



NEW MEXICO HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
P.O. Box 2348  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-2348

**Bill Richardson**  
*Governor*

**Pamela S. Hyde, J.D.**  
*Secretary*

*Contact: Betina Gonzales McCracken (505) 827-6245*

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**For Immediate Release**

## **As Food Prices Rise New Mexico's Low-Income Families Can Turn to the Food Stamp Program**

### **Thousands of Families Qualify But Are Not Participating in Program**

*Santa Fe, New Mexico* – With rising food prices, the New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) encourages eligible families to participate in the Food Stamp Program. “During difficult times, the Food Stamp Program can help eligible families make ends meet by allowing them to purchase nutritious food for family meals,” said Pamela Hyde HSD Secretary

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food prices rose four percent in 2007, compared with an average 2.5 percent annual rise over the last 15 years. In addition, the agency says 2008 is expected to see a 4.5 percent increase.

The number of families receiving food stamps in New Mexico has increased by 3,799 over the past six months, to 94,593 families. However, participation is still below the peak in August 2006, when there were 95,774 families on the program. “We know there are thousands more families that qualify for the program, but are not enrolled,” said Katie Falls, HSD Deputy Secretary. “These families are missing out on an average of \$233 per month to help with the increased costs for food at the grocery store.”

The Food Stamp Program is 100 percent federally funded. Last budget year more than \$250 million was brought into the state through the program. “The Food Stamp Program helps families purchase nutritious foods, but also helps the state’s economy by bringing in dollars that would not come into the state if families didn’t participate in the program,” said Hyde.

Food stamps are the state’s first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for New Mexico’s working families. Families with an income up to 130 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for the Food Stamp Program (see chart below). For example, a family of four with one parent working 40 hours per week at \$10.50 per hour could qualify for up to \$151 month in food stamps.

(more)

Food stamps are convenient to use because families are given an Electronic Benefits Card (EBT) that is similar to any bank debit card. Each month the family's benefits are deposited into their EBT account for their use to purchase food products that month.

It is easy to apply for food stamps at one of the Human Services Department's 35 Income Support Division (ISD) offices located throughout the state. For more information, please call 1-800-283-4465 or find out where the nearest ISD office is by visiting <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us/isd/>.

<i><b>Family Size</b></i>	<i><b>Maximum Monthly Income to Qualify for Benefits</b></i>
<b>1</b>	<b>\$1,107</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>\$1,484</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>\$1,861</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>\$2,238</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>\$2,615</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>\$2,992</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>\$3,369</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>\$3,746</b>

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