



Date Oct. 1, 2010

Contact: Rebeka Gipson-King, 503-947-2466

SNAP program receives national award for third year in a row

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 called food stamps. Oregon was honored as one of the top states for ensuring that people eligible for these benefits received them.

In Washington, D.C., Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the states to be recognized by the USDA for outstanding customer service in providing SNAP benefits: "The states we recognize today are leaders in service to their communities and their success in breaking down access barriers is an inspiring model for other states," he said.

Each year, USDA honors states with the best and most improved program access index. Oregon ranked second for program access and third for most improved program access. The program access index is the ratio of SNAP participants to the number of persons below 125 percent of the federal poverty level and reflects state performance in reaching those eligible for these important nutrition benefits.

This is the fourth consecutive year Oregon has been one the best states in the nation for SNAP administration. With unemployment continuing to hover above 10 percent, the state maintains accelerated growth in the number of people relying on SNAP to put food on the table. Since 2008, food stamp recipients have increased by approximately 50 percent. In August, more than 725,000 Oregonians received benefits, meaning that approximately one in five Oregonians receives food stamp benefits.

(cont.)

Page 2 *SNAP program receives national award*

"As the recession continues, the safety net programs provided by DHS are more important than ever. Our staff members are doing everything they can to ensure Oregonians get the help they need to make it through these difficult times," said Department of Human Services Assistant Director of the Children, Adults and Families Division Erinn Kelley-Siel.

Kelley-Siel also emphasized the importance of the partnerships between DHS and the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services and with community advocates in the Governor's Hunger, Health and Nutrition Initiative. "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," Kelley-Siel said. "It is important that we are sure every Oregonian who is eligible for assistance has the opportunity to benefit from it."

Background: Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, based on household income, and are distributed through the electronic benefits card that is used like a debit card to purchase food. SNAP benefits can be used to purchase foods for the household to eat, such as breads and cereals; fruits and vegetables; meats, fish and poultry; and dairy products. SNAP 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, SNAP benefits can be the primary means of meeting the family's nutritional needs.

To be eligible for SNAP benefits, 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. The overall average SNAP benefit per household is approximately \$250 per month. Approximately three-fourths of all SNAP households have some form of income, which results the actual benefit amounts they receive being reduced from the maximum.

#