

Food Supplement Program Outreach Guide



2013 Edition

ABOUT MARYLAND HUNGER SOLUTIONS

Maryland Hunger Solutions works to end hunger and improve nutrition in the state of Maryland. Maryland Hunger Solutions focuses on using the federal nutrition supports (school meals, summer and afterschool nutrition programs, the Food Supplement Program [Food Stamps] and other nutrition programs) to reduce hunger and its adverse effects on health, learning, productivity and well-being; to improve nutrition; and to strengthen communities. Established in 2007, Maryland Hunger Solutions is a separately staffed and funded initiative of the Food Research and Action Center.

Maryland Hunger Solutions appreciates the contributions of the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) in creating this guide. We thank Capital Area Food Bank, Catholic Charities of Baltimore, and Crossroads Community Food Network for contributing information about their outreach work.

Maryland Hunger Solutions gratefully acknowledges the following funders for their support:

*AARP
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The Abell Foundation
Anonymous
Community Foundation for Prince George's
County
Community Foundation for the National Capital
Region
Consumer Health Foundation
Betty Lee and Dudley P. Digges Memorial Fund
Fund for Change
David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation*

*Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States
Zanyyl and Isabelle Krieger Fund
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
The Moriah Fund
The Morningstar Foundation
The Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Foundation
United Way of Central Maryland
United Way of the National Capital Area
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Walmart Foundation
Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation
Wholesome Wave Foundation*

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to assist community-based organizations, local agencies and service providers interested in starting or improving Food Supplement Program outreach. The **Food Supplement Program (FSP)** provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families to help them purchase food. FSP is known nationally as the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** and was formerly called the Food Stamp Program. SNAP is the largest nutrition assistance program in the country and a crucial anti-poverty resource for families in times of need.

The first section of this guide will provide an overview of FSP in Maryland and draw attention to gaps in participation. The second section explains who can do outreach and where; reviews types of outreach; and lists outreach resources. The third section provides information on joining the *Maryland State Food Supplement Program Outreach Plan*, which can provide funding to support outreach efforts.

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I. Hunger in Maryland and the Food Supplement Program

Despite living in one of the wealthiest states in the country, many Marylanders struggle with hunger. Overall, one in six Maryland households experienced food hardship in 2012.¹ Food hardship is a measure of the number of households answering “yes” to the question “have there been times in the past 12 months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you and your family needed?”



One in five households with children struggle to afford food.

Hunger and food hardship have long-term implications, some of which last a lifetime. These impacts include: obesity, poor academic achievement, long-term economic costs, dental problems, low birth weight, and mental health issues.²

The Food Supplement Program (FSP) is the first line of defense against hunger for struggling Marylanders. More than 760,000 low-income households in Maryland receive benefits to purchase food through the program. FSP benefits are distributed monthly onto an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card. Benefits can be used to purchase eligible food items, including bread, meat, produce, and dairy products.

FSP is administered at the federal level by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the state level, the Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) manages the program. Local Departments of Social Services (DSS) offices process applications.



The average monthly FSP benefit for one person is \$130.

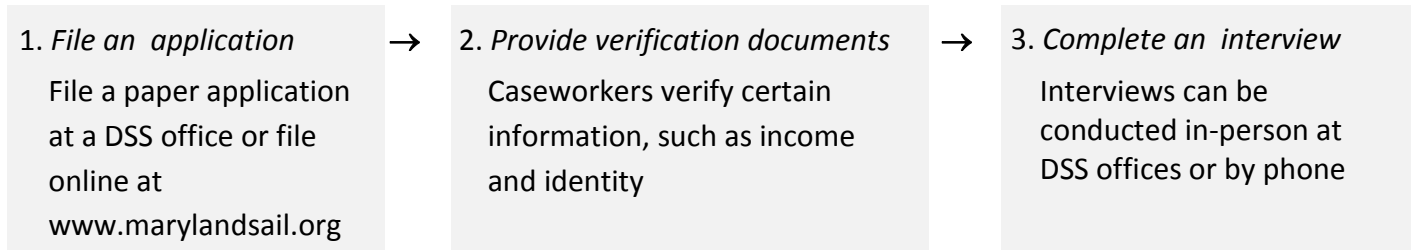
FSP helps people get the food and nutrition they need, but has wider impacts for individuals, households, and state and local economies.

