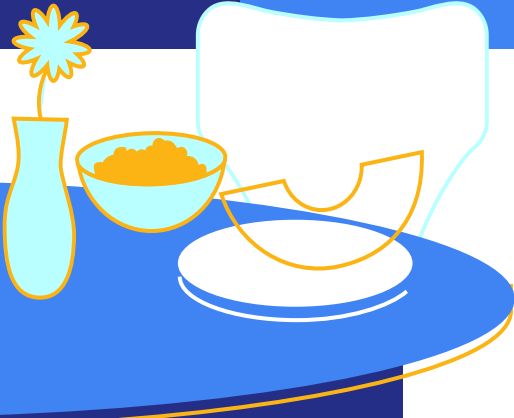




# At The Table

*Nutrition assistance news and information for partners and community organizations in the Northeast Region*



## The Challenges of Yesterday...the Challenges of Tomorrow

*A message from Acting Regional Administrator Robert Canavan*

Traditionally, year-end is a time to reflect. 2008 brought historic changes to the Food and Nutrition Service. Congress renamed the Food Stamp Program the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). That name more accurately reflects our commitment to meeting the needs of our clients, including a renewed focus on nutrition and putting healthy food within reach of low income households.



The new food package in the WIC Program is closer to reality. It includes the all-important fruits, vegetables and whole grains emphasized by current science and the Dietary Guidelines. Once again, the Northeast Region is out in front: New York State is set to implement the new food package in January 2009. (well in advance of the mandatory implementation deadline of October 1, 2009).

the new features of SNAP; to deliver the new WIC food package; and to prepare for the Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition and WIC Programs.

The Nation's economic turmoil has touched all of us. We are seeing record demand for our programs. We are reminded every day how important it is to deliver our programs efficiently and compassionately. Many of our neighbors, who have never needed our programs before, may suddenly find themselves visiting food banks, soup kitchens or applying for nutrition assistance.

I ask each of you to work with us to ensure that everyone who is eligible for nutrition assistance is aware of our programs and able to participate in them. We rely on you to help us serve them with professionalism and respect. We need all of our partners to help us provide the accountability the American taxpayer deserves.

The Northeast Regional Office of FNS is eager to partner with you to meet these challenges. We can provide resources, technology and outreach expertise. Let us know how we can help.

As we look ahead to 2009, we recognize that the challenges of yesterday are the challenges of tomorrow. We will continue to work with you to implement

Together, we'll persevere during these tough times to bring a brighter tomorrow for those in need.

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**Nancy M. Johner**

*Under Secretary*

*Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services*



## **A Message from the Under Secretary...**

### ***Together, We Can Build A Stronger Nation***

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/](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/)



# SNAP

## Putting Healthy Food Within Reach

As of Oct. 1, 2008, SNAP is the new name for the federal Food Stamp Program. It stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and reflects the changes we've made to meet the needs of our clients, including a focus on nutrition and an increase in benefit amounts. The name change was mandated by the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008.

### **Q. Why was the name of the Program changed?**

A. The new name reflects our focus on nutrition and putting healthy food within reach for low income households.

### **Q. What does the name change mean for me – a food stamp recipient?**

A. Only the name of the Food Stamp Program is changing. SNAP is not a new Program. The name change will have no effect on your benefits. You will continue to receive benefits as before and access them with the same electronic card at your local authorized retailers and farmers markets. You do not need to fill out any new paperwork. The same State agency will continue to handle your case. Through nutrition education partners, SNAP will still help clients learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices.

### **Q. What else has changed besides the name?**

A. Recent program improvements include an increase in the minimum benefit (from \$10 to \$14) and standard deduction, elimination of the cap on dependent care deduction and the exclusion of education and retirement accounts from countable resources.

### **Q. Are processing times changing?**

A. No. Time frames to process applications will not change. Applications will continue to be processed by case workers using either expedited (within 7 days) or normal processing time frames (within 30 days).

### **Q. As a SNAP client, how do I access nutrition information and education?**

A. States usually offer nutrition education services through partner organizations. Your eligibility worker can direct you to the nutrition education services in your community. Nutrition education can help you learn how to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices.

### **Q. Are SNAP clients only allowed to purchase certain nutritious foods?**

A. SNAP requirements for foods that can be purchased are the same as in the FSP. SNAP clients can buy all foods intended to be eaten at home. Some things, such as alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, foods hot at the point of sale, non-food items, vitamins or medicines and pet foods are not allowed.

