Are you waiting for your tax rebate? Have you made your plans on how to spend or save it yet? This month more than 130 million households will begin receiving a “bonus check” from Uncle Sam. Being promoted as an economic stimulus plan for the country, the hope is that the money will burn such a hole in your pocket that you won't be able to resist spending what you receive. President Bush signed the $168 billion Economic Stimulus Package into law in February with the hope that spending the money will give an energizing jolt to a national economy.

If you received benefits or earned income of $3,000 or more in 2007 you qualify to receive the rebate. Qualifying income includes earned income from wages, salaries, tips, self-employment, social security, certain retirement benefits and veteran's benefits. Taxpayers must have a valid Social Security number to be eligible. Those with a TIN or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number are not eligible. In addition to qualifying you MUST file a tax return this year to receive the payment.

Even if you do not owe taxes, you had to have filed a 1040A or a 1040 tax return by April 15 to receive a rebate check. To accommodate taxpayers who file tax returns later in the year, the IRS will continue sending payments until December 31, 2008.

Essentially the program works like this: If you earned less than $3,000 you do not qualify for a tax rebate. If you earned more than $3,000 but paid no taxes, you will receive $300. If you made more than $3,000 and paid taxes you will receive $600. And if you have children under 17, add an additional $300 per child. A single person will receive a $600 rebate check and a married couple will receive $1,200. For those filing joint tax returns, only a total of $3,000 of qualifying income for both spouses is required to be eligible for a payment. Payments to higher income taxpayers will be reduced by 5 percent of the amount of income above $75,000 for individuals and $150,000 for those filing jointly.
The stimulus payments will be made in the same way that you receive your tax refund. For example, if you request that your refund be directly deposited into your bank account, the stimulus payment will arrive there as well.

As you are waiting for your rebate watch out for possible scams asking you for sensitive information over the phone or through e-mail that are sure to crop up. The IRS mailing be titled “Economic Stimulus Payment Notice”. You will receive two informational notices advising you of the stimulus payment. The IRS will not call or e-mail you about stimulus payments. If you feel that you are being scammed, you can forward e-mail to www.phishing@irs.gov.

For more information, contact the Internal Revenue Service at http://www.irs.gov or call (800) 829-1040 or Peggie Garner at the Onslow County Center of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension at 910-455-5873.

E-Conservation
Power To Control What You Spend

If you’re looking for ways to lower your energy bill and lessen your environmental footprint E-Conservation is ready to help. The program's Web site, www.e-conservation.net/, is a single source to help consumers be more energy savvy in situations such as renting, building or buying a home; purchasing new appliances or using existing appliances more efficiently; landscaping; and a host of others. Using less energy means reductions in air pollution (and greenhouse gases), which translates into a cleaner environment and lower bills. The E-Conservation web site includes articles, fact sheets, and links to other conservation-oriented sites.

Articles about choosing and using appliances wisely, ensuring that heating and cooling systems are opening efficiently, wise water use, and a range of other topics are available on E-Conservation's site. A number of fact sheets offer more in-depth information about subjects such as calculating energy use for various appliances and systems around the house, tax breaks or incentives for wise energy use; and ensuring energy efficiency in home improvement purchases such as dishwashers, lighting, heating, ventilation and cooling (HVAC).

Also included on the site are practical tips to ensure energy efficiency in and around the home ideas for water conservation are included on the site, as well; employing these strategies can help save money on water bills while conserving a precious natural resource.

In addition to materials developed by the E-Conservation team, the site offers links to energy conservation and alternative energy web sites (such as NC GreenPower and the North Carolina Solar Center), state and federal energy conservation resources (such as the N.C. Department of Energy and the Energy Star Program), and educational materials (such as water use calculators and brochures on insulation and weatherization).

The North Carolina Cooperative Service began the E-Conservation program in 2005 to fill a gap left when utility companies slowed their consumer education efforts. E-Conservation is funded through the State Energy Office of the North Carolina Department of Administration. Professionals from NC State University, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, local utilities and alternative energy organization provide guidance to the E-Conservation program as part of its Advisory Board.
For more information on energy conservation, the E-Conservation program or its web site, contact Peggie Garner at Onslow County's center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

North Carolina Extension produced this press release with funding from the State Energy Office, N.C. Department of Administration.

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**Problem solving is an important skill**

A child needs to develop problem-solving skills. If she is constantly told what to do by her parents, she will continue to depend on someone else to give her the answers.

A child who is encouraged to think about possible solutions and pick those that might work develops a method for thinking about a problem.