- ✓ FSP benefits can lift people above the poverty level.³
- ✓ FSP supports working families. Nationwide, 41 percent of all participants lived in households with earnings in 2011.⁴
- ✓ FSP allows states to leverage federal dollars. The federal government pays 100 percent of program benefits, sharing administrative costs with states, and also provides funding to states for program outreach.
- ✓ FSP boosts local economies. The federal government estimates that every \$5 in new benefits generates nearly double that amount in community spending.⁵

FSP Participation and Gaps

U.S. citizens as well as many legal immigrants may receive FSP. This includes the children of undocumented immigrants and people who are homeless.⁶ FSP eligibility is based on the income of a household, defined as a group of people who purchase and cook meals together. As of October 2012, the income limit (200 percent of the federal poverty level) was set at \$3,842 per month for a family of four.⁷ See *Appendix I* for income guidelines.

Applications for FSP are processed within 30 days by caseworkers at local Departments of Social Services (DSS) offices. There is a three-step application process:

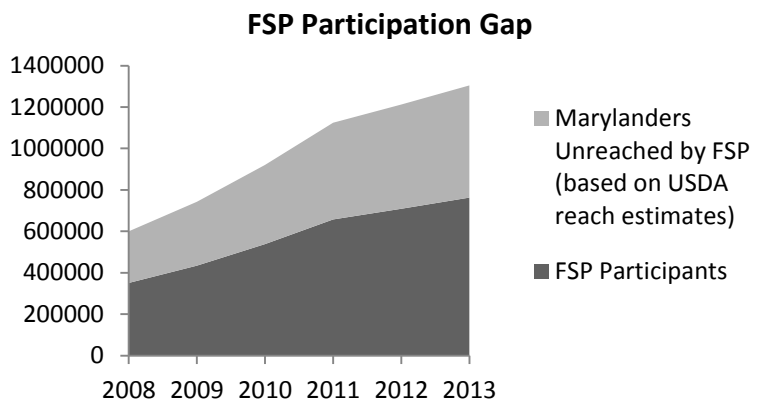


Maryland Services Access and Information Link (SAIL) (www.marylandsail.org) is the Department of Human Resources online application system. It is used for FSP and a number of other benefits.

For more information on FSP eligibility and applying for benefits, see Maryland Hunger Solutions' Guide to Getting Food Stamps, www.mdhungersolutions.org/pubs.shtm.

Similar to a trend seen nationwide in recent years, the number of households enrolled in FSP in Maryland has increased significantly. Over the five-year period from February 2008 to February 2013, the number of participants in Maryland grew by 117 percent. High rates of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty are contributing to greater need.

Even with this growth, many people who qualify for FSP benefits are not getting them. According to the most recent data, **only an estimated 71 percent of eligible Marylanders were participating in FSP**; the national participation rate was 75 percent.⁸



Maryland Department of Human Resources Statistical Reports, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2010*, USDA FNS, December 2012.

The populations most underserved and hardest-to-reach by FSP tend to be the following: seniors, immigrants, the working poor, the newly unemployed and rural populations.^{9, 10}

Common barriers and misconceptions among hard-to reach populations include the following:

- Some people think that applying for FSP may take benefits away from someone who “needs them more.” However, FSP is an entitlement program, meaning everyone who applies and is eligible can receive benefits.
- Immigrants may misunderstand eligibility requirements related to citizenship. In fact, many legal immigrants are eligible. Undocumented immigrants may not know that they can apply on behalf of children who are United States citizens. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service does not consider FSP benefits when determining “public charge.”
- Many people do not apply for FSP benefits because they do not think that it will be “worth it”. Even if an individual receives the minimum amount of benefits, that amount can still help in purchasing milk, eggs, and bread for the month.
- The social stigma attached to Food Stamps can be a barrier to applying. But FSP is not a handout. Like Social Security, FSP is paid by taxpayer money and people deserve to utilize the program during times of need.

Crossroads Community Food Network

A food justice organization based in Takoma Park, Crossroads launched its FSP Outreach Program in 2010 and is part of the Maryland State FSP Outreach Plan.

