

Commodities program helps hundreds of people

By Brian Mortensen
Spilyay Tymoo

Jon Brown wants to get rid of the stigma of "low-income" from anyone who happens to participate in the Warm Springs USDA Commodities program.

"We don't want people to feel that this is a hand-out," said Brown, supervisor of a program that helps feed an average of 200 families on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation.

The program, which can provide a family of three \$1,440 of food a month, is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and offers a wide variety of canned and packaged foods, as well as frozen meat and fresh produce.

The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs is one of the 243 Native American tribes the USDA program assists. The program offers food products to tribal members living on or within a 15-mile radius of the Warm Springs reservation.

Warm Springs USDA Commodities has expanded its program to provide food for families with at least one enrolled member of a recognized tribe in the U.S.

"We serve parts of Jefferson, parts of Wasco, and all of Crook



Jon Brown shows some of the items available through the Commodities program.

County," said Brown, program manager since 1995.

All of the food available for the nationwide USDA commodities program is donated, and it's sent to a national warehouse in Kansas City, Mo., and from there to regional warehouses. The western regional warehouse is located in Albuquerque, N.M., and food is then shipped once a month to storehouses like the one the Warm Springs program is housed in, on Holliday Road at the Industrial Park.

The commodities program benefits anyone whose monthly income is less than \$910. A family of three must earn less than

\$1,440 to become eligible. Brown said the eligibility ceiling for a family the size of the average participating family from Warm Springs, five, is \$1,989 per month.

The program allows each individual or family a set dollar amount of food per month, including set amounts of items from the various food groups, including produce and meats.

The Warm Springs USDA Commodity program has only recently, in the last two years, added fresh produce, delivered by Duck Delivery's satellite location in Bend. The program offers four different fruits and

four vegetables on a year-round basis and can offer others on a seasonal basis.

"They throw in squash, they throw in green peppers, corn, as they're available," he said.

With a freezer on site, the Commodities program can also offer frozen meat, including ground beef, chicken, ham, and, most recently, buffalo meat.

"The USDA calls it bison," Brown said. "And it comes in two-pound packs, so it's very convenient to use, to make, to include in recipes. It's extra-lean, very healthy."

For the holiday season, the Commodities program offered

its participants baskets of fruit. "We try to give our gratitude by way of this little gift exchange," Brown said.

Food administered through the Commodities program is also labeled differently than it used to be. What once was packaged in plain white labels in black print with the only information printed on the label being the actual contents of the package now bears colorful labels with brand names and, more importantly, nutrition information.

Last summer, the Commodities department opened a new driveway, parking lot and entrance on the north side of its building, allowing for easier handicap access, and more confidential access for program participants than the facility's front

door. Brown has a small staff, including John Finch, who has operated the warehouse since 1996; and program assistant Merrissa James.

Brown says the Commodities program's participants often change from one season to the next, all depending on economic conditions. "We slow down quite considerably around Christmas time," he said, "because of all the activities going on, winter break, the tribal bonus, plus other work incentive payments, like what Forest Products give out to its employees."

Conversely, the winter is slow for seasonal employees at Kah-Nee-Ta, who are mostly busier in the summer tourism season. See **COMMODITIES** on 9

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Police to provide voluntary drug testing

When a parent suspects that a child may be using illegal drugs, a complicated and difficult situation can occur.

To help address the problem the Warm Springs Police Department is planning a new voluntary drug-testing program.

The new program should be available to parents after the start of the new year, said Jim Soules, chief of Warm Springs police.

"It's going to be helpful," said Soules, "because it will allow parents to confirm either that a child is doing good or not doing good."

The results of the test cannot be used by the police for criminal prosecution.

Instead, the results are turned over to the parent, who can then decide what to do next.

"It can be an early detection," said Soules.

The testing is done at the police station free of charge by trained personnel. The results are known immediately and then given to the parent.

A positive drug test result

leads to no legal action but will tell the parents what they need to know. Other police departments in the region, including Redmond, Bend and Prineville already offer the testing service, called Parent Aid.

The program started in 1999 as a statewide initiative and is now offered by 38 Oregon law enforcement agencies.

Since July, Jefferson County has offered a \$5 voluntary drug test, launched in part by the Jefferson County Methamphetamine Task Force.

Parent Aid was originally funded by the Oregon State Police, the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police and the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association, said Kevin Campbell, executive director of the police chiefs' association.

"It's a way to give (families) help, before a drug problem becomes an entrenched one," Campbell said. "Parents want an option that doesn't involve their children getting arrested."

Both programs can detect most major drugs, such as mari-

juana, cocaine and methamphetamine, within minutes through urinalysis.

A police officer, usually the school resource officer, is trained to administer the test and oversee the program.

While Parent Aid promises anonymity, Polly Nelson, the education director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon, questioned whether the test should be administered by a government agency.

Nelson said she would rather see it handled by a private party, such as a physician, to ensure the information is safeguarded from legal authorities.

"I realize they think it's a service and it's commendable, but there are some possible downsides," Nelson said.

For instance, she said she wondered how a parent or child can be sure the information doesn't come up in the future.

And even though a youth can refuse the test, she said it might be difficult to do so against a parent and a police officer.

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