

July 30, 2009

## **MDH News Release: Minnesota WIC program to offer healthier food choices to women, infants and children**

### **Minnesota WIC program to offer healthier food choices to women, infants and children**

#### ***New choices include fresh fruits and vegetables***

The Minnesota Department of Health Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program today announced it will begin offering new, healthy food choices on August 1. The 141,000 women, infants and young children participating in the program will be able to receive a variety of healthier foods, including fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables; whole grain products such as bread, tortillas, brown rice and oatmeal; jarred baby foods and soy beverages; and tofu. Skim and one-percent milk will be offered to all women and children over the age of two. Organic fruits and vegetables and other organic WIC-allowed products that are priced similarly to their non-organic counterparts will also be available.

The new foods provided by the WIC program follow changes being made by the federal WIC program and reflect the most recent dietary guidelines for Americans. The new choices also encourage breastfeeding, support infant feeding practices recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and are well suited to the food preferences of the diverse populations served by the WIC program.

“The new WIC food choices will improve the health of Minnesota mothers and children and reduce a child’s risk of chronic disease by supporting healthy eating early in life,” said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dr. Sanne Magnan.

Minnesota WIC officials also hope the changes will help smaller convenience stores in lower income and underserved areas of the state begin carrying fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthier foods that have not always been available before. Lack of access to stores that stock fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods has been identified as a barrier to healthy eating in some communities.

“Making fresh fruits and vegetables widely available to WIC participants will enhance the health and well being of WIC mothers and children across the state,” said JoAnne Berkenkamp, the local foods program director for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). “MDH has demonstrated great leadership in implementing important changes in the foods offered to WIC participants.” IATP has been a leader in supporting healthier eating in

underserved communities and is partnering with the Minnesota Department of Health to promote the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in all Minnesota neighborhoods.

Since 1973, the WIC program has offered participants nutrition assessments, nutrition education, a food package designed to meet their nutrition needs, and health care referrals that have continually resulted in better health outcomes. The WIC program, long considered one of the most successful federal health programs, has strong Minnesota ties, having been championed by two prominent Minnesotans: Senator Hubert Humphrey and Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman.

For more information about the Minnesota WIC Program and the new food package, see the Minnesota WIC Web site:  
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/fh/wic/>.

-MDH-