



# North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

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Michael F. Easley, Governor  
Dempsey Benton, Secretary

Sherry S. Bradsher, Director  
(919) 733-3055

May 9, 2008

**Re: Federal Management Evaluation Review**

Dear County Director of Social Services:

**Attention: Food and Nutrition Services Managers and Supervisors**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently completed a Federal Management Evaluation review of North Carolina's Food and Nutrition Services Program. During this review, program access was one of the areas reviewed to ensure potential FNS recipients were being reached. While we have not officially received our report from USDA, we wanted to highlight an area that requires attention and can be easily addressed. As a part of the review, USDA personnel made telephone calls to several counties in North Carolina posing as potential clients. During a number of these telephone calls, the callers were given information that USDA considered discouraging to potential applicants therefore creating barriers to the program. Ten calls were made and eight out of the ten presented concerns. An example of the responses received indicated that the only way an individual could apply for benefits was to physically come into the agency. Food and Nutrition Services policy allows an individual to receive an application via mail, fax or the internet and also allows an interview to be conducted over the telephone in many cases. Another example was instructing the caller of specific times to come in to apply for benefits. Food and Nutrition Services policy requires that individuals be given the opportunity to apply for benefits anytime during regular agency office hours.

We need to ensure the provision of excellent customer service to the many residents in our state that have a need for Food and Nutrition Services as well as any other programs administered within North Carolina. One of the primary goals of the Food and Nutrition Services Program is to increase the participation rate of potentially eligible individuals. In order to accomplish this goal, it is imperative that individuals are not discouraged from applying for FNS benefits. While we believe these issues create barriers to participation, these issues can be addressed in providing training to staff that provide information to potential clients. Your assigned field staff will share a more detailed review with you once the formal review has been received from USDA.

Nationally, NC has continuously ranked high in both providing timely and accurate benefits to those people who are entitled to our services. You are to be commended for the work your staff do each day and we always can strive to improve upon our services.

If you have any questions, please contact your Food and Nutrition Services & Energy Programs Representative.

Sincerely,

Dean Simpson, Chief  
Economic Services Section

**FNSEP-04-2008**