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WIC Helps Muskegon County Families Make Ends Meet

Muskegon, MI – As food costs, job losses and other economic hardships mount, families are relying on the Muskegon County Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental food program to help meet daily needs. The free program helps pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children up to age five eat well and stay healthy by providing healthy foods, nutrition education and referrals for health and social services.

"It's a wonderful program. It helps my family out a lot, by saving us money and providing nutritious food," said Ashley Nousain.

More and more Muskegon County residents feel the same. The county's total active participation for WIC has jumped 5% within one year.

"Our caseload in January 2009 was around 7,200 participants, and we closed out in January 2010 by providing food to over 7,600 Muskegon County residents," stated Laurel Sproul, Maternal and Child Health Supervisor at Public Health – Muskegon County. Across the state, Michigan WIC serves over 200,000 moms and babies each month.

Monthly foods a family may receive from WIC include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, breakfast cereals, milk, cheese, eggs, juice, baby foods and infant formula, although breastfeeding is highly encouraged and supported. WIC foods are worth \$30-\$112 or more per month for each participant.

"The foods we offer participants were just revamped in an effort to meet more advanced nutritional guidelines. WIC food packages now provide lower fat, higher fiber, less sugar, and more variety. Breastfeeding woman and infants receive additional or increased quantities of food," continued Sproul.

In order for pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children up to age five to qualify for WIC, the family must meet income guidelines at 185 percent of the poverty level. That means a family of four qualifies by earning \$40,793 or less a year. Individuals on Medicaid or families who receive food stamps automatically qualify.

The WIC Program is a federally funded nutrition program of the United States Department of Agriculture and an equal opportunity provider. To see if you qualify for WIC, call (231) 724-1391. For more information, visit www.muskegonhealth.net.

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