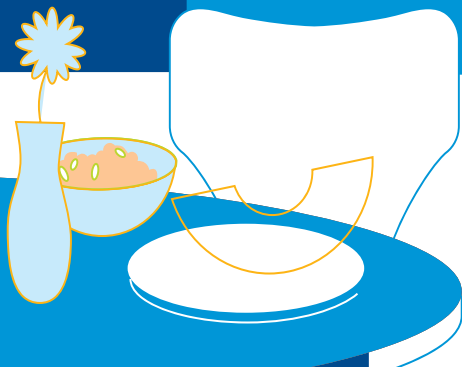


At The Table

Nutrition assistance news and information for partners and community organizations



After hurricane, Houston Food Bank closes out 2008 with powerful merger

For the Houston Food Bank, 2008 proved to be a challenging year for the 27-year-old organization.

The Houston Food Bank has the responsibility of feeding half a million people every year in the largest metropolitan area in the Southwest Region, plus nearby communities in 18 counties. But resources were put to the test when Hurricane Ike, a category 2 storm, made landfall near Houston in the community of Baytown.

Hurricane Ike, the third most destructive hurricane to hit the United States, made landfall on Sept. 13, killing 82 people and causing \$27 billion in damages.

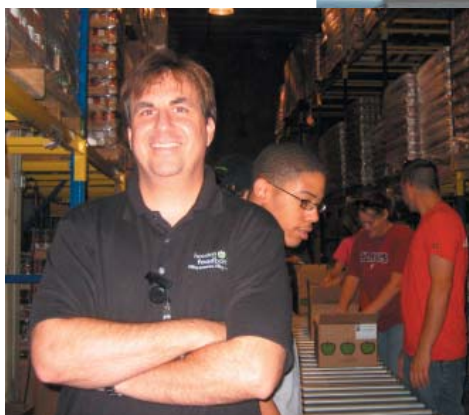
The Houston Food Bank sustained major damage during Ike. Windows were blown out. Roof damage allowed water to soak archived materials in a storage area and caused the collapse of the ceiling in its distribution services offices. Two bay doors on its distribution dock were destroyed.

The Distribution Services and Agency Services departments had to operate in makeshift quarters while the food bank was operating at more than four times its usual capacity to get disaster relief into the community. For two weeks after Ike the Houston Food Bank operated on a generator.

"The Houston Food Bank (HFB) has been fortunate to receive support from various charitable organizations all over the nation and in our own backyard," said Adele Jordan, HFB staff member. "Despite having no power, devastating destruction to personal property, and financial hardships, countless Houston businesses and citizens stepped up to provide financial and



Above: The Houston Food Bank employs 86 full-time workers and two part-time workers. It has nearly 140,000 sq. ft. at two locations to store food.



Left: Houston Food Bank Executive Director and CEO Brian Greene oversaw hundreds of volunteers during the aftermath of Hurricane Ike.

volunteer support to assist fellow Houstonians."

The HFB worked with community organizations and faith-based organizations to deliver 500,000 pounds of direct relief per day over a three-week period following Hurricane Ike.

"When crisis comes people either step up or step back; I am so proud of the way the volunteers and staff of the Food Bank stepped up," said HFB President and CEO Brian Greene. "The USDA responded very promptly following the storm; delivering three truckloads of much needed product. With the USDA product the Food Bank was able to swiftly distribute 3,000 family boxes to people in great need."

Within a month, the food bank's speedy recovery allowed it to prepare for its next challenge.

On Oct. 24, the Houston Food Bank officially merged with the End Hunger Network. The merger will help the Houston Food Bank reach its goal of distributing 120 million pounds of donated food in 10 years, plus extend the reach of the End Hunger Network's nutritional programs. ♦

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Nancy M. Johner
Under Secretary
Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services



A Message from the Under Secretary

Partners critical to success in nutritional assistance

By Nancy M. Johner, FNCS Under Secretary

Our nation has provided nutrition assistance to low income individuals for many years. Now more than ever, strong partnerships are critical to the success of programs that work at the grass roots level to reach members of vulnerable populations.

Federal, State and local government, food banks, local faith and community-based organizations, and others on the front lines should work together to ensure everyone who is eligible for nutrition assistance can access it with dignity and respect.

