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JOHANNIS ANNOUNCES AWARD OF \$18 MILLION TO STATES FOR FOOD STAMP PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

WASHINGTON, Sept. 29, 2005— Agriculture Secretary Mike Johannis today announced the award of \$18 million in high performance bonuses to 12 states that demonstrated excellent customer service in fiscal year 2004.

“Providing nutrition assistance to low-income families, individuals and children is part of our commitment to reduce hunger and promote healthy eating habits,” said Johannis. “I applaud these states for demonstrating diligence and commitment in the administration of the Food Stamp Program to ensure all eligible applicants have access to food assistance.”

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to provide \$48 million in high performance bonuses to states that demonstrate high or improved performance in administering the Food Stamp Program. The bonuses announced today recognize the importance of customer service in administering this critical nutrition program, with award amounts also reflecting the size of the food stamp caseload.

The Food Stamp Program provides support to needy households and to those making the transition from welfare to work, enabling low-income families to buy nutritious food. In May 2005, over 25 million individuals in over 11 million households participated in the program.

The bonuses are being awarded to states that demonstrated the best or most improved access to the program, as measured by the Program Access Index. This index compares the number of people receiving food stamps to the number of people in poverty. A total of \$12 million was divided among the four states with the highest and the four states with the most improvement. An additional \$6 million was divided among the six states with the highest percent of food stamp applications that were processed in a timely fashion.

These customer service bonuses follow \$30 million in program integrity bonuses that were awarded on June 24, 2005. The bonus awards are:

Best Program Access Index

- District of Columbia: \$ 441,677
- Louisiana: \$ 2,807,090
- Maine: \$ 739,296
- Missouri: \$ 2,879,418

Most Improved Program Access Index

- Arkansas: \$ 1,436,360
- New Mexico: \$ 875,098
- Oklahoma: \$ 1,693,715
- West Virginia: \$ 1,127,346

Best Application Processing Timeliness

- Kentucky: \$ 1,552,195
- Massachusetts: \$ 1,039,891
- Oklahoma: \$ 1,112,959
- South Dakota: \$ 142,065
- Virginia: \$ 1,412,102
- West Virginia: \$ 740,788

For more information on the USDA Food and Nutrition Service and its programs go to www.fns.usda.gov/.

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