

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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ND Food Assistance program contracts with new vendor

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services has awarded the Food Assistance Program's Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) contract to a new vendor: eFunds Corporation, which will assume responsibility for handling benefits by March 2009.

Food assistance clients do not need to take any action. New specialized "EBT" debit cards will be issued to clients gradually over the next year during routine eligibility reviews.

North Dakota began issuing all Food Assistance benefits on debit cards in 1997. The federal government requires states to periodically rebid EBT services, and this is the first time North Dakota has rebid its contract. eFunds has provided prime contractor services for 10 states plus two counties in California.

eFunds is notifying participating grocers that they need to sign new merchant agreements this summer. New point-of-sale terminals will be installed at participating grocery retailers prior to the transition.

In June 2008, \$5 million in federal Food Assistance (Food Stamp) benefits were issued to about 49,000 low-income North Dakotans. About half of the recipients were children; others were elderly, people with disabilities, or the working poor.

Food Assistance benefits can be used to purchase food items only. Individuals experiencing hardship purchasing food can apply for Food Assistance at their local county social service office.

For more information, contact the N.D. Department of Human Services' Food Assistance Program at 701-328-2328.

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