A very positive example of results gained by strong partnerships is the response of Federal, State and local officials working with community organizations and individual citizens to provide crucial support to those affected by the Midwest floods, as well as Hurricane Gustav and Ike.

Our commitment to ensure all Americans have access to good nutrition is not reserved for natural disasters, nor is the generosity of the American people seen only during the holiday season.

The work of FNS and the food community

is one of constant dedication, involving volunteers from a variety of organizations and backgrounds to answer a critical call to action when necessary.

Since 2001, funding for nutrition assistance has increased to \$60.1 billion—representing a 76 percent increase.

During this time frame, almost 10.5 million more low-income children and individuals received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (previously known as the Food Stamp Program) benefits.

At the same time, the percentage of eligible individuals participating in the program rose from 54 percent in 2001 to its current rate of 67 percent.

Our partners at food pantries and soup kitchens work tirelessly to help low-income families begin the enrollment process and distribute needed food packages or warm meals.

Compassionate efforts such as these put healthy food within reach for over 29 million individuals each month in SNAP and em-

power them to achieve self-sufficiency.

Child nutrition programs have experienced increases in participation and access as well. Today, 31 million children participate in school breakfast.

Since 2001, more than 2.4 million more low-income children ate a free or reduced-price school lunch and 1.75 million more ate a free or reduced-price school breakfast.

School meals are nutritionally balanced based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and ensure that children have access to the healthful foods they need to support academic achievement.

Federal programs like SNAP and the child nutrition programs are the foundation of USDA's efforts to fight hunger and improve nutrition. Individual and corporate donations to food banks and other emergency feeding sites are just as important.

Citizen volunteers who give their time, money, and knowledge to improve the lives of their neighbors and communities are the cornerstone of our critical partnerships.

During this holiday season and beyond, our nutrition assistance network is collaborating through a variety of channels to combat food insecurity.

If you wish to help, we encourage you to volunteer time, donate food items, and spread the word about our important nutrition assistance programs.

Together, we can build healthier communities and a stronger nation by ensuring that no one in America goes hungry.

To find ways you can help, please visit www.fns.usda.gov/fns/. ♦

Right: Under Secretary Johner visited partner organization — the Presa Community Center — in San Antonio, Texas, where it hosts a Kids Café. A Kids Café project confronts childhood hunger by serving as a direct feeding partnership between an area food bank and an after-school program. Kids Cafés are safe, nurturing places where neighborhood children can go after school and receive a hot supper as well as help with homework from caring volunteers or staff members.



SWRO hires new deputy regional administrator

The Southwest Regional Office welcomed Karen Twitty, its new deputy regional administrator, on Jan. 5.

"I look forward to meeting and working with the partners in the field and region that help us achieve our mission," said Twitty. "Right now, I am focused on learning the people, programs, and operations for the USDA and FNS. I want to continue to support the programs to ensure low-income families and children within our region have access to food and nutrition."

Twitty will help the regional administrator oversee 100-plus employees in the Dallas office, along with field offices in Austin, Houston, Little Rock and Oklahoma City. She will help manage 15 federal nutrition assistance programs in Arkan-

sas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Twitty, a native of Richardson, Texas, has spent most of her adult life working with the federal government. She started her federal career in Washington, D.C., in the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Shortly after 9/11, Twitty was recruited to work for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Department of Homeland Security.

In July 2003, she jumped at the chance to move from Washington, D.C., into the field. She was brought back to the Dallas/

Fort Worth metroplex, working at Dallas Love Field airport's TSA office.

Twitty attended the University of Texas at Austin and majored in psychology with a minor in sociology. She also received a master of public affairs from the University of Texas at Dallas.

After a full week at in the Southwest Region, Twitty has been impressed by the programs and their work-force.

"I am so honored to have been selected to work for this agency," she said. "With each step in my federal career I have felt a sense of purpose



Deputy Regional Administrator Karen Twitty joined the Southwest Region on Jan. 5.

and commitment to my agency and civil service and that continues with the work I hope to accomplish here at FNS."

Twitty has been married for 12 years and has three girls: Kendall 5 years, Carley 2 years, and Kayla 7 months. ♦

"I want to continue to support the programs to ensure low-income families and children within our region have access to food and nutrition."

Karen Twitty
Deputy Regional Administrator

Under Secretary honors 'Can Do' spirit in Texas

In 2008, the state of Texas spent its summer dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Dolly and Ike, along with the effects of Hurricane Gustav in nearby Louisiana.

