

# Food stamp benefits will increase for some

By Mike Sims  
Of the Emerald

Most Oregon food stamp recipients will receive increased benefits beginning this month.

According to Bob Labbe, state food stamp program unit manager, recipients may be affected by changes in one or more facets of the program.

Labbe said that an annual increase in the program's cost-of-living allowance, beginning in October, will mean an increase in the maximum amount of food

stamps allowed per household. For example, a family of five would see its monthly benefits increase by \$9.

Also, standard deductions in household income will increase from \$85 to \$89 this year. The Adult and Family Services Division of the Oregon State Department of Human Resources, which administers the federally funded food stamp program, uses household income as a partial basis for determining whether a household is eligible for benefits, as well as the

amount of benefits to be received.

Food stamps are issued by household, whether that represents one person or several. The 223,000 persons receiving benefits represent about 92,000 Oregon households.

Some recipients will receive an allowance for higher utility costs during the winter. The AFS considers household utility costs in determining the amount of food stamp benefits. Recipients may choose to either receive a standard allowance, which is adjusted in October and March to allow for seasonal changes in utility rates, or to have benefits adjusted according to their actual utility costs.

Recipients who choose the standard allowance for utility

bills will receive an increase in food stamp benefits when the winter allowance takes effect today. An average increase for a family of five would be about \$15 a month in food stamps. The standard allowance is \$122 from April through September, and \$199 during the winter.

Many recipients with low utility bills opt for the standard allowance and thus obtain more benefits than if they had their eligibility adjusted according to their actual utility costs, Labbe explained.

Labbe also stated that food stamp program officials hope to begin conducting rate studies among a sampling of food stamp recipients, energy distributors and public utility concerns in late December or January. Labbe says that the in-

formation gathered will be used to help adjust food stamp benefit amounts, and officials hope to use the data when benefits are adjusted again in April.

Increases in food stamp benefits represent "relatively minor changes in policy," Labbe said, adding that he doesn't expect the number of food stamp recipients to increase dramatically.

"Persons who've applied already and have been denied benefits might consider re-applying," Labbe said. "Every year there are changes in eligibility requirements in small, incremental amounts, and people who were right on the borderline last year may qualify this year," Labbe explained.

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## CUB

Continued from Page 1

And because the amount of donations to CUB cannot exceed \$100 by members, no special interest will become paramount, Tippens says.

"No tax dollars are involved and you don't have to worry about the ups and downs of government," Tippens says. "CUB wouldn't represent any special interest groups, just the consumer."

Because of OSPIRG's intense efforts, the public utilities have become concerned that the measure will be passed, Lawrence says. The CUB measure has been the target of a massive advertising campaign funded by the major utilities, she says. These companies charge that CUB will not have to follow state agency laws and that the citizens will have little control over the board.

"This is a good example of what money can do for you," Lawrence says. "They are developing a smokescreen because the laws they are referring to are state agency laws, but CUB is not a state agency. United Way doesn't have to follow these laws and neither does CUB."

"It's frustrating. Hopefully anyone in their right mind won't listen to them."

Although there was a drop-off in student participation at the end of last decade, OSPIRG is thriving today.

"OSPIRG had some dark years at the end of the 1970s, but right now it's great," Tippens says. "The last two years have been a rebirth. We're now the largest advocacy group in Oregon."

"OSPIRG wants to get students involved in the system," Tippens says. "We try to get what they're learning in school into social action."



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