

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE HELPS DISTRIBUTE HOLIDAY MEALS AT MORRISTOWN FOOD PANTRY

Senior Citizens, Working Families of the Region Benefit

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(TRENTON) – For 150 families in Morris County, the December holidays will be celebrated with a turkey and all the trimmings – something that might not have been possible without the help of the Interfaith Food Pantry in Morristown and some enthusiastic volunteers, including New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles M. Kuperus.

Kuperus, along with pantry volunteers and participants in the Morris County Sheriff's Labor Assistance Program, who perform community service as an alternative to incarceration for minor offenses, joined together today to distribute 150 turkeys along with cranberry sauce, gravy, yams, stuffing and other fixings to those families in need at the Interfaith Food Pantry.

"Hunger is a pervasive problem that many people are surprised to find affect those in our own towns and neighborhoods," said Secretary Kuperus. "At holiday time and throughout the year, these residents count on the assistance of emergency feeding operations like the Interfaith Food Pantry. In turn, the food pantries depend upon donations from local residents and groups and the programs the New Jersey Department of Agriculture provides."

Rosemary Gilmartin, Executive Director of the Interfaith Food Pantry, said the pantry distributed a total of 450 turkeys for the December holidays this year, donated by individuals, various groups, schools, businesses, supermarkets and Turkeys 4 U, an organization started by a high school student that works with Montville UNICO, as well as some purchased by the pantry with donated funds.

"We are so pleased that Secretary Kuperus came to Morris County to meet our clients and volunteers and grateful for the opportunity to show him how critical the State Food Purchase Program is to us and our more than 1,500 households served by the Interfaith Food Pantry," said Gilmartin, "This program has enabled us to continue to meet the demand and to provide good quality, nutritionally balanced, and frequently fresh food to our many families in need."



The Interfaith Food Pantry was established in 1994 and distributes food to 300 families each week, primarily senior citizens living on fixed incomes and low-income working families in Morris County. In 2006, the pantry distributed more than 597,000 pounds of foods to its

clients.

The pantry is a recipient of the State Food Purchase Program, initiated by Governor Jon S. Corzine in 2006. The program has provided a steady supply of balanced, nutritious food for the pantry's clients and has quadrupled the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables they distribute and enable them to make meat available once a month.

The State Food Purchase Program provides direct relief to the state's hungry, with a focus on buying locally produced nutritious foods. In its first year, the program resulted in the purchase of 3.9 million pounds of nutritious foods, which helped feed an extra 69,110 people each month. This year, the Governor and Legislature allocated \$4 million for the State Food Purchase Program.

In addition, the Department of Agriculture operates the Emergency Food Assistance Program, which distributes food donated by the United States Department of Agriculture through a network of 660 food pantries, soup kitchens and other feeding operations. Last year, the Department distributed more than 6.4 million pounds of the USDA commodities.

The Interfaith Food Pantry has a website, which provides information on how to volunteer at the pantry, how to donate, and how to get help. It lists the current needs at the pantry and upcoming events. The site can be accessed at <http://www.mcifp.org/>.

For more information about the Department of Agriculture's hunger programs, visit www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn/fooddistrib/tefap.html and www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn/fooddistrib/foodpurchaseprogram.html.