Some of the very first boots on the ground when the skies cleared were the workers and volunteers of food banks which fed hundreds of thousands of residents — some who were left without electricity for weeks.

"A top priority at USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is to ensure that all Americans have enough food to sustain a healthful diet," said USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services Nancy Montanez Johner at ceremonies across Texas. "We commend the hard-working staff and volunteers at food banks for ensuring access to critical nutrition assistance as thousands of Texans recover from hurricanes and continue to rebuild their lives."

Under Secretary Johner traveled to the San Antonio Food Bank, Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley, East Texas Food Bank, Houston Food Bank and Southeast Texas Food Bank to deliver "Can Do" awards to recognize their service to their communities. ♦

Clockwise from the top: Under Secretary Johner poses with San Antonio Food Bank Director of Services Paco Vélez. Emelie Irving, executive director of the Southeast Texas Food Bank accepts the award. Under Secretary Johner congratulates Brian Greene, executive director and CEO of the Houston Food Bank. Terri Drefke, executive director of the Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley, receives her award. Robert Bush, executive director of the East Texas Food Bank shows off his plaque.



Bill Ludwig
Southwest Regional Administrator
USDA Food and Nutrition Service



A Message from the Regional Administrator

SNAP puts healthy food within reach

By Bill Ludwig, Southwest Regional Administrator

No one in America should go hungry. But every day, hard-working and retired individuals and families face the choice between buying enough food and paying for basic life necessities like rent, heat and electricity.

In addition, unexpected day-to-day circumstances like a trip to the emergency room or the loss of a job can easily push a household into food insecurity.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers 15 nutrition assistance programs that serve as the nation's first line of defense against hunger.

Its largest program, the Food Stamp Program (FSP) helps 28 million low-income people each month put healthy food on the table. Half of those recipients are children.

As of October 1, 2008, SNAP is the new name for the Food Stamp Program. SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and reflects the changes we've made to meet the needs of our clients, including a focus on nutrition and an increase in benefit amounts.

While SNAP is the federal name for the program, State programs may have different names.

Current clients will not lose benefits as a result of the name change.

Current clients and recent applicants do not need to re-apply.

On average, 37 million individuals were eligible for food stamp benefits each month in 2006, and 25 million received them.

This means that only 67 percent of eligible participants signed up while 33 percent of those chose not to participate. Studies show that families who do not have access to healthy foods and nutritional education suffer from higher rates of obesity.

Children without access to healthy food can experience behavioral and social problems that they otherwise wouldn't if they were simply not hungry. But there is an opportunity to increase the number of participants in SNAP.

Recent program improvements include an increase in the minimum benefit amount (from \$10 to \$14) and standard deduction, elimination of the limit on child or dependent care deduction and the exclusion of education and retirement accounts from countable resources.

Through nutrition education partners, SNAP helps clients learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices. Research shows that every \$5.00 of new benefits generates \$9.20 in total community spending.

Please spread the word about the SNAP name change and program improvements. With SNAP, healthy food is within reach for low-income Americans.

For more information about SNAP or one of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services 15 programs, please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov>. ♦

Did you know?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, helps 28 million low-income people each month put healthy food on the table. Half of those recipients are children. Here is how SNAP helped residents in the Southwest Region in 2008:

- **Arkansas SNAP:**
377,883 residents participate
\$95.17 is the average monthly benefit
\$457,399,517 total funds given to state*
- **Louisiana SNAP:**
790,733 residents participate
\$108.04 is the average monthly benefit
\$1,091,743,275 total funds given to state*
- **New Mexico SNAP:**
239,959 residents participate
\$93.48 is the average monthly benefit
\$295,624,796 total funds given to state*
- **Oklahoma SNAP:**
419,038 residents participate
\$97.72 is the average monthly benefit
\$529,368,266 total funds given to state*
- **Texas SNAP:**
2,532,047 residents participate
\$100.98 is the average monthly benefit
\$3,235,148,234 total funds given to state*



**Amount includes value of benefits and state's administrative cost.*

USDA partners with LULAC for Hispanic Outreach

NT Food Bank, Tyson donate commodities

On Dec. 13, the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program got a big marketing promotion via information brochures inserted into "Cena En El Barrio" holiday meal boxes in the largest feeding project by North Texas LULAC chapters.

