



Mississippi Department of Human Services Press Release



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Sunflower County Investigation Ends in Arrest

(SUNFLOWER, Miss.) – On February 16, 2012, investigators from the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Office of Special Investigations, and the Sunflower County Sheriffs' Department, arrested Sunflower store owner Perry Parker at his store, located at 125 Railroad Avenue, and charged him with trafficking Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

In Sunflower County, 37% of the county's residents are SNAP clients, representing over \$16.6 million in benefits that are issued each year or an average of over \$1.4 million every month. "Greed by a few has cost the honest low-income families and elderly a local grocery store that can accept their EBT cards. This crime penalizes all who may have used this local shop for eligible EBT food purchases. The trickle down of effect of SNAP trafficking is huge, particularly in rural small-town Mississippi. The crime affects the whole area," said MDHS investigator Frank Saddler. "We want store owners to know that we are watching them and if they choose to scam the system, they will be caught."

SNAP trafficking investigations are aimed at preventing the illegal use, transfer or trafficking of SNAP benefits, with the focus of investigations on retailers who are authorized to accept benefits through EBT purchases but instead exchange benefits for cash and/or ineligible goods such as non-food items. Retailers arrested for trafficking are not only charged with the crime but lose eligibility to accept any future EBT benefits at that store location. Further, clients who participate in trafficking are charged and potentially lose their benefits. All can face fines and jail time.

During 2011, the Office of Special Investigations, in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service and local law enforcement agencies investigated 35 retailers statewide who were suspected of trafficking.

Local residents can help spot possible fraud in their grocery stores. The small "mom and pop" grocers are usually the type of stores targeted by those trying to defraud a system in place to help those who are at risk of food insecurity, such as the elderly and children.

If you suspect a store or client is misusing benefits, call the Fraud Hotline at 1-800-299-6905. SNAP fraud is a crime.

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