

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 E Boulevard Ave, Bismarck ND 58505-0250

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 20, 2009

Contacts: Arlene Dura, Director of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, ND Dept. of Human Services, 701-328-2064; or Heather Steffl, Public Information Officer, 701-328-4933

County and state employees honored for helping address hunger through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

BISMARCK, N.D. – County social service office employees and North Dakota Department of Human Services employees work hard to make a difference by helping low-income individuals and families overcome hunger through the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program previously named Food Stamps. When these individuals gathered in Bismarck this spring for training and performance recognition awards, the human services department invited them to participate in the first annual Make a Difference Food Drive, which netted 1,685 items weighing 1,400 pounds that were donated to the Great Plains Food Bank for statewide distribution.

North Dakota Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Director Arlene Dura said, “Each year we host a training conference where we also recognize county eligibility workers, supervisors, and directors who provide quality service while determining if people qualify for the program. Holding a food drive with the conference was another way to work together to address hunger.”

She said the state’s West Central administrative region won the first *Make a Difference Award* for donating the most food drive items. Counties in the region include: **Burleigh, Emmons, Kidder, McIntosh, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan, and Sioux** counties. The region also received the *Conrad J. Moe Traveling Trophy* for achieving the lowest error rate among the state’s six administrative regions.

The department also recognized other counties and state agency staff for meeting performance measures. The following counties were recognized from among North Dakota’s 53 counties for completing required case file reviews: **Benson, Eddy, Foster, Kidder, Morton, Mountrail, Ramsey, Ransom, Richland, Stark, Walsh, and Wells**. The reviews are a proven method of detecting and preventing errors, and are used to determine training needs and to affirm the accurate work being done in the counties, Dura said.

-MORE-

Most Improved Performance

County social service offices were also evaluated against like-type counties and recognized for achieving the most improved error rates from the 2007 to 2008 fiscal year. The state recognized **Renville County** from among counties with 1-50 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cases a year; **Billings/Golden Valley** and **Griggs County** (counties with 51-100 SNAP cases/year); **Pierce County** (counties with 101-200 SNAP cases/year); **Walsh County** (counties with 201-500 cases/year); **Morton** and **Sioux** counties (counties with 501-1,000 cases/year), and **Grand Forks County** from among the five counties with over 1,000 SNAP cases per year.

Lowest Error Rates

State Human Services officials also recognized seven counties for achieving the lowest error rates. These awards were grouped by caseload size, percentage of the statewide SNAP caseload, and 2006 – 2008 fiscal years quality control data. Award recipients in order from smallest caseload to largest included: **Kidder**, **Grant**, **McLean**, **Mountrail**, **Benson**, **Stark**, and **Rolette** counties.

Dura said county eligibility workers, supervisors, and county social service office directors were honored along with state employees who provide technical assistance and quality control services to counties. In North Dakota, people apply for the nutrition assistance benefits at county social service offices, and the state's human services department is responsible for administering the program, contracting for electronic transaction services, providing training and technical assistance to counties, and performing quality control services.

In April 2009, the federally funded U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provided a little over \$7 million in benefits to 53,390 qualifying low-income North Dakotans. Almost half of the participants were children, and the remainder included senior citizens, people with disabilities, and low-income working families and individuals. According to one recent estimate, every \$1 spent on SNAP benefits adds \$1.73 to local economies through increased food sales and related jobs including farm jobs. The government issues benefits on specialized debit cards, called EBT cards, which can only be used at grocery stores and other retailers to purchase food items.

Dura said individuals in North Dakota who are struggling to buy food and experiencing hunger should contact a county social service office to apply for the program.

###