



USDA ANNOUNCES GRANTS TO EXPAND NUTRITION HELP FOR LOW-INCOME SENIORS

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Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that USDA will invest in pilot projects to increase access and participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, among low-income seniors. Award grants totaling approximately \$8 million will allow State agencies to pursue innovative outreach and delivery pilot projects.

"The Obama Administration has put in place unprecedented measures and legislation to combat hunger and poverty in America and to assist food insecure households," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Expanding nutrition assistance among underserved populations, such as seniors, will require us to seek innovative methods for program outreach and delivery. These grants will allow State agencies to pursue those programs and deliver help to Americans in need."

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is encouraging State agencies to submit grant applications for programs designed to boost SNAP participation among Medicare's Extra Help population. Extra Help, also called the Low Income Subsidy, is a program to help low-income individuals or couples with limited resources pay for their Medicare prescription drug plan costs. Under a new law, data from these applications is sent to State Medicaid agencies to enroll people in Medicare Savings Programs. FNS will provide funding to encourage the Extra Help population to participate in SNAP by using State Medicaid agency data from Medicare Savings Programs. FNS invites State agencies to submit applications that will implement outreach efforts, simplify eligibility, or standardize benefits for this population. The deadline to submit grant proposal applications is June 30, 2010.

"USDA has worked with State agencies for years on pilot programs to make it easier for elderly and disabled persons who get certain cash assistance from the Social Security Administration to enroll in SNAP. These projects aim at building on that success," said Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon. "The pilot programs under this announcement today further advance our mission of ensuring nutrition assistance for all those who are eligible."

While the participation rate among all eligible persons was 66 percent in 2007, the participation rate is less than one third (32%) among eligible elderly. Research shows multiple reasons why eligible people, including seniors, do not participate in SNAP. These include stigma, unawareness of eligibility, confusion about program rules and requirements, and lack of transportation.

FNS oversees the administration of 15 nutrition assistance programs that touch the lives of one in four Americans over the course of a year. The largest program, SNAP, puts healthy food on the table for more than 39.4 million people each month.

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