

Minnesota Department of Human Services Food Support key messages

8/16/10

Message #1

Hundreds of thousands of lower income Minnesotans receive Food Support each month but even more are eligible.

- Food Support (formerly Food Stamps) helps Minnesotans with low incomes meet their nutritional needs.
- Limited funds create challenges for low-income people to eat nutritiously.
- Children cannot learn as well, adults cannot work as productively, seniors cannot maintain their independence as well without proper nutrition.
- Food Support is the basic resource for maintaining proper nutrition for people with low incomes; it is a true safety net.
- As of June 2010, about 420,000 Minnesotans received Food Support benefits. Statistics in Minnesota for 2009 show: The average benefit per household, per month is \$198, and the average benefit per household, per month for those 60 and older is \$111.
- About 54% of eligible Minnesotans participated in the Food Support program in 2009.
- The Minnesota Department of Human Services, which administers the Food Support program, wants everyone who is eligible for the program, particularly senior citizens, to participate and ensure they get the healthy meals they need.

Message #2

The Minnesota Department of Human Services is taking a proactive approach to reaching out to individuals who are eligible but not currently receiving Food Support.

- We have been working with food shelves, community service agencies, faith-based organizations, and others to provide information on the program.
- According to Hunger Solutions Minnesota, one in seventeen Minnesotans rely upon local food shelves to help feed their families. In 2009, there were 2 million visits and 47 million pounds of food distributed at Minnesota's 300 food shelves.
- The Department of Human Services, together with the US Department of Agriculture, funds and works with community programs to ensure Minnesotans get the nutritional food they need.
- We are providing information that helps dispel the stigma of receiving food assistance as a welfare program.

Message #3

Minnesota has accomplished a great deal through innovative practices in the Food Support Program

- In 2005 Minnesota earned \$2.5 million in bonus funds in recognition of a low negative error rate. Minnesota works to ensure that children, families and individuals who are entitled to benefits remain participants in the program and those who lose eligibility based on changes in circumstances are appropriately determined ineligible.

- Bonus funds were awarded due to:
 - Outstanding automation, training, online policy manuals, and help desk and technical support for our county partners
 - Work of counties, particularly county financial workers, who contributed to a high level of program integrity.
 - Counties received 75% of the federal bonus funding. The remaining 25% was dedicated to statewide program improvements.
- Through our Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP):
 - Minnesota developed a groundbreaking pilot integration of cash and food benefits. MFIP, with the permission of Congress and USDA, became the basis of our federal TANF Program.
 - MFIP foreshadowed the alignment of TANF and Food Support policies allowed under more recent law.
 - 100 percent of our MFIP families receive Food Support.
 - Families whose incomes grow to exceed the limits of cash assistance but who remain eligible for Food Support experience a “seamless” transition.
- With information learned from pilot programs, we changed the name of the program from “Food Stamps” to “Food Support” to emphasize the program’s changing role.
- Minnesota has instituted statewide outreach through:
 - Staff recruitment of local partners to conduct outreach
 - 400+ volunteer individuals and organizations so far
 - Department and counties that supply the “infrastructure” of material updates, supplies, training and communications.
- The department also instituted:
 - Statewide EBT in 1998
 - Food Support Nutrition Education Program through the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe
 - More than 100 educators who provide nutritional training, budgeting, shopping and preparation of foods in schools and community settings
 - A state option in which households where all members are elderly or disabled may be certified on a 24-month basis as opposed to every 12 months
 - Implementation of an increased asset limit and an exclusion of vehicles for applicants of the Food Support program who receive a domestic violence brochure.

Message #4

We recognize the system is not perfect and we have challenges ahead. We are ready to take them on.

- Complex food application processes can be a barrier.
- Senior citizens, people with disabilities and individuals in rural communities may choose not to use cards to purchase groceries for a variety of reasons.
- Proper nutrition is a concern.

Message #5

We will create a coalition to carry forth our vision for the future.

- Minnesota legislation mandates the Department of Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Health and the Department of Education, to formulate a broad public policy to improve nutrition and health.
- Minnesota wants to develop a broad coalition to address policy related to:
 - Increasing food security
 - Improving nutrition for all, especially low-income people
 - Reducing disparities in nutrition and health
 - Rising above particular organizational issues to deliver the message
 - Setting indicators of progress.
 - Participants in the coalition may include:
 - USDA Food and Nutrition Service Colleagues in Chicago and Washington
 - Food production industries, grocers and other businesses
 - Legislators
 - University of Minnesota nutrition experts and educators
 - Food shelves, Feeding America, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and other food delivery organizations
 - Minnesota Area Agencies on Aging
 - Minnesota Board on Aging
 - Others with a related mission or interest.