### **Q. Who should I contact for more information if I want to apply for SNAP benefits?**

A. Contact your State agency. Or call our national number 1-800-221-5689.

### **Q. Will States change the name of their Programs to SNAP?**

A. States are encouraged, but not required, to change their program name to SNAP, as it is an opportunity to promote messages about healthy eating to customers. States are still able to rename their programs independent of the Program's Federal name. Over time, FNS, other Federal Agencies, and States will no longer reference the FSP. Some States have already changed the names of their programs.

### **Q. Will the Food and Nutrition Service provide free outreach, retailer and other materials with the new name?**

A. FNS will continue to provide free materials to outreach providers, retailers and others. FNS will reprint materials with the new name when current supplies of materials run out.

### **Q. What is FNS doing to raise awareness of the name change?**

A. FNS is conducting outreach; providing technical assistance to States; sending letters to partners, retailers and other Federal agencies; making announcements on our toll free numbers, and including inserts with publication orders. Over the long term, FNS will update publications, existing radio and television public service announcements and similar items. FNS has resources available to its partners to use to communicate the name change to their clients, including newsletter articles, an e-newsletter paragraph, a fact sheet, and a press release. For assistance, please contact [laura.griffin@fns.usda.gov](mailto:laura.griffin@fns.usda.gov).

Additional resources and updates are available at [www.fns.usda.gov/snap/snap.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/snap.htm)

# Massachusetts Elementary School Achieves National Recognition As Healthier US Silver School

Winter Hill Community School (WHCS), in Somerville, MA, has achieved the coveted Silver status as a HealthierUS School Challenge winner. WHCS, a K-8 school providing quality instructional services to 465 students from diverse backgrounds joins the ranks of an elite group recognized for health, nutrition and fitness excellence! Only 452 schools out of the 66,000 elementary schools eligible nationwide have achieved HealthierUS status. Eric Steiner, Associate Administrator of Special Nutrition Programs for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service presented the award to WHCS Principal Stephen Tuccelli, Food Service Director Mary Jo McLarney and students from the school. Steiner also took time to tour the school, co-teach a nutrition class, meet with WHCS Food Service workers and enjoy lunch with students.

Steiner recognized the WHCS staff and other team members responsible for creating a holistic child wellness environment, a multi-year effort supported by the Shape Up Somerville initiative launched by Tufts University nearly 6 years ago. The road to Silver certification is rigorous and challenging. The WHCS has achieved a standard of excellence in a District recognized for achievement in the effort to reduce childhood obesity. The WHCS will serve as model for schools throughout Massachusetts. To date, only five Massachusetts schools have achieved the HealthierUS School Challenge status.

The HealthierUS School Challenge, established by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, recognizes elementary schools that take specific steps to improve their school nutrition environment and address childhood obesity. The Challenge encourages schools to take a leadership role in helping students make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices. Among the criteria for certification, schools must offer healthy meals and snacks, nutrition education and physical activity. For more information about the Challenge, go to [www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/HealthierUS/index.html)



*Winter Hill students take an exercise break during the presentation assembly*



*USDA Food and Nutrition Service Associate Administrator Eric Steiner (l) and Northeast Region Special Nutrition Programs Director John Magnarelli (r) enjoy lunch with Winter Hill students*



*Eric Steiner participates in a 3rd grade nutrition education class*



*Eric Steiner (l) presents the HealthierUS School Challenge Award to Winter Hill Principal Stephen Tuccelli (ctr) and Food Service Director Mary Jo McLarney (r)*

## USDA Awards SNAP Outreach Grants

The USDA awarded nearly \$1 million to faith-based and community organizations to improve access and awareness of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

USDA awards outreach grants at the local level to raise awareness of the nutrition benefits of SNAP and test strategies to reach eligible individuals and families. Many grantees work with partners to customize the outreach programs to the needs of their community. The maximum award for each grant is \$75,000.

Grant opportunities were available to public entities and private, non-profit organizations, including faith and community-based organizations to assist in improving awareness and access among eligible low-income people, especially the working poor, seniors and legal immigrants, who are not currently participating in SNAP.

Nationally, approximately 67 percent of those who are eligible to participate receive program benefits. The participation rate for eligible Hispanics is considerably lower at 56 percent and even lower among eligible elderly Hispanics at 34 percent.

In addition to directly helping individuals and families, SNAP benefits provide a boost to local economies because every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9.20 in total community spending.

In the Northeast Region, the 2008 outreach grantees are the Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc., of Hyannis, MA and the New York City Department for the Aging.

