorization process provides Congress with a regular opportunity to examine the operation and effectiveness of the Federal nutrition assistance programs, and consider making improvements to their statutory structure under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966.

USDA believes that public input and program assessment—including WIC, National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and Special Milk Program—are essential to help the Department plan for reauthorization. In anticipation of these discussions, FNS regional offices organized listening sessions to gather input that will help the Department better understand the needs and concerns of program cooperators and participants at the State and local levels, including representatives from State agencies, local program offices, industry, and State and local advocacy groups.

On August 6 during World Breastfeeding Week, FNS Western Regional Office (WRO) hosted a listening session in San Francisco, California. Since WIC has historically promoted breastfeeding to all pregnant women as the optimal infant feeding choice, it was fitting to have the meeting during that week. WRO Regional Administrator Allen Ng welcomed over 100 attendees who represented school districts, students, parents, advocate groups, food industry, medical associations, childcare sponsors, local governments, and state agencies. More than 50 people made presentations to FNS officials and attendees.
HealthierUS School Challenge Silver Award Goes to... Lincoln Elementary School in Toppenish

By Renee Miles
Toppenish School District

USDA HealthierUS School challenge is designed to promote healthy eating and exercise habits among American schoolchildren. The program provides schools with nutrition education materials; technical assistance for school food service directors, managers and staff; and materials to build school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

The Silver Award recognizes schools that are creating healthy school environments by promoting good nutrition, healthy foods and physical activity. Lincoln Elementary School in Toppenish is the first school in Washington state to earn the designation. We are proud of all our schools in Toppenish and plan to go for the GOLD this coming year.

“The Silver Award recognizes schools that are creating healthy school environments...”

Washington, D.C. Congressman for Washington State, Doc Hastings visited Toppenish on May 29, 2008 where he participated in an award ceremony honoring Lincoln Elementary School for earning a Silver Award from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for meeting the HealthierUS School challenge. Hastings has long-supported nutrition programs that add more fruits and vegetables to school menus. Other attendees were USDA Food and Nutrition Service Regional Administrator Allen Ng, FNS Special Nutrition Programs Director Jesus Mendoza and FNS Public Affairs Director Cordelia Fox, Child Nutrition Director for Washington State George Sneller, School Superintendent Steve Myers, Food Service Supervisor Renee Miles, city and school board officials, Head Cook Cindy Hobbs, Cook Sylvia Allen, school staff and students.

Offering children nutritious choices at school will help them develop healthy eating habits that they can take with them for the rest of their lives. Central Washington farmers lead the country in growing top quality fruits and vegetables, and Lincoln Elementary is leading the way in promoting healthy eating habits among our schoolchildren.

On October 15, WRO Regional Administrator Allen Ng celebrated National School Lunch Week at an event hosted by the Paularino Elementary School of the Newport-Mesa Unified School District in Costa Mesa, California. The district’s Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Hubbard, principal Stacy deBoom, board members, and some parents attended the event. The celebration included a performance by the students and FNS Power Panther, tour of the school’s garden, a physical education and nutrition education class demonstrations, and lunch with the students. At the event, Allen Ng talked about the National School Lunch Program and the HealthierUS School Challenge and the importance of providing nutritious meals that include a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and are low in sodium, sugar and fats.

National School Lunch Week was established in 1963 by presidential proclamation. It is designed to help raise awareness of, and support for, the role that the National School Lunch Program and nutrition education play in the lives of children. This year, National School Lunch Week ran from October 13 through 17.

Kids who eat well do well

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in over 101,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more than 31 million children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946.

This year, the Federal government plans to invest over $14 billion in child nutrition programs. The NSLP provides school children of all economic backgrounds with a well-balanced, healthy meal that is designed to meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In some cases, the school lunch is the main daily meal for a needy child. The NSLP strengthens the nation by safeguarding the health and well being of the country’s children while encouraging the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural products.