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FOOD

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the federal level, including cuts in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP and formerly known as food stamps.

"This past fall there was a scheduled reduction in the SNAP program," Rodriguez said. "There was an increase as a result of the stimulus package when the recession first hit, but this fall that bump in the food stamp program was cut off."

"Unfortunately, the cut came right before the holidays at a time when families feel a lot of anxiety," he added. "That puts more pressure on a family's budget and, unfortunately, studies show one of the first things that falls off the budget plate is food."

Statewide, the \$8 billion reduction in SNAP meant 159,000 low-income households lost roughly \$90 a month in benefits, according to the New Jersey Anti-Hunger Coalition. That translated to about 34 fewer meals a month, according to Feeding America.

Food stamp cuts

The effects of SNAP cuts are evident in end-of-the-month attendance at the Community Soup Kitchen and Outreach Center located at Church

of the Redeemer in downtown Morristown, which served up 54,000 meals in 2012, according to Terry Connolly, its executive director. Recently, the center, which has served lunch for decades, started offering breakfasts as well.

"We see more people at the end of the month, when their food stamps are gone, than at the beginning of the month," Connolly said. "Before the cuts, we got them three weeks a month. Now we're seeing them a week earlier."

The congressional vote that passed the Farm Bill, which included the SNAP cuts, broke largely along party lines. But Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., split with his party and voted against the cuts. "I support a sturdy safety net for Americans who find themselves in genuine need," Frelinghuysen told the Daily Record. "Clearly, the food stamp program (SNAP) is a vital part of that safety net. It's important that every dollar we spend on food assistance gets to those who truly need it."

Though SNAP is important, only half the clients at the Interfaith Food Pantry in Morris Plains qualify for the benefit, according to Carolyn Lake, its director of community and relations and development.

Yet those families who do not qualify, some of



Keith Dudiak, from Morristown and Summit, with a meal Thursday from Table of Hope at Bethel Church soup kitchen in Morristown. KAREN FUCITO

which include adults working full time, still can't afford the food they need.

Healthful meals

While ensuring people have an adequate amount of food to eat is important to food activists and providers, so, too, is another issue: the quality of that food.

A concern for good eating is what prompted the Community Soup Kitchen and Outreach Center in Morristown to start its Healthy Choices Market, which offers its dining guests fresh fruit, vegetables and meat to take home twice a week.

A grant from the Fannie E. Rippel Foundation allows the center to res-

cue the produce from Trader Joe's, Whole Foods Market, and local farms.

Those who run free food services point to continued need. The Food Pantry at Long Valley Presbyterian Church anticipates increased demand for the Easter holiday and, beyond, in summertime.

"We get such support from everyone in the community," Spina said. "But as people get caught up in things and the summer progresses, the food situation becomes quite dire. Residents go on vacation and they're not thinking about making donations to the food pantry."

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