## USDA Grants \$5 Million to Increase Access and Participation in SNAP

The USDA announced \$5 million in grants for six state agencies, one local agency and a non-profit organization to simplify the SNAP application and eligibility systems and improve access to program benefits for America's low-income households.

This year's grants focus on modernizing and streamlining the application process or eligibility system to improve overall customer service. More than half of the grants place emphasis on increased participation among Hispanics and the elderly.

In the Northeast Region the grantee is the City of New York Human Resources Administration.



## Team Nutrition Training Grants Announced

\$5 million in Team Nutrition Training grants was awarded to twenty states to help children develop better eating and physical activity habits.

Team Nutrition is a key component of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to provide schools with nutrition education materials for children and parents as well as technical assistance for school food service providers and communities to support healthy eating and physical activity.

In the Northeast Region the grantees are Maine (\$195,206) and Rhode Island (\$322,707). More information on the Team Nutrition Training Grants is available at <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov>

## USDA Help for WIC Nutrition Delivery Technology Grants Improve Access

The USDA announced \$9 million for state agency technology improvements to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The grants subsidize the development, implementation, and transfer of newer, more capable computer systems and electronic benefit transfer (EBT).

Investment in technology is critical to USDA's ability to modernize the delivery of benefits. To meet the goals of system improvement, for FY 2008, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded approximately \$5 million to support the development of three model management information systems that can be implemented in a cost effective manner.

Newer WIC systems move state agencies from paper to electronic food benefits using EBT. FNS provides support for the development and evaluation of EBT pilots to identify technology solutions that maintain integrity in nutrition benefit delivery while fostering positive outcomes for WIC participants, retailer and state agencies. For FY 2008, FNS awarded \$4 million to WIC state agencies for EBT-related activities.

For more information on technology efforts in the WIC Program, visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/EBT-MIS.HTM>

# Around The Region



## Vermont Receives SNAP Award

USDA FNCS Deputy Under Secretary Kate Houston presented Vermont Secretary of Human Services, Cindy LaWare, a check for \$306,995 for Most Improved Program Access.

Each year the USDA awards a total of \$12 million in high performance bonuses to the eight states with the best and most improved program access index. The program access index is the ratio of participants to the number of people below 125 percent of poverty. Vermont joined Hawaii, Missouri, and New Hampshire as the states with the most improved program access.

## Convoy of Caring Delivers the Hunger Action Month Message in Connecticut

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Deputy Administrator Eric Steiner addressed a room full of anti-hunger advocates, food industry representatives, and truck drivers in Rocky Hill, CT about the important partnership of private and public nutrition assistance efforts, highlighting the importance of SNAP benefits to low-income CT families. Steiner then jumped into the cab of a Stop and Shop eighteen-wheeler as part of a 20-truck convoy bound for the warehouse/headquarters of FoodShare. This annual event recognizes the generosity of private food industry partners throughout the year. More than 30 companies donated enough food to provide 200,000 meals for area residents. FoodShare is redoubling its efforts to work with community organizations to promote increased SNAP participation by the families served by their food pantry partners.



## New SNAP Logo On Display

USDA FNCS Deputy Under Secretary Kate Houston (l) displays the new SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) logo at the NERAHN (Northeast Region Anti-Hunger Network) Conference.

## 2008 Hunger Champions

The Hunger Champion award is given to local offices nominated for their exemplary service conducting outreach activities and assisting eligible clients to obtain nutrition benefits in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

This year's Hunger Champions were chosen from more than 80 nominations by state and local offices and advocacy organizations serving communities across the country.

Congratulations to the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, New Market Square Office for its selection as an Honorable Mentor.

A complete list of awardees may be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm>

## Pioneer Community Action Agency Doubles Summer Meals

The Community Renewal Team Inc. (CRT) is an anti-poverty agency serving people and families throughout the Connecticut River Valley. When America's War on Poverty began in 1964, the founders of CRT were already at work addressing the needs of the poor and disadvantaged in Hartford. In 1999, the Community Renewal Team of Greater Hartford Inc. merged with Community Action for Greater Middlesex County to form the Community Renewal Team Inc. CRT now runs major programs in 59 Connecticut towns, including Meals on Wheels, Head Start, homebuyer and energy assistance, nutrition and youth services. CRT is the oldest continuously operating community action agency in the country and the second largest in New England.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is an important resource for families in Middletown, CT --a small city of 47,000. While one-third of Middletown's public school students qualify for free and reduced price lunches during the school year, only 11 percent had participated in the SFSP in 2006. That statistic, coupled with a 2005 Wesleyan University study revealing more than 1,800 Middletown children live in households considered food insecure, prompted CRT to team up with End Hunger Connecticut! to launch a campaign to double the number of children getting lunches through the SFSP.

