



*Creating a hunger-free community*

# **Worcester County Forum on Hunger: *A Call to Action***

***Overview of SNAP in***

***Worcester County and Massachusetts***

**Julia E. Kehoe**

**Commissioner**

**Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance**



# Worcester County Forum on Hunger



## Overview of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Worcester County

Commissioner Julia Kehoe  
**June 14, 2011**

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# MA Department of Transitional Assistance

## Quick Facts

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- The Department's mission is to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.
- Our goals are
  - Ensuring access to basic benefits
  - Increasing employment of TAFDC (TANF) clients.
- We serve one out of every eight people in Massachusetts, including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.





# Our programs

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## Food

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps)** provides food and nutritional benefits and is federally-funded.
  - As of March 2011, there are 445,998 households (810,776 individuals) enrolled in SNAP in Massachusetts.

## Cash

- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC)** provides cash assistance to very low-income families.
  - As of April 2011, there are 51,408 households enrolled in TAFDC.
- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC)** provides limited cash assistance to elderly and disabled persons, as well as children, who are not covered by our other programs.
  - As of April 2011, there are 22,102 households enrolled in EAEDC.
- **State Supplement to SSI** provides cash assistance in addition to federal Social Security benefits for elders and people with disabilities.
  - As of April 2011, there are 189,442 households receiving this supplement.

## Job Assistance

- **Employment Services Program (ESP)** provides job search, job training, and related support services to TAFDC clients. This program may be eliminated in the FY2012 budget.





# SNAP



- SNAP provides a monthly benefit to help low-income households buy healthy food.
- The number of households enrolled in SNAP has increased by more than 324% since the beginning of FY02 while total Department staffing levels decreased by more than 34% in that same time period.
  - Within the last year alone, the SNAP caseload has increased by nearly 64,000 individuals (nearly 40,000 households), or 10%, and is projected to continue to grow.
- DTA issues more than \$107 million in SNAP benefits monthly.
  - This represents more than \$2 billion per year in local production, sales, and jobs for the Commonwealth, since each dollar in SNAP assistance generates nearly \$2 in economic activity for the state.
  - The average monthly SNAP benefit per household is \$241.





# SNAP in Worcester County

Zip code	Feb 2008 Households	Feb 2008 Individuals	Feb 2009 Households	Feb 2009 Individuals	Feb 2010 Households	Feb 2010 Individuals	Feb 2011 Households	Feb 2011 Individuals
01601	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25
01602	758	1,351	1,008	1,810	1,326	2,396	1,438	2,599
01603	1,895	3,695	2,340	4,447	2,840	5,273	2,895	5,363
01604	2,251	4,589	2,941	5,798	3,627	7,099	3,908	7,505
01605	2,956	6,320	3,566	7,530	4,104	8,556	4,306	8,974
01606	650	1,217	855	1,618	1,070	1,968	1,211	2,218
01607	741	1,512	905	1,789	1,108	2,143	1,227	2,354
01608	759	1,534	979	1,860	1,123	2,060	1,202	2,134
01609	1,743	2,908	2,101	3,479	2,514	4,170	2,576	4,246
01610	3,033	5,883	3,764	7,040	4,426	8,167	4,472	8,360
01612	30	74	46	83	65	139	72	143
01613	n/a	Less than 25	32	37	32	36	32	44
01653	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25	n/a	Less than 25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,816</b>	<b>29,083</b>	<b>18,537</b>	<b>35,491</b>	<b>22,235</b>	<b>42,007</b>	<b>23,339</b>	<b>43,940</b>

- Between 2008 and 2011, the SNAP caseload in Worcester County increased by nearly 15,000 individuals (more than 8,500 households), or about 5%.





# Worcester County DTA Offices

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- Fitchburg: 473 Main Street
  - More than 12,000 SNAP and cash cases
- Framingham: 110 Mt. Wayte Avenue
  - Nearly 12,000 SNAP and cash cases
- Southbridge: 1 North Street
  - More than 7,600 SNAP and cash cases
- Worcester: 9 Walnut Street
  - More than 25,000 SNAP and cash cases.





