

#26694



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

MAR 17 2011

The Honorable John Kline
Chairman
Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The enclosed report responds to the directive contained in section 749(g) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-80) for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to submit an annual report to Congress detailing the progress it has made in using \$85 million to develop and test methods of providing access to food for low-income children in urban and rural areas during the summer months, when schools are not in regular session.

An important challenge for the Nation's nutrition assistance programs is reaching children in need during the summer months. Some research suggests that food insecurity increases over the summer months, when free and reduced-price school lunches and breakfasts are unavailable to most children who qualify for them.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created to provide nutrition benefits during the summer to children living in low-income areas. The SFSP enriches the lives of millions of low-income children during the summer, both by making nutritious food available and by providing resources that support summer education and recreation programs. Despite aggressive initiatives to promote the program and attempts to simplify its administration, SFSP has been unable to achieve the same level of program participation as school meal programs achieve during the school year. While approximately 19 million children receive free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program, only about 2.2 million children receive meals during the summer through the SFSP.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service developed a plan to fund a multi-phased demonstration approach to test different strategies to improve program participation—both enhancements to the current SFSP, and completely new ways of providing nutrition assistance to children in the summer. The report provides an overview of USDA's plans to conduct and evaluate multi-year, multi-phased summer demonstration projects; information on USDA communications with various stakeholders about these demonstrations; and the status of each demonstration project and evaluation activity.

The Honorable John Kline
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I appreciate your strong commitment to the child nutrition programs. A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "V".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

Enclosure

Report on the Summer Food for Children Demonstration Projects For Fiscal Year 2010

U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service

A Report to Congress

INTRODUCTION

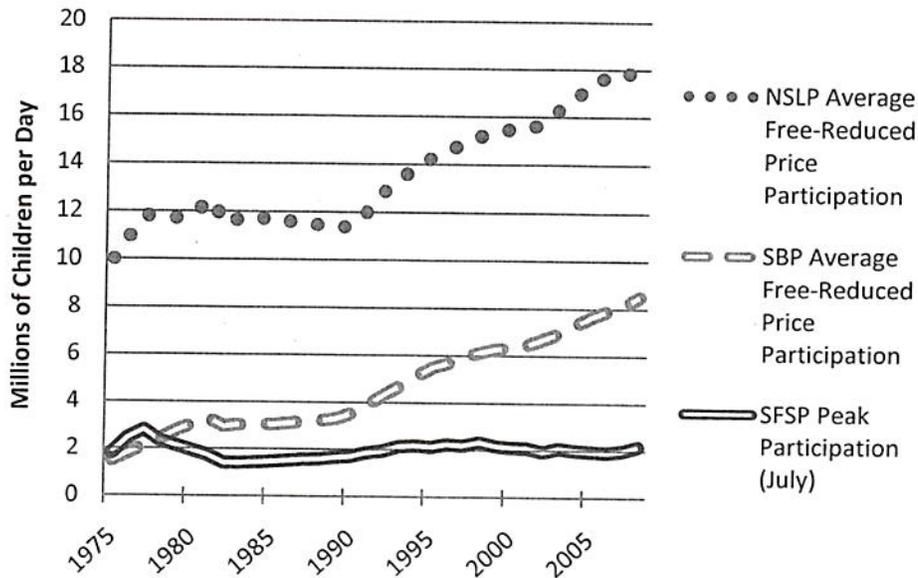
This report fulfills the directive by Congress contained in section 749(g) of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-80) for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to submit an annual report to Congress detailing the progress it has made in using \$85 million to develop and test alternative methods of providing access to food for low-income children in urban and rural areas during the summer months, when schools are not in regular session. It provides an overview of USDA's plans to conduct and evaluate multi-year, multi-phased summer demonstration projects; information on USDA communications with various stakeholders about these demonstrations; and the status of each demonstration project and evaluation activity.

