CHARLIE CRIST
GOVERNOR

July 6, 2009

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your June 5 letter regarding the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 and your recommendations on increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation in Florida. I am happy to share that Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF) ACCESS Florida Program is a front-runner in taking advantage of programs, options, and tools available to ensure the people of our State receive the full benefit of the SNAP Program.

Each year, ACCESS Florida submits an Outreach Plan to the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) intended to increase the number of SNAP applications submitted and approved. ACCESS Florida is currently partnering with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida in conducting an outreach project to improve the participation rate of eligible families in SNAP in six Central Florida counties.

ACCESS Florida works with the Department of Education for Direct Certification and Verification in the administration of Florida's SNAP, Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), and Medicaid Programs, the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, and the Special Milk Program. These programs increase participation of SNAP and TCA recipients in the school meal programs through direct certification.

ACCESS Florida takes its role very seriously and is committed to quality customer service and ensuring that applicants for any public assistance program receive the help for which they are eligible in a timely manner. To assist in improving timely certification, ACCESS Florida has examined all options allowed under the 2008 Farm Bill, and has implemented as many of these options as feasible. ACCESS Florida has submitted waivers of federal policy to further streamline application processing. FNS is currently considering these requests.

To provide increased access to SNAP, ACCESS Florida developed a community partner network of approximately 3,000 members. By maximizing shared resources, the "Community ACCESS Network" increases customer access to services needed to strengthen families in the local community. The Department is committed to investing in services that work; making a positive, measurable difference in people's lives; and helping communities become safe, stable, supportive places for children and families.

THE CAPITOL
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399 • (850) 488-2272 • FAX (850) 922-4292

Thank you for sharing your suggestions with me. We share your desire to provide help to those in need and look forward to continued partnership with the USDA. If you need additional information, please have a member of your staff contact Jennifer Lange, Director, ACCESS Florida, at (850) 921-0253.

Sincerely,

Charlie Crist