At times, she may need suggestions, but as long as these are given as suggestions and not orders, the child learns to take responsibility for the solutions she chooses.

If the problem is satisfactorily solved, the child can feel proud that she solved it. If the solution she chooses was not the best, but she is praised for trying, she will want to try again.

It is good practice to give even very young children exercises in making choices. A two-year-old might be given a choice between the green shirt and the blue one. A four-year-old might choose between two restaurants.

Having a say in decisions can have enormously positive influence on a child.

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**Picnic Table Protocol**

*Ways to keep the picnic table clean and germ-free*

Hot dogs, hamburgers, salads, corn-on-the-cob . . . pull up a seat at the picnic table and enjoy some easy summer fare. But wait! Before you do, look down and make sure that the surface you're about to dine on is clean and germ-free.

Picnic tables in public spaces are busy places that can be breeding grounds for germs, observes Nancy Bock, Vice President of Education at the Soap and Detergent Association. Even picnic tables at home may be subject to the unwanted attention of birds and other elements of nature, not to mention the challenge of spilled food.

**On the Go**

Make disinfectant wipe your summer traveling companion! Use them for quick wipe downs on public picnic tables and benches.

**On the Home Front**

For general cleaning, soap and warm water may suffice. However, if you plan to use the table for food preparation – or if juices from meat, seafood or poultry have spilled on the table – the next step is to sanitize it. Mix a solution of three tablespoons of chlorine bleach to one gallon of water. Apply the solution to the surface of the table and let stand for two minutes. Rinse with a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

**Hand Hygiene**

Clean hands are as important as a clean picnic table. If soap and water aren't available, use a disposable hand wipe or a hand sanitizer to clean your hands.
Storing your Winter Sweaters and Woolens

Once again it is time to put away the winter clothing and get out the summer clothing. Before you store your winter sweaters and woolens, make sure they are clean. There may be stains invisible to your eye which left untreated will harm your clothing during the time it is stored. Stains left untreated will also attract moths and insects.

If the garments are meant to be dry cleaned, have them cleaned before storing. Washable woolens can be washed, but use the correct cleansers and do not use additives such as starch or chlorine bleach. Do not use fabric softener. If it requires a fabric softener: put it through a rinse or dry cycle with the softener when you unpack it next fall.

Cashmere, alpaca, angora, lambswool, merino wool, and most hand knits always require dry cleaning. Do not clean them except when they are soiled. Excessive cleaning breaks down some materials and can misshape your sweaters. Always follow the care instructions on the label of the garment. If it says 'dry clean only' do not risk hand washing it. When the tag says it may be hand washed, use the following instructions:

- Use cold water and a high quality liquid detergent especially designed for knitwear.  
- Turn the sweater inside out, gently immerse and work the soap through it.

- Do not twist or pull, wring or rub too hard.

- Gently roll the excess soap and water out of the sweater then rinse until you've rinsed out all the bubbles.

- Rinse several times in cold water.

- To remove excess water from your sweater, roll it up in a fluffy towel and squeeze gently or place it in a cotton pillowcase and place in the washing machine for a very gentle, short spin; just long enough to remove the excess water that weighs down your sweater.

- Block the sweater, reshaping the waist and wrist ribbing, button cardigans closed, roll collars into position, and straighten out the sleeves.

- Dry the sweater flat. A sweater dryer works very well or you can dry your sweater on a towel, away from direct heat and sunlight.

- Do not tumble dry.

- Do not iron.

- Do not hang sweaters or knitted garments which can stretch out of shape.

Clean, unused suitcases make excellent storage containers. Line them with acid-free tissue to prevent moisture build-up. Neatly fold sweaters and knitted garments, stacking them in the case with the heaviest at the bottom. Place a sheet of acid-free tissue between each item. Cardboard boxes may be used for temporary storage. Do not use cardboard for long term storage as it invites moisture and insects. Do not use sealable, air tight plastic storage containers as heat and moisture may cause mildew.

Never leave clothing in the plastic cleaner bags. Plastic can cause discoloration and decrease airflow. To keep clothing dust-free, it can be wrapped in pillowcases, a clean white sheet or acid-free tissue. There are excellent canvas wardrobe storage containers; some even have built in cedar inserts. These are good, breathable,
moisture free containers for out-of-season storage.

