



Solano County's food stamp efforts lauded

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Solano County is the best medium-sized county at getting food stamp benefits into the hands of eligible low-income residents, according to the California Food Policy Advocates.

The organization presented the county the "Best PAI in Class-Medium County" award at the 11th annual CalFresh Forum in Sacramento last week.

The "Freshy Awards" honor individuals and organizations for their efforts to boost participation in the CalFresh program, formerly known as the Food Stamp program.

"The CalFresh program gives eligible families much needed assistance to provide healthy and nutritious meals," said Christiana Smith, Health and Social Services deputy director for employment and eligibility services. "The integration of services at the one-stop campuses, our outreach efforts and the ability for clients to apply for benefits online were key to achieving our participation rate."

In December 2010, Solano County had 18,022 open cases with individuals receiving the federally funded nutritional assistance benefits, up 3,816 cases or 27 percent from December 2009. The monetary value of the December 2010 benefits was \$5.6 million in local food purchases.

Solano County ranks fifth in the state for maximum participation in the federal program, according to a report by the California Food Policy Advocates that establishes a county-level Program Access Index (PAI) by estimating CalFresh utilization among low-income individuals. Solano County's PAI was .695.

Full participation would bring an additional \$13.5 million annually in federal nutritional benefits to Solano County families, the report said. The organization estimates that statewide only half of eligible Californians receive CalFresh benefits, which translates into about \$4.9 billion in federal nutrition benefits that are not collected each year.

Residents can apply for CalFresh benefits online at www.benefitscalwin.org.