"Cena En El Barrio," which is Spanish for "Dinner in the Neighborhood," is an annual feeding project coordinated by the Hispanic civil rights organization LULAC, which stands for League of United Latin American Citizens.

LULAC, along with the North Texas Food Bank, Tyson and CoorsMiller, were able to provide enough commodities to provide a generous meal to low income families in Hispanic



LULAC Youth Councils in high schools collected more than 5,000 canned vegetables to supplement the holiday meal boxes delivered to 2,000 families in the North Texas area this holiday season.

neighborhoods this year. The event was truly a community effort:

- LULAC Youth Councils in high schools collected cans of vegetables.
- LULAC Young Adult Councils donated boxes of stuffing and mashed potatoes.
- LULAC Adult Councils provided dessert items.
- The North Texas Food Bank provided fresh fruit and vegetables.

- Tyson provided bags of frozen chicken.
- CoorsMiller provided finances to run the project.
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service provided literature in English and Spanish about SNAP.

The North Texas Food Bank went a step further and provided a bilingual flyer listing its food stamp outreach coordinator and contact number.

The food bank also refrigerated

Tyson's chicken before the day of the event to ensure food safety.

Families were identified through neighborhood schools where the majority of students receive free lunch. Faith-based communities, food pantries and battered women shelters were also sites that provided lists of families.

"LULAC District III recognizes the great work the USDA Food and Nutrition Service does on a daily basis to help Hispanic families. LULAC appreciates the outreach USDA does to make sure that any Latino who is eligible to receive nutritional assistance gets the necessary access to do so," said Renato De Los Santos, LULAC District III Director.

Because of the success of this year's outreach, "Cena En El Barrio" partners are considering increasing next year's outreach to possibly 10,000 families. ♦

A Resource Center is Born

North Texas residents not only get a new pantry, but a skills center

On Oct. 28, Dallas' premiere poverty prevention organization, the Wilkinson Center, celebrated the opening of its new food pantry in the south-eastern neighborhood of Dallas — Pleasant Grove.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony was attended by more than 150 friends and supporters of the Wilkinson Center, including elected officials and a representative from the USDA Food and Nutrition Services.

The event also featured the center's first big donation from the Medical City Hospital, whose employees donated \$192,441 toward much-needed services to the citizens of Pleasant Grove. Britt Berrett, President and CEO of Medical City Dallas Hospital, presented a special dedication on behalf of the more than 2,400 employ-

ees of the hospital who helped raise that large contribution.

Also donating that day was Jan Pruitt, President and CEO of the North Texas Food Bank, who presented the Wilkinson Center with a "Close the Gap Grant" for \$20,000, the first to be issued by NTFB to a partnering agency.

"Close the Gap" is the North Texas Food Bank's three-year strategic plan to unite the community and narrow the food gap by providing access to 50 million meals annually.

The Pleasant Grove center is located just North of I-30 at 3312 N. Buckner Boulevard with 4,000 square feet of highly visible space in a major retail hub where the Texas Workforce Commission and WIC offices anchor this shopping

North Texas Food Bank's President and CEO Jan Pruitt helped launch a food pantry and poverty prevention center in Pleasant Grove.



center. The bright and cheerful waiting room welcomes the families who previously had to travel distances of up to 14 miles for assistance at the Wilkinson Center's Munger location. The Pleasant Grove location will offer clients a full-range of services from basic necessities to adult education classes and case management.

The Wilkinson Center serves over 34,000 clients each year. Half of those served are children. One hundred percent of its programs serve low-income families for whom hunger is a reality and homelessness is always a possibility.

For more information about the center, visit www.wilkinsoncenter.org or call (800) 880-4988. ♦

Faces & Places



Above: Members of the FDPIR Funding Work Group were given the "Honor Award" by Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer on Oct. 28. Left: Special Nutrition Programs Chris Hennelly was an integral part of the FDPIR Work Group, which helped bring an additional \$2 million in operational funds to the Southwest Region.

Federal employees, tribal leaders receive award for work on better fund distribution

On Oct. 28, members of the Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) Funding Work Group received the USDA Secretary's Honor Award. The award is the most prestigious award given by the USDA and recognizes outstanding contributions by USDA employees and private citizens in support of the Department's mission.

