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Food Stamp Benefit to Increase 13.6% Today for 2.5 Million Californians

Federal Stimulus Money Provides a Total of \$840 Million to California's Food Stamp Recipients over the next 18 months

SACRAMENTO -- John Wagner, Director of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), announced today that participants in California's Food Stamp Program will receive a 13.6 percent increase in their monthly benefits beginning today.

Approximately 2.5 million Californians (1 million households) receive food stamps totaling approximately \$321.6 million each month. That is expected to increase to 2.8 million Californians (1.15 million households) in the upcoming year. The 13.6 percent increase will raise the average monthly food stamp benefit from approximately \$300 per household per month to approximately \$341 per household, resulting in \$47 million in additional federal dollars arriving in the state each month. "These benefits help low-income families put food on the dinner table every day," said Wagner. "A 13.6 percent increase will dramatically help families, while also boosting California's economy in ways that benefit grocers, food manufacturers and growers."

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), passed by Congress and signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009, provides for the 13.6 percent food stamp increase through federal fiscal year 2010. The Act also provides California with approximately \$22 million in administrative funding for

costs associated with increased SNAP caseloads. (The federal food stamp program is now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or “SNAP”.) Participation in California’s Food Stamp Program by those not already receiving CalWORKs or other assistance increased 21 percent between January of 2008 and December 2008, from 628,000 to 764,000 cases. To be eligible, households must meet asset requirements and have an income below 130% of the federal poverty level, currently \$2,297 a month for a family of four. “We encourage everyone who thinks they might be eligible to apply for nutrition assistance benefits,” Wagner said.

According to US Department of Agriculture (USDA) research, every \$1 of additional federal food stamp benefits results in a \$1.84 in local economic activity. More than 19,000 retailers and 62 Farmers’ Markets serving more than 183 locations statewide currently accept food stamp benefits in California.

As part of the announcement today about the increase in the food stamp benefits, Dr. Mark Horton, Director of the California Department of Public Health, reminded Californians that they can eat healthier foods in difficult economic times because it is often less expensive than buying highly processed, prepared foods that may be low in nutritional content. “All Californians should eat more fruits and vegetables, buy produce in season when it is most affordable, and select whole foods, such as dried beans and grains, whenever possible.” he said. “It not only makes sense from a health perspective, it makes good economic sense as well.”

“Farmers’ markets can be a great source of low-cost healthy foods,” Horton said. “We are pleased that 62 farmers’ markets across the state accept food stamp benefits, and we look forward to working with our community partners to increase that number even more.” Dr. Horton oversees the “Champions for Change” public awareness campaign targeting low-income mothers in California communities that include a high number of food stamps recipients. The campaign, administered through a statewide network of community organizations known as the Network for a Healthy California, is aimed at empowering low-income Californians to exercise and choose healthy foods to combat obesity and its associated health effects, including diabetes and hypertension.

In addition to the food stamp increase, the ARRA also provided additional funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Under EFAP, commodity foods from the USDA are made available to California’s food banks and food pantries for distribution to low-income Californians. The amount of commodities provided by USDA is based on economic need, as determined by the unemployment index and the U.S. census population. In fiscal year 2008-09

through March 31, 2009, California received 48 million pounds of commodities from USDA. An additional 22 million pounds of commodities is scheduled to be received through September 30, 2009, plus another 10 million pounds of commodities under the ARRA.

The assistance comes as demand for food at California food banks is reaching an all-time high. "No California family should have to face hunger," Wagner said. "In difficult economic times, the nutrition assistance safety net, which includes food stamps and the emergency food assistance program, becomes even more important. Californians who are able to make food donations to their local food bank or pantry are encouraged to continue to be as generous as possible." Additional information about California's Food Stamp Program is available at <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/foodstamps/>.

Additional information about the Champions for Change outreach campaign is available at <http://cachampionsforchange.net/en/index.php>

Additional information about the Emergency Food Assistance Program is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/sdacontacts.htm> or call (916) 229-3344. Additional information about federal stimulus monies for California in the ARRA is available at www.recovery.ca.gov.

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