



Date: September 15, 2009

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Need for Economic Assistance Shows Unprecedented Increase

SALEM - New figures released from the Oregon Department of Human Services show that food stamp assistance to Oregon families continued to increase in August. Last month, a total of 635,033 people received food stamps, the largest total in state history.

Since Oregon's economic downturn began a little over one year ago, the number of food stamp recipients has increased by nearly 32%. Today, one in six Oregonians depends on food stamp benefits to supplement their family food budget.

DHS officials said that the demand for economic support has most often leveled off or declined during the summer months; however, Oregon's food stamp and cash assistance numbers continued to increase this summer at substantial rates. The increases over the past several months are unprecedented for Oregon, and officials expect continued growth in the program for at least the next year and possibly longer.

"The families represented by these numbers are families hardest hit by the economy, including many households with young children," said Erinn Kelley-Siel, Director of the DHS Children, Adults and Families Division. "Programs such as food stamps, Oregon Health Plan coverage, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families and the free school lunch program all help individuals and families maintain safety and stability."

Kelley-Siel also pointed out that many unemployed Oregonians are beginning to exhaust their unemployment insurance benefits, which is expected to translate into additional demand on the food stamp program.

Like food stamps, demand for cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program has also increased since last year. In August, a total of 24,531 families with children received this benefit in Oregon, an increase of 23% over last year. TANF is available only to parents with children 18 years of age and under; the program provides cash assistance to very low income families and builds personal responsibility and self reliance through job preparation and on-the-job training.

Attached: chart of Oregon recipients by region

Background: To be eligible for TANF, parents with children must earn less than the total monthly income limit. For a two-parent family with 2 children that maximum is \$795, along with an asset limit of \$2500 (not including the family home, or the first \$10,000 value of family vehicles). TANF provides temporary assistance and case management services for families struggling due to unemployment, underemployment or incapacitation of a primary wage earner. TANF and TANF-related programs also provide employment and training services, childcare while looking for work or other alternatives, assistance seeking SSI/SSDI, and help to flee or stay free from domestic violence. The maximum benefits for the family of four, with no other income, would be a total \$647 per month. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, based on household income, and are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card" that is used like a debit card.

To be eligible for food stamps, families must earn less than 185 percent of the federal poverty level, along with other factors. For a family of four, the income limit is less than \$3,400 per month. The maximum benefit for a household of four totals \$668 per month. Benefits are determined on a sliding scale, based on household income, and are distributed through the "Oregon Trail Card" that is used like a debit card to purchase food. Food stamp benefits are intended to act as a supplement to a family's overall food budget, not to cover it entirely. In many households with little or no income, it can be the primary means to meet the nutritional needs of the family. The overall average food stamp benefit per household is approximately \$250 per month. Approximately three-fourths of all food stamp households have some form of income, which results in the actual benefit level received being reduced from the maximum.

The name of the food stamp program is being changed to Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, or SNAP, but the benefits remain the same. The Oregon legislature also changed the name of the program from "Food Stamps" to "Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program". This name change officially takes effect in January 2010.

- To learn if you might be eligible for food stamps, TANF, Oregon Health Plan or other services, visit your local DHS office. You may also go online to OregonHelps and see if you may be eligible for these and other programs at <http://oregonhelps.org/>
- To download applications for TANF and food stamps, go to: www.oregon.gov/DHS/assistance/.
- DHS also partners with SafeNet to help people to find local resources such as local food pantries or other assistance. The number is 800-SAFENET (800-723-3638).

	Individuals Receiving Food Stamps August 2009	Percentage Increase Over Last Year		Families Receiving Cash Assistance (TANF) August 2009	Percentage Increase Over Last Year
District 1 (Clatsop, Columbia & Tillamook)	17,599	36%		409	10%
District 2 (Multnomah)	126,323	31%		7,051	25%
District 3 (Polk, Marion, Yamhill)	92,760	29%		4,239	29%
District 4 (Benton, Lincoln, Linn)	41,467	29%		1,346	8%
District 5 (Lane)	67,525	29%		1,943	21%
District 6 (Douglas)	23,232	25%		850	2%
District 7 (Coos, Curry)	17,834	23%		665	17%
District 8 (Jackson, Josephine)	60,494	29%		2,011	24%
District 9 (Hood River, Gilliam, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler)	8,106	22%		187	1%
District 10 (Crook, Deschutes, Jefferson)	36,254	39%		985	22%
District 11 (Klamath, Lake)	15,830	25%		374	19%
District 12 (Morrow, Umatilla)	15,791	17%		454	10%
District 13 (Baker, Union, Wallowa)	8,334	23%		236	21%
District 14 (Grant, Harney, Malheur)	9,454	21%		173	2%
District 15 (Clackamas)	37,816	42%		1,270	19%
District 16 (Washington)	56,214	43%		2,338	43%
STATE TOTAL	635,033	31.6%		24,531	23%