# Why is the SNAP caseload increasing?

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- Challenging economy
  - Friends and neighbors struggling to pay bills
  - People on low- or fixed-incomes having trouble meeting basic needs
  - Requests for assistance from individuals and families who have not accessed government services before.
- DTA efforts to:
  - Remove access barriers
  - Streamline processes
  - Improve customer service





# DTA efforts to improve SNAP

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- Recognized by USDA for ranking in the top ten states in the nation for SNAP participation.
- Collaboration with MA Department of Agricultural Resources and other organizations to increase access to SNAP at Farmers' Markets.
- Shortened application for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Standard medical deduction of \$90 for seniors and people with disabilities who have more than \$35 per month in medical expenses. This can result in a higher monthly benefit.
- Fewer required verifications and extended certification periods.
- SNAP Outreach Centers and Satellite Offices within health centers, senior centers and community non-profits across the state.
- Web-based application (at [www.mass.gov/vg/selfservice](http://www.mass.gov/vg/selfservice)) that allows people to apply from any location with Internet access. Once approved, clients can track their benefit information online through My Account Page or by phone through the DTA Automated Hotline (1-877-382-2363).





# Who is eligible for SNAP?

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- Low-income families, individuals, children, elders, and people with disabilities participate in SNAP.
- Eligibility for SNAP is based on the number of people in a household and the household's monthly income and expenses.
- The monthly income of families with children must fall below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.
  - For a family of three with children, the monthly income limit is \$3,089 (or about \$37,000 per year).
  - The maximum monthly SNAP benefit for this family is \$526. Income limits are lower for households without children.
  - The Federal Poverty Level for a family of three is \$18,530 per year.
- You do not have to be “on welfare” (receiving state cash benefits) to receive SNAP.





# How to apply

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- Visit [www.mass.gov/dta](http://www.mass.gov/dta) for program-specific eligibility criteria.
- To apply for SNAP benefits or to view your case information online, go to [www.mass.gov/vg/selfservice](http://www.mass.gov/vg/selfservice).
- Call one of our toll-free hotlines:
  - 1-877-382-2363 for automated information available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
  - 1-800-445-6604 to speak with a live agent about case information, to request an application, or to find out if you may be eligible for assistance.
- Visit your local DTA office. DTA has 22 offices across the state with case managers familiar with all of our programs.





# What can you buy with SNAP benefits?

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- Households **CAN** use SNAP benefits to buy:
  - Foods for the household to eat, such as:
    - breads and cereals
    - fruits and vegetables
    - meats, fish and poultry
    - dairy products
  - Prepared cold sandwiches and salad bar items to be consumed outside of the store
  - Seeds and plants which produce food for the household to eat
- Households **CANNOT** use SNAP benefits to buy:
  - Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes or tobacco
  - Any nonfood items, such as:
    - pet foods
    - soaps
    - paper products
    - household supplies
  - Vitamins and medicines
  - Prepared hot foods or prepared cold foods to be consumed in the store





# The need for creativity and collaboration

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- Working closely with state agencies and community partners, we can improve SNAP access, reduce food insecurity, and assist clients with becoming self-sufficient.
- With shrinking funding, we must do more with less and develop creative solutions.
- Working together, we can connect people to available resources.
  - DTA Works Internship Program
  - Volunteer to Succeed: Community Service Program
  - Collaborating with MDAR
  - Farmers' Market Ambassadors Program
  - Healthy Incentives Pilot
  - DTA Advisory Boards





# DTA Works Internship Program



- Recruits DTA clients receiving TAFDC to work as interns in local offices where they receive training, support, and help with barriers (e.g. finding child care).
  - Began in 2008 with six interns (five obtained employment with DTA, one at State Street).
  - Expanded in 2009 with 25 interns, most transitioned to full-time jobs at DTA.
  - Expanded again in 2010 with more than 50 interns (four transitioned to full-time jobs at DTA).
  - If ESP is eliminated in FY12, DTA will offer DTA Works as a Volunteer to Succeed community service option.
- First-hand experience in government and civic engagement.
- Informs DTA of the challenges our clients face.
- Provides on-the-job clerical training in an office environment.