Targeting summer 2007, the agencies set three parameters for an outreach campaign:

1) increasing the number of sites; 2) expanding the length of service; and 3) reaching out to more kids per site. "If we could do this--move simultaneously on all three fronts, we couldn't help but see an increase," said Nancy Pappas, CRT Director of External Affairs.

To overcome one of the biggest barriers--parents' lack of awareness about the free lunch sites -- a comprehensive information campaign was launched.

To encourage the kids to participate, activities were added at each open site including crafts, games, gardening and reading. Funding and supplies and new paid site supervisors came from Liberty Bank, End Hunger Connecticut!, and Books to Dreams Foundation. Wesleyan University students helped plant a garden at a local housing authority and brought "tasting parties" from their own nearby farm to the open sites. The Dept of Labor's Youth Employment Program provided two teens to help out per site.

CRT's efforts paid off--increasing from 3,500 meals in 2006 to 8,857 in 2007--meeting the goal of doubling the number of free meals served to hungry kids! The program operated 10 sites daily from June 25 through August 24.



In 2008, CRT was able to more than double its numbers from 8,857 meals in 2007 to 17,508 in 2008--the largest increase in the State! The addition of kids in a local Upward Bound program added to the numbers as did the publicity generated from the previous year as organizations and parents began calling about the program in early spring. The 2008 program operated 17 sites.

"CRT's been in the trenches a really long time and views helping vulnerable kids a corporate mission," said Pappas. "Through SFSP, we developed a sense of shared responsibility for children in the community, vowing to make palatable and healthy meals available to the maximum number of kids."

CRT credits the increases to creating an environment where kids want to go and in which parents have confidence leaving their kids. With the program's success, people of Middletown started to see CRT as an even more involved partner in the community. "People were helping us and we were helping other folks," said Pappas. "The program positioned CRT as a Community Action Agency where it should be, in partnership with organizations doing important and meaningful work."

Liberty Bank launched its corporate volunteer program with the SFSP in the Summer of 2008. Some Bank employees had no idea of the challenges facing low-income families in the surrounding community.

Because it was accomplished with very little extra funding, Middletown serves as a model for other communities wanting to increase participation in the SFSP--one of the most available, yet underused federal nutrition programs.

"A lot of organizations run SFSP at a deficit because they feel it's the right thing to do for the community," said Pappas. "We're here to show what's right for the community does not have to be a drain on the sponsor organization. With the help of small outside grants, you can keep the program in the black."



Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer and Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt appointed 13 nationally recognized experts to serve on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. The Committee members are made up of prominent medical and scientific researchers from universities and scientific institutions across America that are leaders in their field.

Selected for their expertise in dietary intake, human metabolism, behavioral change, and health, the Committee will advise the Secretaries on any nutritional and dietary revisions necessary to the existing Dietary Guidelines. Following a review of the scientific literature; listening to and receiving public comment; and deliberating in open forums, the Committee will prepare an advisory Report to be submitted to the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services and used in setting the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The Dietary Guidelines are based on the preponderance of scientific, medical, and related knowledge and inform both the general public and government policy makers on ways to improve the overall health of the American public through proper nutrition. As mandated by Congress, the Dietary Guidelines are reviewed for revision every five years. The administrative responsibility for supporting the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee alternates between Departments. The Department of Agriculture has the administrative lead for the 2010 revision; the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion is the agency within the Department that is leading the effort.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans have become recognized as the Nation's cornerstone of Federal food policy. They are of particular importance to nutrition education of the general public and in strengthening the Nation's food assistance programs.

All USDA press releases, fact sheets, backgrounders and other press materials are available at [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)

## MyPyramid for Preschoolers

Mom, you are the most important influence on your child. Moms and caregivers can do many things to help children develop healthy eating habits for life. Use MyPyramid to help your preschooler eat well, be active, and be healthy. MyPyramid for Preschoolers is for children 2 to 5 years of age.



At [www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers](http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers), you can **Explore ways to help your preschooler:**

- Grow up healthy. Complete a growth chart especially for your child to find out more about normal development.
- Develop healthy eating habits. Raise a healthy eater by setting a good example and practicing positive habits.
- Try new foods. Help for picky eaters.
- Play actively every day. Add physical activity into your preschooler's day.
- Follow food safety rules.

### Find:

- Sample meals patterns, meals and snacks.
- Kitchen activities for preschoolers.

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