BACKGROUND

An important challenge for the Nation's nutrition assistance programs is reaching children in need during the summer months, when school is not in session. Some research suggests that food insecurity increases over the summer months, when free and reduced-price school lunches and breakfasts are unavailable to most children who qualify for them.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created to provide nutrition benefits during the summer to children living in low-income areas. The SFSP enriches the lives of millions of low-income children during the summer, both by making nutritious food available and by providing resources that support summer education and recreation programs. Despite aggressive initiatives to promote the program and attempts to simplify its administration, SFSP has been unable to achieve the same level of program participation as school meal programs, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), achieve during the school year. While approximately 19 million children receive free or reduced price meals through the NSLP, only about 2.2 million children receive meals during the summer through the SFSP.

**Trends in Average Daily Participation:
Summer Food Service Program vs. School Meals, 1975-2008**



In October 2009, Congress appropriated \$85 million to develop and test additional methods of providing access to food for low-income children in urban and rural areas during the summer months, when schools are not in regular session. USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) developed a plan to fund a multi-phased demonstration approach to test different strategies to improve program participation—both enhancements to the current SFSP, and completely new ways of providing nutrition assistance to children in the summer. This initial annual report to Congress describes progress made during fiscal year 2010.

PLANNING

Identifying the Problem

FNS began its planning by reviewing a wide variety of causes for low SFSP participation identified by State, local, research, and advocacy partners, as well as potential solutions. From this assessment, four issues emerged consistently:

- The most successful SFSP sites are typically those that offer other activities, in addition to meal services, that attract children to the sites. However, because sponsors are not allowed to use SFSP funds to pay for these activities, and many sponsors do not have their own resources to fund activities, they are often unable to provide these activities.

- For some sponsors, financial limitations and other constraints make it difficult to operate SFSP sites for more than limited periods of time, thereby limiting access to meals by children who need them.
- SFSP sponsors in rural areas frequently struggle to achieve the levels of participation needed at congregate feeding sites to sustain services, either because children cannot travel long distances to the sites, or because there are simply not enough children in the area of a site.
- While SFSP sites reach millions of children while they are open and serving meals, most SFSP sites do not operate 7 days a week, and children may be at risk of hunger during the days that meals are not served.

Beyond these issues, the traditional SFSP *facility-based* program faces some basic structural limitations that differ from school meal service in important ways: they are accessible to only a fraction of eligible children, attendance is not mandatory, facilities are not consistently open every week, and feeding sites may change location during the summer. While SFSP is critically important for the children it can serve during the periods it operates, FNS recognized that additional approaches—ones that do not rely on facility-based feeding arrangements but go directly to *households*—were worthy of exploration and evaluation.

Multi-phased Demonstration Plan

To address the issues above, FNS developed a demonstration plan that couples multiple approaches to program improvement with a rigorous evaluation:

- Phase 1: SFSP Activity and Length of Operation Incentives (summers 2010 and 2011) to address the funding limitations that limit enrichment activities that draw and sustain attendance at SFSP sites and the financial constraints that prevent some sponsors from staying open for long periods of time.
- Phase 2: SFSP Home Delivery and Food Backpacks (summers 2011 and 2012) to address the challenge of serving enough children to operate sustainably, and the risk of hunger that comes when sites are not open 7 days a week.
- Phase 3: Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC) using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) technology (summers 2011, 2012, and 2013). These demonstrations provide the additional approach to summer feeding needed by children not adequately served by congregate feeding sites.

Each phase of the demonstration projects also includes an evaluation component, which is described later in this report.

Communications with Stakeholders

As plans for the Summer Food for Children Demonstrations were being formulated, USDA consulted widely with stakeholders in the nutrition assistance and anti-hunger communities, as well as with technical experts about program operations. USDA used this information to develop a draft plan.

To ensure that stakeholders at various levels had information about the plan, FNS undertook a broad communications effort, reaching out to:

- Staff from Congressional Committees and member offices with an interest in FNS programs, including Senate and House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees; the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; the House Committee on Agriculture; and the House Committee on Education and Labor.
- State governments and State government associations, including the National Governors Association, National Conference of State Legislatures, and State Directors of Child Nutrition, SNAP, and WIC.
- Nutrition assistance program associations, including the School Nutrition Association, the American Public Human Services Association, and the National WIC Association.
- Other advocacy organizations, such as Food Research and Action Center, Feeding America, Share Our Strength, Bread for the World, Mazon, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Stakeholders involved in electronic benefit transfer (EBT) systems, including the Electronic Funds Transfer Association.

