



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL
AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

Don Jordan, Secretary

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Food Assistance Overview

Integrated Service Delivery
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Chairman Taddiken and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the Food Assistance Program. My name is Bobbi Mariani, and I am Director of Economic and Employment Support for the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. The Food Assistance program is a federal program administered by SRS which provides a monthly benefit to eligible low-income households to assist them in purchasing food for home consumption. The program is administered at the Federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the federal level, the Food Stamp Program was changed to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In Kansas, we call this program the Food Assistance Program.

Eligibility for the Food Assistance Program is based on financial and non-financial factors. With certain exceptions, a household that meets the eligibility requirements is qualified to receive benefits. Generally households with income below 130% of federal poverty and with no more than \$2000 in countable assets can qualify for the program. Households with at least one member who is 60 or older can have up to \$3000 in assets. A household is defined as a single individual or group of individuals who live and eat together.

In Kansas, the program currently serves 260,000 persons, of which 47% are children. This is a 27% increase over the previous year. The average monthly benefit per person is \$123.71, and the average benefit per household is \$273.33. Benefits are issued electronically on the Vision card. In FY 2009, the State issued a total of \$263,141,527 compared to \$205,419,709 in FY 2008. These benefits are spent at local grocery stores, farmers' markets and other stores in Kansas to purchase food for home consumption. Only food and plants/seeds to grow food can be purchased with food assistance benefits.

There are many benefits to increasing participation in the Food Assistance Program including helping more low income families with their food and nutrition needs as well as transition to self sufficiency. In addition, the increased food buying power generated by the program generates economic activity, supports the local and state economy, and supports farming in Kansas. Every \$5 in food assistance generates \$9.20 in economic activity.

Benefits are issued electronically on the Vision card. The Kansas Vision card -- an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card -- acts similarly to a debit card in that it can be used at a POS or ATM machine to access available benefits in the account. The Vision card cannot be used to pull funds from a person's personal bank account -- only benefits from an EBT



account. USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) enrolls grocery stores for program participation and cardholders can access food assistance benefits to purchase food at authorized retailers. By using bar code technology, scanners are able to determine food vs. non-food items. Only food items can be purchased with food assistance benefits. FNS mandates food assistance benefits to be on the Vision card but states do utilize the technology for other programs as well. Current programs on the Vision card include food assistance, all cash programs and child care benefits. All of the program benefits have specific spending rules and are in separate accounts on the card.

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act made several important changes to the Food Assistance Program. This legislation, which was passed in February 2009, increased Food Assistance benefits by 13.6% effective April 1, 2009. This change resulted in an additional \$12.5 million food assistance benefits issued in SFY 2009 and a projected \$53.8 million in benefits issued in SFY 2010. The average benefit increase per household was \$46.

The Recovery Act temporarily suspended the able bodied adults without dependent provisions that only allowed such persons to get food assistance for 3 months out of every three years (if unemployed). These provisions were suspended until September 2010; however, they have now been further suspended through September 2011. Additional food assistance administrative funds were also issued for 2009 and 2010. These funds allowed SRS to provide some overtime for staff, and to hire temporary staff to keep up with rising demand and eligibility determination. Additionally the money was spent on increased EBT transaction costs due to the rising caseloads.

In 2009, SRS assisted 10 farmers' markets with the ability to accept the Vision card for fresh fruit and vegetable purchases. Funding to support the start up costs of each market was provided by USDA High Performance Bonus Money awarded for improved food assistance error rates in FFY 2008. Organizations continue to expand this capacity with federal or other grants and funding sources. Please see the attached program summary for more details.

Overall, the Food Assistance Program in Kansas is an effective and critical support for low income citizens. I will be happy to stand for questions.