For the last three years, this working group of federal employees and tribal leaders from across the nation have met on a regular basis to develop an objective method for allocating federal administrative funds for FDPIR.

"We've had face-to-face meetings, biweekly conference calls and follow up work to get a better funding strategy," said Chris Hennelly, a program specialist for the SWRO Special Nutrition Programs. "I am so glad that I was able to be there from day one and help bring increased budgets to all of our tribes in the Southwest."

FDPIR has 100-plus tribes that administer the program nationwide. The Southwest Region has 19 tribes that participate in FDPIR.

Because of Hennelly and her working group's findings, around \$2 million in additional funds were redirected to help SWRO's tribal organizations in 2008. These funds helped tribes hire more staff, make infrastructure updates to food distribution centers and provide health benefits to current staff members. ♦

Southwest Regional Nutritionist Linda Melcher (right) gave a presentation at the State Fair of Texas on Oct. 14, on a stage sponsored by the Texas Department of Agriculture. Her topic focused on "Feeding Young Children: Creating Healthy Eaters."



SWRO staff attended the 10th Annual Fort Worth Hispanic Wellness Fair on Aug. 2. Pictured on the left is Tarrant Area Food Bank personnel, who gave healthy cooking demonstrations. FNS program materials were provided in Spanish and English. More than 3,000 attended the event.



On Nov. 21, Under Secretary Nancy Montanez Johner visited San Antonio, Texas, and participated in the monthly "Food Fairs," a feeding project coordinated by the San Antonio Food Bank. The "Food Fairs" program is just one of the many ways that the San Antonio Food Bank helps feed Americans through a mass distribution of food and outreach materials to qualified families. This event was held in southwest San Antonio's Brewer Elementary School.

A place for dignity and hope

Center targets hunger in the HIV/AIDS community

One of the quickest ways to fall into poverty is sickness. In America, 45 million are uninsured and experts say poverty could be just a health crisis away for many of these families.

People living with HIV/AIDS know the burdens of health care. Some have enough resources to access important care to treat HIV like a chronic disease. But for those who are forced to leave the workforce due to constant illness or because of stigma and lack of support in the workplace, the excessive costs of HIV treatment and lack of access to private insurance plans often have them turning to public assistance.

In North Texas, the Resource Center of Dallas (RCD) has been at the forefront of providing nutritional assistance to those with HIV/AIDS. The center got its start during the outbreak of AIDS, feeding gay men afflicted with the epidemic. Today the center is seeing clients from other communities, especially those of color.

Dallas County leads the state in new HIV infections, and the Dallas metroplex has more than 20,000 residents that are HIV-infected. RCD, which receives five to eight tons of food per week from USDA partner North Texas Food Bank, employs 44 people and hundreds of volunteers. The center is preparing for its client list to grow, according to Bret Camp, an associate executive director at RCD, who spoke to *At The Table* about the center.

At the Table: What started the food pantry/hot-meals feeding at the Resource Center? Bret Camp: "In the early 1980s when HIV hit Dallas there was nothing the community could do but make sure people with HIV had food for nutrition. There were no medications. The food they received was their only medication. Today we still see food and nutrition as medicine for our clients."

What are the qualifications for people receiving a hot meal at the Resource Center? "They have to be HIV positive, have an income below 300 percent of the federal poverty level (\$31,200), live in Dallas County and have a referral from a case manager."

What is your average daily attendance? "We have 170 shoppers in our food pantry and 100 to 120 hot meal clients five days a week."

How much can they get at the food pantry each week? "About \$100 worth of groceries (retail), for a two week period. Clients can shop every two weeks."

Since HIV/AIDS clients' immune systems are compromised, how much more intake of calories do they need to have a nutritious meal? "3,500 calories per day are recommended, but this may be adjusted depending on their medicines and health status."

How many medicines does an average HIV/AIDS patient take a day? "The number ranges from three pills to more than a dozen, often with difficult dosing schedules. Some medications need certain food, other need to be on an empty stomach."



Above: More than 100 Resource Center clients partake in the daily hot meals program. Left: Doris Woods has been cooking at the center for years. Clients affectionately call her "mama." Below: the Resource Center pantry is the only source of nutrition for nearly 1,000 people each week.



How does lack of nutrition affect someone taking HIV/AIDS medicine? "They experience faster muscle tissue wasting, inability to adhere to medication, greater side effects from their medications, quicker deterioration of immune system."