Rosa Sanchez, a native Spanish speaker and trained Community Connector through Montgomery County Health and Human Services, leads the FSP outreach team in providing information, pre-screenings, application assistance, and follow-up support. A former FSP participant and long-time resident of the area, Sanchez offers a safe, inviting space at the weekly Crossroads Farmers’ Market for individuals to receive application assistance.

To date, Sanchez has spoken with more than 7,000 low-income individuals about FSP benefits, conducted 3,000 eligibility pre-screenings, and completed more than 1,000 applications—each of which she hand-delivers to the local DSS office. The farmers’ market has seen an increase in the number of SNAP participants using their benefits to purchase fresh, healthy, local foods.



“Many people don’t apply [for FSP] because they’re scared. But having someone from the community, working on the ground, who they know they can talk to, helps people understand how these benefits can help them. I’ve been in their shoes.” —Rosa, Crossroads Market

II. Making a Difference: FSP Outreach

As stated earlier, only about 71 percent of eligible Marylanders participate in the Food Supplement Program. Effective FSP outreach closes participation gaps. Organizations and community groups engaged in FSP outreach provide greater access to a critical resource that can help individuals and families get the food and nutrition they need without having to sacrifice other basic necessities.

FSP outreach provides information and assistance to people who may be eligible but are not currently participating in the program. Outreach workers can also let those already participating know about recertification, a process in which a client provides documentation of his or her situation to continue receiving benefits. Outreach includes eligibility prescreening, public education, application assistance, and follow-up activities. The goals of FSP outreach are to increase awareness about the program and ultimately to increase participation among eligible individuals and families.

Who can do outreach?

- food banks and pantries
- anti-hunger organizations
- Community Action Agencies
- faith-based organizations
- public health programs
- human service agencies serving low-income people
- and other groups

Where can outreach be done?

- grocery stores
- places of worship
- farmers' markets
- free tax assistance sites
- county and community health clinics
- Head Start centers
- community events
- libraries
- summer food sites
- schools
- food pantries
- low-income housing
- senior centers
- media
- and other locations

Types of Outreach

There are four types of outreach: education, prescreening, application assistance, and follow-up.¹¹

From developing and customizing outreach materials to walking an individual through the application, there are many ways to conduct outreach based on these four core components. FSP outreach partners can choose which activities are best suited for them. The table on page 7 has examples of outreach activities.

Organizations engaged in FSP outreach and using the SAIL online application system should register as a Community Partner. This is done by going to www.marylandsail.org and clicking "Become a Community Partner." Once registered, the organization will receive a SAIL login and ID number. This is used for each SAIL application and helps DHR track those applications completed with the assistance of Community Partners. (Note: You do not have to be a formal Community Partner in Maryland's FSP Outreach Plan in order to be a SAIL Community Partner.)

Type of Outreach

Possible Activities

Education

Informing people about FSP, eligibility, benefits, and the application process

- Hand out or post information on FSP.
- Present at community events and to community groups where there are likely to be eligible groups of people.
- Develop and customize outreach materials, e.g. translating an FSP brochure into another language, or create customized brochures, flyers, etc. for seniors, immigrants, and other target populations.
- Place advertisements for FSP on the local radio station, in print, and online. Produce and distribute public service announcements.

Prescreening

Estimating an applicant's eligibility and benefits level, so they can make an informed decision about applying

- Using a prescreening tool (i.e., Maryland Hunger Solutions Prescreening Sheet or the Prescreening Tool on Maryland SAIL), ask people questions about their household size and income to see if they may be eligible.
- Ask additional basic questions about expenses (rent/ mortgage, medical and childcare expenses, etc.), and citizenship/ immigration status to estimate eligibility.
- Once clients are determined to be potentially eligible, they may be offered options for submitting an application. Outreach workers should encourage clients to complete an application even if they are not sure they are eligible.

Application Assistance

Answer questions from applicants about applying for FSP, help complete the application, and/or assist with gathering supporting documentation

- Assist with the Maryland SAIL application: Walk applicants through the online application.
- Assist with the paper FSP application: Help clients obtain and complete a paper application.
- Assist with gathering verification documents: Inform applicants of required verification documents they may need and make copies of documents.
- Assist in delivering paper applications to local DSS offices.
- Help schedule interviews.