It is important to keep your garments away from heat and humidity and moths. Do not crowd your out-of-season clothing closely together. Heat and humidity can cause mildew and damage to your clothing. Store everything in a cool, dark, clean and dry area. Basements may be damp and are not a good choice. Avoid air-conditioning or heating ducts or furnaces; the gases, fumes and heat can fade colors and damage material. Sunlight and heat can cause woolens to yellow and other items to fade.

Mothballs are popular when storing winter clothing, but be cautious with them; they can be harmful to children or pets if they are eaten and the odor can be difficult to remove from some fabrics. Natural substitutes like cedar blocks are a great way to keep your clothing safe and smelling fresh.

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**Portion Distortion - It's Not Just What You Eat, But How Much You Dish Out!**

Whether you're fighting to shed pounds or maintain a healthy weight, forget about trying the latest fad dish or wasting money on questionable diet supplements. Instead, look at the portions on your plate. If you're struggling with your weight, it could be you're getting a bit sloppy when it comes to your eyeballing abilities.

It's not all your fault. Over the past few decades, American serving sizes have swollen tremendously. According to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, the average fast-food cheeseburger has gone from 333 calories 20 years ago to nearly 600 calories today. And a spaghetti and meatball dinner that packed 500 calories 20 years ago now boasts more than twice as many calories. Unless you increase physical activity-and most Americans have not-you're going to gain weight eating these larger meals.

If you suspect you're eating more than you need, try these tips:

- **Measurer or weigh your portion.** You may be pouring out two servings of cereal instead of one or eating double portions of pasta at dinner.

- **Fool your eyes.** Use small cereal bowls or lunch plates instead of larger dinner plates to cut down on portions.

- **Satisfy your stomach with lighter choices.** Fill up on low-calorie foods like salads, vegetables and broth-based soups.

- **Learn the calorie count of your favorite foods.** That alone may help you put the brakes on!

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**Put Your Sleep Problems To Rest**

Do you often catch yourself yawning in the middle of the day? Do you fall asleep watching TV or movies just as the plot thickens? Have you caught yourself dosing at work or behind the wheel? Three-quarters of American adults report at least one symptom of a sleep problem, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Fortunately, you can prevent or treat many sleep difficulties.

If you're having trouble getting a good night's sleep, try these tips:

- **Establish a strict bedtime and stick to it.** Help condition your body to sleep at a regular time.
- **Avoid long naps.** Ten to 15 minute naps are ideal. Longer naps can rob you of nighttime slumber.

- **Exercise.** Regular physical activity works as an excellent relaxing agent. But be careful not to exercise two to three hours before bedtime, you may get the opposite result.

- **Avoid caffeine and nicotine four to six hours before bedtime.** They act as stimulants and can cause restlessness.

- **Avoid heavy snacks high in protein, fat or sugar and those that are acidic.** A light carbohydrate, such as a banana or glass of milk, is better before bedtime.

- **Relax.** Unwinding is key to good sleep. Try reading a book or listening to soothing music before you go to bed or soak in a warm bath to de-stress muscles.

- **Make your bedroom a haven for slumber.** Have comfortable sheets, pillows and blankets. Adjust the room temperature so you're not too cold or hot. Cover windows well to block out light. While in bed, turn off the TV and put away your magazine or work.

Seeking professional help: If your sleep problem is chronic or these tips don't work, talk to your doctor. Help him or her find the root of your trouble by providing as much information as possible. Make a list of all the physical and mental complaints you have, as well as all medications you're currently taking.

List your lifestyle habits, such as eating, drinking and smoking. More information your doctor has, the easier he can help.

## May Spotlight

### 4-H Is Soaring To New Heights

**Summer 2008**

The 4-H motto is "To Make the Best Better", so make the best better by enrolling now to learn something new and meet new people. The 4-H office along with those giving leadership to the activities hope you have an enjoyable summer and invite youth ages 5 - 19 to take advantage of the many opportunities offered in the Avenues of Interest Summer Program. We invite you to join us for an exciting summer!!! Any youth in Onslow County may enroll in one or more workshops, you do not have to be a 4-H'er to register, just come by the 4-H office at 4024 Richlands Hwy. Jacksonville. Call us at 455-5873 or you can also check our web site to see if classes are full (http://onslow.ces.state.nc.us/). All programs have a registration fee which must be paid when you register.

Registration will not be held at the workshop or activity. Make checks payable to NCCES-ONSLOW COUNTY CENTER. All monies collected are used for supplies and or instructor fees. Again, do not miss out on an exciting summer of 4-H activities.

Robin Taylor
Extension Agent
Family & Consumer Science

Peggie L. Garner
Onslow County Extension Director