

Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency

Healthy People, Healthy Communities

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency Receives National Gold Hunger Champion Award

This week Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, announced the 2010 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Hunger Champion Award recipients. Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency is one of only two county agencies nationwide receiving the highest honor - Gold Hunger Champion. Of the thirty awardees honored in total, Mendocino County is the only California agency. The awardees are recognized for demonstrating exemplary service conducting outreach activities and assisting eligible clients to obtain nutrition benefits. Mendocino County was nominated for the award by Plowshares Community Dining Room and FIRST 5 Mendocino.

“Putting healthy food within reach for low income Americans has never been more important,” said Concannon. “These local offices have gone the extra mile to reach out to and educate needy members of their

communities about the nutrition benefits of SNAP and how to apply. Through innovative strategies and creative partnerships, these honorees serve as models for local offices across the country.”

“I am so proud of the work of our Agency and our community partners in reducing hunger and providing compassionate and professional assistance to working families, seniors and the newly unemployed. We are experiencing times of great economic uncertainty,” says Stacey Cryer,

Health and Human Services Agency Director, “and many local families are having to choose between putting food on the table or paying their rent. We want those families to know that the food stamp program can provide some help when they need it. The Food Stamp program, funded entirely by federal funds through the USDA, supports our local families, our local farmers, and our local grocery stores.”

“FIRST 5 Mendocino appreciates the county’s response to hunger,” states Anne Molgaard, Executive Director of FIRST 5 Mendocino. “This county and this country are experiencing the worst economic downturn since the Depression. Some family breadwinners need some extra help for the first time in their lives. They don’t know where to turn or how to ask for help. The county and partners are reaching out in a respectful and compassionate way to make sure that families don’t go hungry. Helping families get enough food is as fundamental a definition of community as I can imagine.”

Last year, the Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency facilitated the development of a new community coalition called Food For All Mendocino. Staffed by employees of the County’s Eligibility and Family Assistance Services division, the coalition includes

representation from local food banks, community dining rooms, family resource centers, child advocacy organizations, local schools, and other County programs. The primary mission of the coalition is to reduce hunger and encourage healthy eating through the promotion of food stamps and local food resources.

With the support of the HHSA, the Food For All Mendocino coalition has achieved a number of outreach goals. Key elements of the initiative include training and support of “Food Stamp Advocates” at local family resource centers and community-based organizations; encouraging the use of mail-in applications; a local hotline (46-BREAD) answered by a trained outreach worker who can answer questions about the food stamp program; and outreach activities at local libraries, senior housing complexes, child care centers, schools, grocery stores, farmer’s markets, and community events.

“Without the support of our community partners, especially our network of Family Resource Centers and FIRST 5 Mendocino, we would never be able to reach out to and support our geographically diverse community. Our partners richly deserve recognition and credit for this award,” says Cryer.

California has the second lowest participation rate in the Food Stamp Program in the country. Only 55% of eligible participants in California are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program. This lack of participation hurts low-income families, as well as local farmers, grocery stores and food retailers. 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 8,000 people in Mendocino County are potentially eligible for food stamps but not enrolled

in the program. The lack of participation carries an economic impact, as well. Mendocino County grocery stores, food retailers and farmer's markets lose out on over \$11 million a year in potential Federal funds via food stamps due to the under-utilization of the Food Stamp Program.

For more information about Food For All Mendocino or the Food Stamp Program, please call 46-BREAD. (462-7323)

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