Do you plan to expand your current feeding programs? "We are already seeing a steady increase in the clients we serve over the past few months. This is anticipated to continue as the number of people with HIV grows."

What is the make up of your clientele? "A wide variety of people and families depend on our services. They come from all socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures."

Aside from feeding HIV/AIDS clients, what other services do you provide? "The Resource Center has a comprehensive continuum of care for our clients. It includes medical case management, dental services, laboratory services, health insurance premium assistance, a cyber center, client support, treatment education, Positive University, research, prevention, outreach and support groups."

For more information about the center, visit www.rcdallas.org or call (214) 528-0144. ♦

Hunger doesn't take a summer vacation

Although summer is six months away, preparations are underway to welcome this year's Summer Food Service Program site sponsors and prepare them for the fight against hunger.

The Summer Food Service Program is a federally-funded program that provides free meals in low-income neighborhoods across the country to children when schools are out.

School districts, cities, and faith and community-based organizations often provide meals to hungry children in the summer in conjunction with activities. Although almost 18.5 million children nationwide eat lunch at school during the school year, all too many of these children face hunger in the summertime when their schools close.

The Summer Food Service Program helps to draw children into safe and fun activities filled with learning opportunities. The program encourages communities to provide safe places for children to be with other children and supportive adults. Children benefit nutritionally by receiving complete, wholesome meals.

Parents benefit from some help in stretching their food dollars and by knowing their children are engaged in supervised activities. Organizations receive funds to provide meals that complement recreational and enrichment programs they already have planned. Any child, age 18 and younger, can come to a summer food service site and eat a free meal. It isn't necessary to sign up in advance or fill out any forms. Just show up.

Interested in becoming a sponsor? Please call your state office:

- **Arkansas:** (501) 682-8869
(Deadline for sponsor application is June 15)
- **Louisiana:** (877) 338-3663
(Potential sponsors must attend workshop on March 17)
- **Oklahoma:** (225) 342-3720
(Deadline for sponsor application is April 15)
- **New Mexico:** (800) 328-2665
(Deadline for sponsor application is April 15)
- **Texas:** (877) 839-6325
(Recommended that sponsor applications be in by April 15)

More information about the Summer Food Service Program is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/>. ♦

We recommend...

New MyPyramid for Preschoolers

USDA's MyPyramid website has a new section devoted to nutrition for children ages two to five. Like previous versions of MyPyramid, MyPyramid for Preschoolers offers tools to customize an eating plan for very young children. It also features advice on helping children develop healthy eating habits, recommended activity levels, food safety tips, and a growth chart. The website has games and interactive features to help children develop healthy activity and eating patterns. To learn more, visit www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/.

SNAP Recipe Finder Database

Internet users now have the option of searching the Recipe Finder Database of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Nutrition Connection in English and Spanish, greatly enhancing the capacity and resources available to providers of SNAP nutrition education. The features of the database are incorporated and translated in *Buscador de Recetas* (Recipe Finder), including the search page, more than 400 recipes with nutrition and cost analysis, the shopping list option, ratings and reviews and print options. The Recipe Finder was originally released in 2005 for use by nutrition educators working with SNAP-eligible populations. Recipes included in the database help providers of SNAP nutrition education save time, teach food resource management skills and meet nutrition education goals. Recipes generally use low-cost, readily available ingredients, can be prepared quickly, use simple measurements and basic equipment and are compatible with the existing Dietary Guidelines for Americans. To access *Buscador de Recetas*, visit: <http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov>.

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Through the USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs summarizes the actions and initiatives FNS has implemented since 2002 to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among program participants. Addressed in this new report are policy guidance and initiatives, programs, nutrition education and promotion, collaboration and coordination, grants, reports and emerging initiatives and resources. You can access the report at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/>. ♦

FNS Southwest Region

1100 Commerce St. Room 522
Dallas, TX 75242
phone (214) 290-9802
fax (214) 767-6249
email: jesus.garcia@fns.usda.gov

Office of Public Affairs
Patricia Mancha
Terri Romine-Ortega
Jesse Garcia
Leslie Lankster

US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service

At the Table is produced for our partners throughout the Southwest Region. If someone you know has an interest in our programs, we would be happy to add them to our distribution list.

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