# Volunteer to Succeed



- Volunteer to Succeed is the new name for DTA's community service initiative.
- Due to shrinking resources in our Employment Services Program, we are expanding Volunteer to Succeed.
  - Partners volunteers seeking work experience with non-profit and government organizations.
  - Allows TAFDC clients to perform work for the community while improving their employability.
  - Establishes a pool of candidates for future employment opportunities.
  - Provides free assistance with projects or tasks.





# Collaborating with MDAR



- DTA and the MA Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) have been in partnership since 2009.
- Together (with financial assistance from the Wholesome Wave Foundation and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Foundation), we made fresh, locally grown produce available to thousands of SNAP clients.
- Expanding access to SNAP at farmers' markets was a recommendation of a statewide hunger summit in 2008.
- MDAR and the farmers' markets have done a wonderful job with promoting the markets to SNAP clients.
- This year, we are taking the initiative even further, using our DTA Works Internship Program and Volunteer to Succeed (community service program) as models.





# Farmers' Market Ambassadors



- This year, DTA and MDAR are launching the Farmers' Market Ambassadors Program.
  - A Volunteer to Succeed program at farmers' markets where DTA clients gain valuable employment experience.
  - Training and mentorship is similar to DTA Works.
  - Participation counts toward meeting TAFDC work requirements.
- Ambassadors will
  - Promote the use of SNAP at farmers' markets.
  - Process SNAP transactions with EBT machines.
  - Help with market set-up and break-down.
- Piloting the program at Boston farmers' markets
- MDAR secured free public transportation for Ambassadors
- 40 clients are interested in participating.



# Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP)



- In August 2010, Massachusetts was the only state chosen for USDA's Healthy Incentives Pilot.
  - \$6.3 million to test the effects of providing a financial incentive to encourage participating SNAP households to buy fruits and vegetables.
  - Encourage low-income households to improve health through the consumption of healthy foods.
- Hampden County is the HIP pilot site
  - Urban, suburban, and rural communities
  - Network of nonprofits, retailers, and three DTA offices.
- Random sample of 7,500 SNAP households will be chosen to participate
  - Will receive 30 cents in additional SNAP benefits for every dollar spent on allowable foods
- **Some HIP funds will be used to further expand SNAP access at Hampden County farmers' markets**
- Operations phase of HIP begins in Fall 2011.





# DTA Advisory Boards

- Assist DTA with meeting its mission and achieving its goals by providing feedback and developing recommendations to improve policy and programming, expand access to services, and evaluate local office performance.
- Community partners collaborate to help DTA better serve its clients.
- DTA has launched 16 boards so far:

Boston	Framingham	Milford	Revere
Brockton	Greenfield	New Bedford	Springfield
Cape & Islands	Holyoke	North Shore	Taunton
Fall River	Lowell	Pittsfield/North Adams	Worcester

- Currently recruiting members for Fitchburg, Lawrence, Malden, Plymouth and Southbridge.





# Conclusion

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- The SNAP caseload in Worcester and across the state is projected to continue to grow.
- We are exploring options for additional waivers to streamline access to SNAP and reduce workload for staff.
- Need to develop more creative solutions to help people feed their families and to gain valuable employment and training experience.
- DTA Works; Volunteer to Succeed; SNAP at farmers' markets; Farmers' Market Ambassadors; the Healthy Incentives Pilot, and DTA Advisory Boards accomplish these goals.
  - DTA Works Internship Program
  - Volunteer to Succeed: Community Service Program
  - Collaborating with MDAR
  - Farmers' Market Ambassadors Program
  - Healthy Incentives Pilot
  - DTA Advisory Boards