Follow-Up

Follow-up with applications and work with applicants and local DSS offices to troubleshoot

- Make phone calls to applicants to see if they were approved.
- Follow up with the local DSS office about any problems applicants may be having.
- Make reminder calls to enrolled participants regarding recertification.

NOTE: For Community Partners in Maryland's State FSP Outreach Plan, some activities are not allowed or cannot be reimbursed with federal funds. See *Appendix II* for information on prohibited activities.

Outreach workers and volunteers are not caseworkers, but they should have a good understanding of FSP. In particular, knowledge of potential deductions that can raise benefit levels and being aware of

special cases of eligibility (i.e., citizen children of undocumented immigrants are eligible) is important for effective outreach.

All outreach partners, but especially those engaged in application assistance and follow-up, should work to establish a strong connection with the DSS offices in their local service area. Having a direct contact at the office can be an important resource when assisting applicants and checking on applications. To find the DSS office nearest to you, see the *Guide to Getting Food Stamps in Maryland* or go to <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/county.php>.

FSP Outreach Resources

Materials

Maryland-specific FSP outreach materials, brochures, and fact sheets created by Maryland Hunger Solutions can be downloaded for free at www.mdhungersolutions.org/pubs.shtm.

- *Guide to Getting Food Stamps in Maryland*
- Food Supplement Program Guide (available in Spanish)
- Food Stamps Pre-screening Worksheet (available in English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and Vietnamese)
- Federal Nutrition Program Flyer (available in English and Spanish)
- 6 Steps to apply for Food Stamps (available in English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and Vietnamese)
- And more

Order or download USDA SNAP outreach materials for free at <http://snap.ntis.gov/>

SAIL Training

Maryland Hunger Solutions staff can conduct a 90-minute SAIL Training that provides information on FSP, program eligibility, using the SAIL online application for FSP, and tips for outreach and outreach materials. Contact info@mdhungersolutions.org for more information. DHR also provides SAIL training. Contact Stephanie Bartee at Stephanie.bartee@maryland.gov or (410) 767-8121.

Applications

Maryland SAIL online application (also includes a prescreening tool): www.marylandsail.org

Paper applications are available at local DSS offices or can be downloaded from the SAIL website.

III. Funding Outreach: Joining Maryland's State FSP Outreach Plan

By partnering with the Department of Human Resources (DHR), community-based organizations can receive federal reimbursement to cover up to 50 percent of their costs for FSP application assistance and outreach activities. Organizations can do this by applying to join Maryland's *Food Supplement Program State Outreach Plan*. This is simply called the "State Plan" for short.

Which groups in Maryland are already part of the State Plan?

- Maryland Hunger Solutions
- Humanim Inc.
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington
- Crossroads Community Food Network
- Capital Area Food Bank
- Maryland Food Bank
- Lifestyles, Inc.
- And, more...

Capital Area Food Bank

The Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) conducts FSP outreach in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, including Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, Maryland. Two staff members devote their time to outreach in Maryland. As part of the Maryland State Outreach Plan, CAFB is directly connected to FSP officials and is reimbursed for 50 percent of their outreach costs in Maryland. In 2012, CAFB distributed over 310,000 FSP materials to Maryland residents through community locations such as non-profits, schools, libraries, local government centers and health clinics.

CAFB relies heavily on its network of partner organizations to reach potentially eligible residents. Some outreach takes place at food distribution sites, which provide opportunities to talk with a large number of families who are likely eligible for FSP.

Outreach workers provide information about FSP, offer applications and encourage anyone who wants additional assistance to call or meet with them at another time, in a quieter setting.

More intensive outreach is done by giving presentations about FSP at locations like apartment buildings and then meeting one-on-one with individuals to complete the application and help gather necessary documents. When possible, outreach workers take these applications directly to the local social services office and request a telephone interview for the applicant.

In addition to direct outreach, CAFB also trains organizations and volunteers to do FSP outreach.

Our hope is that the more varied our approach, the more opportunities we give struggling families to participate in a program that provides access to much-needed food.

—Amanda, CAFB

What FSP outreach activities can be reimbursed through the State Plan?

Funding received through the State Plan could be used for printing targeted outreach materials explaining how to apply for FSP and/or to help cover a portion of an outreach workers' salary and staff time, among other things. See page 7 of this guide for a list of outreach activities, all of which are eligible for reimbursement under the State Plan. *Appendix II* has a list of activities *not* eligible for reimbursement.

