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FOOD SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM BENEFITS LOCAL ECONOMY

Today's column continues as a series to highlight resources to extend your food dollar.

While Maryland is the richest state in the nation, a 2010 study conducted by Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) found one in six Marylander's report not having enough money to buy food that they or their family needed at some point during the prior twelve months. Meanwhile, there was a 21% increase in caseloads from January 2010 to 2011, for the Federal Food Supplement Program (FSP), formally known as Food Stamps,

FSP helps low-income households buy the food they need for good health. Benefits are issued to households on an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, called the Independence Card. You use this card to buy food, as well as plants and seeds to grow food for your household to eat. Most stores that sell food will accept the EBT card, and even some farmers markets.

The benefit is not intended to pay for all of your food needs, but it will help stretch food dollars and bring money into the state economy. Maryland Hunger Solutions reports the average monthly benefit in MD is \$130/person.

In Frederick County, five percent of the total population receives FSP benefits, a 51% increase from 2007 to 2009, the most recent figures available. Calculations using FRAC guidelines, find that 36% of eligible county residents are not utilizing the benefit. Research by the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), estimates every dollar of federal FSP benefits generates almost twice that in local economic activity. Therefore, when one-third of county residents do not take advantage of the program then Frederick County misses a significant number of federal dollars.

Many readers may believe they would never need or be eligible for food stamps. Some may associate receiving any assistance as socially irresponsible or shameful. Understand the program is not a welfare program, but a way to increase your food buying power, during times of economic need. Your hard-earned taxes have paid for the program and you have a right to use it

if you are eligible. Maryland Hunger Solutions, has just released an excellent resource, "Getting Food Stamps in Maryland," to guide you. For an electronic copy go to http://www.mdhungersolutions.org/pdf/maryland_getting_foodstamps_guide_2011.pdf For a paper copy contact their office at 400 East Pratt Street, Suite 606, Baltimore, MD 21201, 410-528-0021.

To apply for FSP benefits in Frederick County visit the Department of Social Services, 100 East All Saints Street, Frederick, Maryland 21701, Phone: (301) 694-4555. Their hours are Monday-Friday from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM. Visit <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/how/cashfood/fstamp.htm> to find out if you are eligible and what you need to bring with you to apply.

The University of Maryland Extension, where educators collaborate with groups who serve families eligible for FSP to provide nutrition education and resources, administers the Food Supplement Nutrition Education Program in Maryland. Here are two low-cost recipes from the program.

GARDEN FRITTATA

- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella or cheddar cheese
- 1 cup salsa
- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon low fat milk
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

Cook vegetables in microwave on high for 2-3 minutes or until warm. Drain.

Spray pie plate or other shallow baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Pour vegetables into pie plate. Top with cheese and salsa.

Beat eggs, milk and spices together. Pour egg mixture over the vegetables, cheese, and salsa. Cook in microwave on high for 3-4 minutes or until the eggs are firm. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Makes 4 servings.

BEEF AND CABBAGE FOR DINNER TONIGHT

- 1 head green cabbage, cut into bite-size pieces and washed
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- Non-stick cooking spray
- Garlic powder

Salt

Pepper

Hot pepper flakes (optional)

Chop cabbage and onions. Set aside. In a large skillet, cook the ground beef on medium heat until browned. Drain the fat. Set beef aside. Spray skillet with non-stick cooking spray. Cook onions on medium heat until soft. Add cabbage to the onions and cook until cabbage starts to brown. Stir the beef into the cabbage and onion mixture. Season with garlic powder, salt and/or pepper. Add hot pepper flakes to cabbage if you like it spicy. Makes 6 servings.

For more information about the Frederick County Extension Office check out our website <http://Frederick.umd.edu/> The University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or national origin.

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