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Sept. 7, 2007

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Is it possible to eat healthy on a low income? Take the FoodShare Challenge

MADISON, Wis.--Milk, eggs, cereal, fresh fruit--basic items on most people's grocery shopping lists. But for a surprising number of Wisconsin households, even the basics may be out of reach.

One in ten Wisconsin households does not always have enough food. That means that more than 600,000 people live in households without enough food for good health, according to the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium, a group of organizations focused on reducing the problem of hunger in the state.

The Food Stamp Program (called FoodShare in Wisconsin) is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. The program aims to boost the nutrition level and food purchasing power of people with low incomes. The program benefits are often too low to allow families to purchase the healthy food they need.

To raise awareness of the problem, the Consortium is working in concert with UW Cooperative Extension to give people the chance to experience firsthand what it's like to live on food stamps by inviting them to take the FoodShare Challenge.

For one week in September 2007, participants agree to spend approximately \$21 per person per week—the average food stamp benefit—on food. That includes meals from fast food or other restaurants. By staying within the budget, people will get a glimpse of what it's like trying to make ends meet with scant funds.

While FoodShare allotments are designed to supplement a household food budget rather than provide all food dollars, the Challenge conveys what it's like to live on such a limited budget.

The FoodShare Challenge, also sponsored by the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium, is being held in conjunction with the Wisconsin Hunger Summit on Oct. 4 in Stevens Point. Food providers, activists, members of the faith community, public and private agency staff, educators, business leaders, local elected officials and concerned citizens will meet to focus attention on new ways to help low-income people get enough healthy food.

Nationwide, local officials including two governors, journalists and community members have taken part in similar challenges. Participants report that making

bad choices at the supermarket, buying one item that costs too much or even something as small as breaking a jar of food, means they will probably go hungry for days.

To register for the FoodShare Challenge, contact Kadi Row at 608-265-2934. For more information about the Wisconsin Food Security Consortium and the Hunger Summit, visit www.wisconsinfoodsecurityconsortium.org.

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