

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Humane Society of Berks County Announces Free Pet Food Distribution Program for Pet Owners in Need

The Humane Society of Berks County (HSBC), the leader in animal welfare, announced that it is offering a new service to help pet owners in need who may be facing surrendering a pet to an animal shelter as a result of the bad economy. On Saturday, January 17, 2009, the Humane Society of Berks County will be distributing cat and dog food, **free of charge**, to pet owners at the HSBC Scholar Center in Reading. The HSBC hopes that the pet food assistance will aid families in need and help keep pets in their homes, rather than entering regional animal shelters. “We know that the bad economy is making some people have to choose between heating their homes, paying their bills, or feeding their families and feeding their pets,” said Karel Minor, Humane Society Executive Director. “Although the economic downturn is impacting the Humane Society, too, this is one way we can help pets and people and keep animals from entering our shelters in the first place.”

The food to be distributed is excess food from the HSBC *Ani-Meals on Wheels Program*. The program delivers pet food and supplies to Meals on Wheels recipients and other qualified pet owners on a monthly basis in Berks and Montgomery Counties. Although the economy has resulted in decreased financial donations to non-profits such as the Humane Society, the HSBC has seen increases in pet food donations to the Ani-Meals program. After distributing excess food to program participants and other area animal rescues, the HSBC decided to make food directly available to those in need. Unlike some other services offered by the HSBC, there will be no eligibility requirements to receive the food donations. “We want anyone who can use the helping hand to come and take advantage of this offer,” said Minor.

Beginning at noon on Saturday, January 17, the HSBC will distribute twenty pounds of cat food per person and twenty to forty pounds of dog food per dog owned by an individual. Food will be distributed on a first come, first served, basis and will continue until 3:00 PM or until supplies are exhausted. Dog owners will be required to show proof of dog ownership by providing proof

of current dog license for each dog. Owners may purchase a 2009 dog license at the time if they do not already have one. The licensing requirement is applied to every HSBC program. “Dog licenses are not only required by law, they can be a matter of life and death for strays,” said HSBC Field Services Coordinator, Officer Dylan Heckart. “No matter how bad someone’s circumstances, the HSBC believes we should encourage responsible and legal pet ownership.”

The food distribution program will be repeated on a regular basis as food supplies allow. It is another part of the HSBC’s continuing effort to attack the underlying causes of shelter overcrowding and euthanasia of pets. In addition to *Ani-Meals on Wheels*, *PetNet*, and other signature proactive animal welfare programs, the HSBC recently expanded its existing veterinary services for the general public to provide reduced cost medical services for those in financial distress. The HSBC’s goal is to prevent as many animals from entering shelters as possible, not just to react to overcrowded shelters after the fact. “Sure, we’ve been hammered by the economy like everyone else and we’ve been impacted by animals flooding our shelter,” said Minor. “That doesn’t mean we should throw up our hands and admit defeat. Our supporters expect us to get out there and do what we can- whatever we can- to help animals on their behalf.”

Anyone seeking assistance for their pet through any of these programs can get more details by visiting the HSBC’s website at www.berkshumane.org or by calling its two animal welfare centers at 610-921-2348 (Reading) and 610-385-0928 (Douglassville)

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws for all of Berks County, the Humane Society provides adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, veterinary services to the general public, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading, and 1201 Ben Franklin Highway E., Douglassville.

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