Monterey County Administrative Office
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Department of Social Services Sweeps Awards for Statewide Excellence in Providing CalFresh Services

Monterey County’s Department of Social Services has been recognized for excellence in the way it manages and delivers the CalFresh program, an important nutrition service for local residents.

CalFresh (formerly known as food stamps) provides nutrition assistance to those in low-income households. Each year, those at the state level review the accuracy rate of departments in certifying households which apply to receive food benefits and typically, Monterey County ranks high in this area. This year, CalFresh directors also reviewed the speed in which departments were able to determine an applicant’s eligibility for the program and gave out awards in four categories. Monterey County won an award for each of the categories, the only one of 58 counties to do so.

Here are the categories reviewed by the state, and Monterey County’s success rate for the federal fiscal year October 2012 - September 2013:
• Determining CalFresh eligibility and issuing benefits for expedited services within three days. We were successful in meeting the timeframes 99.3% of the time for Public Assistance households and 99.4% of the time for Non Assistance households.

• Determining regular CalFresh eligibility within 30 days. We were successful 100% of the time.

• Having a high CalFresh accuracy rate. Last year it was 97.61%.

• Having a high CalFresh case and procedural accuracy rate (this is also known as the “negative accuracy rate” involved in denying benefits). Last year it was 80%!

“I just want to pass on a sincere note of appreciation for everyone in Community Benefits, the branch of DSS which provides public assistance benefits and services,” says Elliott Robinson, Department Director. “Your dedication to all in our community whose needs aren’t being met by the economy is so strong and it is such an honor to be part of your team. As the chair of the County Welfare Directors Association’s CalFresh Committee, this honor was extra special and humbling. Thank you so much for all you do!”

Ag Commissioner Collaborates to Bring Groundbreaking Farmworker Advisory Group to Life

A first of its kind collaboration between the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office and the farmworker community may turn out to be a model program for other California counties.
Last month, the Commissioner’s Office and the Center for Community Advocacy (CCA) announced the creation of farmworkers advisory committee, which will advise the Commissioner’s Office on policies and practices impacting field workers in Monterey County.

“Our focus will naturally be around pesticide safety for farmworkers, including review of current pesticide posting requirements and other pesticide safety issues,” explains Agricultural Commissioner Eric Lauritzen. “Having this committee in place means we can have a direct dialogue between the farmworker community and our staff, ultimately resulting in a better understanding of the challenges we all face.”

How did this groundbreaking committee come to life? Like so many successful projects, it grew from two organizations finding common ground. Discussions about forming the committee began several years ago when the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office and Poder Popular (then a program of the Community Foundation for Monterey County and now a CCA program) hosted a community forum. Both the Commissioner’s Office and CCA saw the potential in developing a working relationship, but the two agencies had never worked together. They ‘took a leap’ and developed a relationship by working together on several projects including the AgKnowledge Program hosted by the Grower-Shipper Foundation and a series of small forums between the Commissioner’s Office and CCA-trained leaders.

When the idea of the advisory committee came forward, the proposal was vetted and enthusiastically supported by farm groups including Monterey County Farm Bureau and the Grower Shipper Association of Central California. Lauritzen says there has already been an initial meeting, resulting in defined goals for the committee.

“The advisory committee gives us direct access to farmworker leaders; to their concerns and to their suggestions and help us fulfill our obligations to the farmworker community and to the agricultural industry in general,” says Lauritzen.

One of the committee members is Chief Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Teo Gonzalez, who knows firsthand both the needs of farmworkers and importance of the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office. Twenty-six years ago, Gonzalez was picking lettuce in the Salinas Valley. He later earned a degree in agricultural economics from Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo in Mexico City, got his green card to work in the United States and came back to the Salinas Valley to look for a different job.
Gonzalez worked up the nerve to walk into Lauritzen’s office, unannounced, and ask for a job. Three months later he was offered a position. That was 14 years ago.

Gonzalez says he hopes the first goal of the committee will be to establish a baseline for communication.

Paulina Mejia, an agricultural inspector and biologist with the Agricultural Commissioner’s office and also a member of the advisory committee, says that one of her immediate goals is to forge trusting relationships with farm workers.

“When I’m out in the fields, there’s a hesitation when we drive up in county trucks,” Mejia says. “Many farm workers don’t understand we are here to help them. I want to ensure they are comfortable enough to approach us.”

Get Ready and Get Involved in National Preparedness Month

September is National Preparedness Month, and the Office of Emergency Services (OES) wants to make sure all of us are in the know, ready to go when it comes to emergency preparedness. OES has launched an information outreach effort, posting weekly themes about preparedness topics to its Twitter feed and webpage and it has some special ideas just for county departments to help employees be more aware of the value of preparedness.

“We can help any department that wants to put together an activity or informational event for its staff,” says Sherrie Collins, Emergency Services Manager. “We have materials
available for departments and lots of ideas for fun and informative events, like having a ‘preparedness potluck’ for an office lunchtime event.”

Contact OES if you’d like to have a preparedness event in your department, and in the meantime, check out the ways you can be “In the Know, Ready to Go” both at work and at home:

**In the KNOW:**

- **Visit the Monterey County Office of Emergency Services website** for information on hazards in Monterey County, ways to get prepared, and links to additional resources.

- **Subscribe (by email or RSS feed) to the “Latest News” section** to stay in the loop about what’s going on in and around Monterey County, including emergency information.

- **Like/Follow the Monterey County Office of Emergency Services Facebook and Twitter (@MontereyCoOES)**

- **Sign up your cell phone number at AlertMontereyCounty.org.** Alert Monterey County now allows you to register a cell phone number and receive emergency notifications via text, phone call, or email. You also can choose what types of messages that you will receive and where they are concerning, for instance, you work in Salinas but live in Monterey and want to know if something is happening in either city.

**READY to GO:**

- **Have a plan.** This includes how and where to evacuate and meet (if necessary) and how to communicate with each other. Think about things like pets and if children are at school or activities. Talk about it and make sure everyone understands it. You’ll find sample plans at Ready.gov.

- **Build a kit.** What would you need if nothing was available? Store enough supplies for each person for at least 3 days and don’t forget batteries and a can opener for canned food! Throw some games and books in there to help pass the time. Keep it all together so that you can grab it quickly in case of evacuation and keep a smaller version in your car or at work as well so you are ready no matter where you are. Customize it to your specific needs. Some suggested items can also be found at Ready.gov.