



## Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency

*Healthy People, Healthy Communities*

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## Press Release

December 3, 2009

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Food For All Mendocino announces a campaign to Bring A Million Dollars to Mendocino County**

Food For All Mendocino, a local coalition working to increase access to healthy food in our communities, announces the launch of a new campaign to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program. If Food Stamp Program enrollment in Mendocino County is increased by just 10%, an additional \$1 million in federal funds will flow into our local economy each year.

“We’re thrilled to be launching this campaign at the start of the holiday season,” says Megan Van Sant, coordinator of Food For All and employee with the Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency. “Our community is losing millions of dollars each year in food stamp benefits that are not being used by eligible participants who are not enrolled. But even more importantly, we know that thousands of families in our community are struggling to pay their bills and keep healthy food on the table. Our campaign is a community-wide effort to increase access to healthy food for low-income families while bringing additional funds into our community for local spending at grocery stores and farmers’ markets.”

The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to low-income families and individuals. Benefits provided by the program are 100% funded by the

federal government through the United States Department of Agriculture. The average monthly food stamp benefit is about \$200. In the past, the program used paper coupons. But today, food stamp recipients are given an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which is like a debit card for food purchases. Food stamp recipients can only use their EBT card to buy food, non-alcoholic beverages, plant seeds and plant starts that produce food. All major grocery stores, most smaller grocery stores, and the farmers' markets in Ukiah and Willits accept food stamps. Hopefully, the farmers' markets in Fort Bragg, Laytonville and Round Valley will be able to accept food stamps by next summer.

"Many individuals and families may not know that they qualify for the program," says Van Sant. "You can have a job, own a home, own more than one vehicle, and still qualify for the program based on your family income and household size. And there are special regulations that make it even easier for seniors and families with children to qualify."

Approximately 30% of low-income households in Mendocino County have reported that they have gone hungry in the past year because they couldn't afford enough food. But in spite of pervasive hunger in our communities, an estimated 9,500 people in Mendocino County are potentially eligible for food stamps but not enrolled in the program.

The experience of Mendocino County is part of a larger statewide trend. California is ranked last in the country for participation in the Food Stamp Program. Only 50% of eligible participants in the state are enrolled in the program. This lack of participation hurts local families as well as local farmers, grocery stores and food retailers. Using food stamps in the community creates an economic ripple effect. Every \$5 in new food stamp benefits generates \$9.20 in total community spending. In addition, participation in the food stamp program frees up money that can be used to buy other necessary non-food items.

By increasing food stamp enrollment and funneling federal dollars into our local economy, Food For All Mendocino hopes to boost economic support for local grocers, local farmers, retailers, and other businesses. "Our campaign is all about celebrating the Food Stamp Program by recognizing the economic and health benefits that the program brings to our communities. We want our community to think differently about food stamps and their value

to our local economy,” says Van Sant. “We encourage folks to keep an eye out for enrollment and outreach events in their local communities throughout the month of December and into the new year, and to call us if you’d like get involved in the campaign.”

In the spirit of friendly competition, Food For All Mendocino has organized a regional contest, spearheaded by family resource centers in eight regions throughout the county, to determine which community can increase participation by the greatest percentage. “Our community Family Resource Centers are looking forward to leading local campaigns to increase participation in the Food Stamp Program,” says Carol Mordhorst, Coordinator for the Family Resource Center Network of Mendocino County. “Our centers are trusted and well-established within their communities, and we are ready and willing to help families with the application process.” Participating family resource centers include Potter Valley Youth and Community Center, Anderson Valley Family Resource Center (Boonville), Laytonville Healthy Start, Action Network (Gualala), Nuestra Alianza (Willits), Safe Passage (Fort Bragg), Nuestra Casa (Ukiah), and the Arbor on Main (Ukiah.)

Food For All Mendocino (FFAM) works in close partnership with the Family Resource Center Network of Mendocino County, UC Cooperative Extension, Plowshares Community Dining Room, FIRST 5 Mendocino, Ukiah Community Center and Food Bank, school districts, and other community organizations.

To find out if you might qualify for food stamps, for guidance and assistance with the application process, or for more information about the campaign, call Food For All Mendocino at 46-BREAD (462-7323.)

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