



Extension News Column

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To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), msmetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: Pinching Pennies to run Monday, OCTOBER 10, on page A-3
Additional Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

How are your skills in preparing meals at a bargain price? Many of you can pinch a penny until it squeals, but can you feed your family on a very low budget?

October is Hunger Awareness Month. Due to the economic downturn, some of our friends and neighbors are having trouble feeding their families. The Fairbanks Community Food Bank reports that they provide a box of groceries to more than 11,000 households in the Tanana Valley each year. A significant portion of our population is having trouble making ends meet.

Can you feed your family at a very low income? Alaskans are invited to take the Food Stamp Challenge.

The challenge is to live on the weekly food stamp benefit, which is \$55 for a single Alaska adult who lives on the road system and up to \$85 for residents of remote, rural communities. That works out to \$8 to \$12 a day.

This challenge has been undertaken as an experiment by some of our legislators last year, and now it is your turn. The challenge is to feed your family and to raise awareness about the difficulty of eating well on the food stamp budget.

The original food stamp program was not designed to pay for all the food a family would consume. Food stamps are intended to be a supplemental program and bolstered by contributions from food banks and other programs. Unfortunately, for a lot of people, that's not the case. It is the only source of the family's food.

As of February 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that 76,488 Alaskans received food stamps, or about one in nine residents. Numbers have increased substantially. According to the Division of Public Assistance, Alaska food stamp usage increased 72 percent in a five-year period that ended July 2011.

All food purchased and eaten during the challenge week must be included in the total. Participants may not eat food from their pantry or freezer and must avoid accepting free food from friends, family or at work.

Now, when you finish your week, we'd love to hear about it. Helen Idzorek, coordinator of Cooperative Extension's nutrition education programs, is collecting public comments and would love to know how you made it work.

Send her your meal plans and any healthy, low-cost recipes you use to feed your family. Strategies that you use to stretch those dollars are especially helpful. These will be used anonymously in a display as part of an Oct. 24 celebration of National Food Day on the UAF campus.

I'll also be doing a news column later this year on all those great hints you came up with. So, send your information to Helen at haidzorek@alaska.edu or to me at rrdinstel@alaska.edu.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.