Do you have to join the State Plan to do FSP outreach?

You do *not* have to join the State Plan in order to conduct outreach. However, joining the State Plan can help fund your organization's outreach and is an opportunity to develop a strong partnership with the state and other organizations doing FSP outreach.

Who pays for the rest of the outreach costs?

Community Partners are responsible for raising funds for the other half of their outreach. Local community foundations are a good place to start in your search for matching funds.

How does my organization develop an outreach plan?

To start an outreach plan, you can begin by gathering basic information about the need for FSP outreach, connecting with any existing outreach efforts, and developing a plan for increasing participation. You may want to focus on a target audience- i.e., seniors, Latinos, or the working poor. When you apply to join the State Plan, you will also need to provide details on staffing and the services you will provide.

Who reviews the application and what is the timeline?

Applications to join the State Plan should be submitted to DHR by **June 30**. (Previous Community Partners wishing to continue to be part of the State Plan must resubmit an application each year, also by June 30.) DHR then submits its outreach plan to the USDA. USDA will review the plan and notify DHR of approval around October 1.

Who should we contact for additional information? Who should we send our application to?

If your organization is interested in becoming a Community Partner or would like to submit a Community Partner application to join Maryland's State Plan contact Stephanie Bartee at Stephanie.bartee@maryland.gov or (410) 767-8121.

Where can we find the application forms?

The basic components for an application to the State Plan are the following: cover page, organization information, summary of outreach activities to be performed, staffing details, budget details and budget narrative. USDA's Food and Nutrition Service provides templates for state agencies submitting plans. Organizations use the USDA FNS templates as guidance. (Currently, Maryland DHR does not have its own application for organizations applying to become a Community Partner.) While your application does not need to match the template exactly, you should include all information requested in the

template. In particular, you should use the budget templates provided. All materials should be submitted in Word or Excel format, not PDF.

Project templates and spreadsheets for proposals can be found on the USDA FNS State Outreach Plan Guidance web page:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/stateplan.htm>.

Maryland Hunger Solutions has created a sample application template for community organizations, as well as a sample outreach plan. See page 12 for these and other resources.

Are there any specific state guidelines or tips?

Proposals must be submitted in either Microsoft Word or Excel formats, with the telephone numbers and addresses of 2 contacts lists on the application. Additionally, be sure that your organization is registered with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation (DAT) before submitting your application. Finally, have an accountant or fiscal professional should review the budget, as budget accuracy allows for applications to be approved in the most expeditious manner.

What can we expect after we submit an application?

DHR will contact you about your application and any questions they may have about your application prior to submitting the full plan to USDA. If your submission is approved by DHR, it will be included in the State Plan submitted to USDA for review and approval. If your application is approved, you will need to keep track of your organization's outreach activities, including submitting quarterly invoices, updates to your application, and supporting documents to DHR.

You should also expect to carefully review USDA and DHR policies on reimbursable expenses. For example, outreach materials that are distributed or produced as part of the State Plan must include a non-discrimination statement and give funding credit to USDA.

Additional State FSP Outreach Plan Resources:

The Food Supplement Program State Outreach Plan Conference Call

Hosted by Maryland Hunger Solutions and the Department of Human Resources (4/17/ 2013)
This conference call includes information on joining Maryland's State Plan, current partners and examples, sample staffing and budget information as well as important contact and application submission information. Archives will be accessible for one month.

www.mdhungersolutions.org/fedfoodprogs/food_supplement.shtm

Maryland State FSP Outreach Plan: Sample Application Template for Community Partners and Sample Community Partner Application

These resources can help guide organizations with their application to join the State Plan.

www.mdhungersolutions.org/fedfoodprogs/food_supplement.shtm

SNAP/ Food Stamps Outreach and Access Toolkit, Food Research and Action Center

Information on funding resources for SNAP/Food Stamps outreach, on the core elements of outreach, and on innovative and successful strategies groups use to reach eligible people. Also includes an introduction to various relevant data resources.

<http://frac.org/snapfood-stamps-outreach-and-access-toolkit/>

State SNAP Outreach Plan Guidance, USDA FNS (2009)

Written for state agencies but gives important information on the policies and regulations of State Outreach Plans. In particular, under *Guidance*, see *Section B, Policy* (p.10).

