

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



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Food Stamps...for a Healthy Community

Approximately 51% of all Americans will benefit at some point in their lives from the federal food stamp program. Every state in the US, including Kansas, offers food stamps as a *safety net for food security** in times of personal economic stress. Food stamps are a kind of “insurance policy” for food security. A case in point— if a single parent loses her job or has a minimum wage job, food stamps can help her protect her child from food insecurity until she is in a position to better provide for her basic needs. On a larger scale, food stamps slow the economic downturn when there is higher unemployment because they can help compensate in part for people’s loss of income.

Most people who receive food stamps use them only a few months. However, this food assistance can make a big difference for a for a household when there is a crisis such as a job loss, divorce, a difficult year in

farming, loss of a home in a flood or tornado; for a senior living on Social Security or a person living with a chronic disability. In fact, many Kansans who have experienced one of the several natural disasters in the recent past found there really is a “safety net” in food stamps.

Benefits from food stamps extend beyond those that directly impact individual households. There is also a measurable economic effect on the community where the food stamp recipient lives. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) found that for every \$5 of food stamps, almost \$10 is generated in total economic activity in a community. Food stamps are not just good for those in need, but good for the community at large—a win-win situation.

In Kansas, there are on average 85,000 food stamp households. Approximately 47% of the benefits go to

families with children, many of them whose head of household is working full-time. Most of the remainder goes to households with older adults on fixed incomes or those with disabilities. The average food stamp household in Kansas receives about \$200/ month. That can translate into about \$17,000,000 federal dollars received in Kansas/month or nearly \$204 million a year! If the food stamp households spend this money on food in stores, then they have a little more money to spend on other necessities. Most of the benefits are spent in our grocery stores and supermarkets, with the remaining amount spent in convenience stores, farmers markets, and senior meal services like Meals On Wheels. When food stamps are spent at farmers markers, the local farm economy profits and food stamp recipients receive fresh local fruits and vegetables. Again—a win-win situation.

To maximize the health benefit to families receiving food stamps, USDA Food and Nutrition Services offers nutrition education to those who receive food stamps and those who are eligible to receive them. In Kansas, food stamp nutrition education programs are provided by county Extension agents. To find out more about food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689. To learn about nutrition education offerings, contact your local county Extension Office.

**Food security—access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members.*

Sources: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 7, 2007, March 2008; Journal of Nutrition, Environment and Behavior, 2005; Kansas SRS, Public Assistance Report, February 2008

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.

The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.

To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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