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/stateplan.htm>

SNAP Community Partner Outreach Toolkit, USDA FNS (2011)

Intended to help community organizations conduct or improve existing SNAP outreach to those who are eligible but not participating in the program.

http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2011/Community/tool-kits_community.htm

Appendix I: FSP Income Guidelines and Maximum Benefit

October 1, 2012- September 30, 2013

Household Size	200% FPL* (Monthly)	Maximum Benefit (Minimum is \$16)
1	\$1,862	\$200
2	2,522	367
3	3,182	526
4	3,842	668
5	4,502	793
6	5,162	952
7	5,822	1,052
8	6,481	1,202

* Federal Poverty Level

NOTE: A small number of households, primarily those in which someone has violated FSP rules in the past, will have a lower gross income limit (130 percent of the FPL). These households may also be required to meet an asset test.

Source: Family Investment Programs - Income Guidelines, Maryland Department of Human Resources. <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/iag.pdf>

Appendix II: Activities Prohibited or Not Reimbursable

<p>What outreach activities are prohibited from outreach plans?</p>	<p>The following activities are prohibited regardless of the source of funding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interfering during the certification interview or at other times to campaign on behalf of specific applicants or recipients, however, outreach workers may be present to provide support or help explain complicated terms; and • Recruitment of individuals to participate in SNAP. Recruitment is defined as an activity intended to persuade an individual who has made an informed choice not to apply for SNAP benefits to change his or her decision.
<p>What outreach activities are allowable provided they are not supported by federal funds?</p>	<p>These activities are not reimbursable with federal funds under SNAP, although they may be funded through other mechanisms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as an authorized representative for the applicant, receiving SNAP benefits at issuance, or food purchasing; and • Transportation of clients to or from the local SNAP office or provisions of tokens, vouchers or similar items for transportation of clients to or from the local SNAP office. For example, a transit agency could donate bus vouchers for use by potential SNAP clients to travel back and forth to the local SNAP office at no expense to the state agency.

Source: USDA FNS SNAP State Outreach Plan Guidance, Section B (1), page 10. 2009.
http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/Outreach_Plan_Guidance.pdf
 See page 7 of this Guide for allowable activities.

References

¹ *Food Hardship in America 2012: Data for the Nation, States, 100 MSAs, and Every Congressional District, February 2013.*

http://frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_2012.pdf

² *Ibid.*

³ When benefits are included as income, there is a 10.5 percent increase in the number of Maryland households receiving FSP who are at or above 101 percent of the federal poverty level. *Effect of SNAP Benefits on the Poverty Status of SNAP Households*, Analysis of 2010 USDA FNS SNAP data by the Food Research and Action Center, September 2011.

http://frac.org/pdf/state_poverty_status_snap_effect_101_percent_state_rankings.pdf

⁴ *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Households: Fiscal Year 2011*, United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, November 2012.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/2011CharacteristicsSummary.pdf>

⁵ “Every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9.00 in total community spending.” Hanson, Kenneth (2010). *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP*. USDA Economic Research Service. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR103/ERR103.pdf>.

⁶ Some other groups may be eligible, such as refugees, asylees, and victims of human trafficking.

⁷ Family Investment Programs - Income Guidelines, Maryland Department of Human Resources.

<http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/iag.pdf>

⁸ *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2010*, USDA FNS, December 2012. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/snap/FILES/Participation/Reaching2010.pdf>

⁹ *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Community Partner Outreach Toolkit*, U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, May 2011. The USDA identifies the following target populations for SNAP Outreach: general low-income population, working poor, elderly, and legal immigrants.

www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/pdfs/toolkit/2011/Community/toolkit_complete.pdf

¹⁰ The Food Research and Action Center points out that poverty is more prevalent in rural (non-metropolitan) communities. See FRAC’s paper, *Federal Nutrition Programs: Vital for the (Economic) Health of Rural America*.

http://frac.org/pdf/fednutr_progs_vital_in_rural_america.pdf

¹¹ See also SNAP/ Food Stamps Outreach and Access Toolkit, Food Research and Action Center.

<http://frac.org/snapfood-stamps-outreach-and-access-toolkit/>

Photo credits

Page 5: Crossroads Community Food Network