In addition to several conference call briefings, USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack and Under Secretary Kevin Concannon for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services also discussed and promoted the demonstrations at several speaking engagements, and sent letters to Governors and State Commissioners of Education, Agriculture, Health, and Human Services, urging them to consider applying for one or more of the demonstration project opportunities.

DEMONSTRATION AND EVALUATION STATUS

Phase 1: SFSP Activity and Length of Operation Incentives (summers 2010 and 2011)

Project Overview

Activity Incentive Project:

This demonstration project provides funding to support enrichment or recreational activities to engage children at approved SFSP meal service sites for all SFSP sponsors in the selected States that plan and implement them. Currently, funding from SFSP cannot be used to support enrichment activities. This demonstration provides grant funds they can use to pay for activities. The goal is to encourage more children to participate through the provision of enrichment activities. Eligible sponsors must provide activities for children at sites on most, if not all, days of operation. Some examples of activities eligible for this incentive include but are not limited

to: sports, arts and crafts, tutoring, games, lessons, and playing music. These incentive funds may also be used in part for any sponsor or site staff costs incurred from adding these activities.

Extending Length of Operation Incentive Project:

The goal of this demonstration project is to help sponsors afford staying open longer so they can feed children in their communities for as long a portion of the summer as possible. This demonstration project provides additional funding to all eligible sponsors in the selected States that agree to operate meal service sites for a minimum of 40 days in the summer. This number of days was selected because it is a large portion of the typical summer break from the school year. An additional 50-cent reimbursement is provided for each lunch served at sites that are open for this length of time or longer.

Grant Solicitation

In accordance with the demonstration projects' goal to improve access and reduce food insecurity, FNS used data on food insecurity and rates of participation in SFSP to target a limited number of States as eligible applicants for the first phase of the demonstration projects. The 10 States designated as eligible for the summer 2010 demonstration projects had a combination of the highest rates of food insecurity among children and the lowest rates of summer meal participation. These States were: Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming.

On March 2, 2010, the Request for Applications (RFA) for SFSP Activity and Length of Operation Incentives demonstrations was released to the 10 eligible States to apply for the first phase of the summer demonstration projects. Eligible States were allowed to apply for either or both of the demonstration projects, but could be selected for only one project. Eight of the 10 eligible States applied for one or both of the 2010 summer demonstrations—four States applied for the Extending Length of Operation demonstration, and five applied for the Activity Incentive demonstration.

Awards

On May 10, 2010, FNS announced that Mississippi was selected for the Activity Incentive demonstration, and Arkansas was selected for the Extending Length of Operations Incentive demonstration. Mississippi received \$500,550 and Arkansas received \$687,943 to implement their awarded demonstration projects in summer 2010. They will receive additional funds to continue these projects through summer 2011.

Evaluation of the Phase 1 Demonstrations

The evaluation of the Phase 1 demonstrations has started and will determine the impact on participation and meal service; describe and document the process of project implementation; and determine and document the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations. Because States have until November to report data on the previous summer,

findings for the evaluation of the summer 2010 Phase 1 demonstrations are not yet available. FNS will issue a stand-alone report on the summer 2010 evaluation findings in 2011.

Phase 2: Home Delivery and Food Backpacks (summer 2011 and 2012)

Project Overview

Home Delivery Demonstration Project:

To address the challenges of SFSP congregate feeding in rural areas, the Home Delivery Demonstration Project will provide funding for approved sponsors in the selected State(s) to develop ways to deliver summer meals to eligible children in rural areas at a sustainable cost. This may include identification of and delivery to homes of children certified for free or reduced-price school meals, to drop-off sites where parents have been informed they or their eligible children can collect the meals for off-site consumption, or other methods of providing meals that are exempt from the congregate feeding requirement.

This demonstration project is not intended to fund mobile feeding sites or transporting children to a congregate meal site, as these efforts are already allowable costs in the SFSP. Rather, the intent of this demonstration is to evaluate if non-congregate meal service will increase SFSP participation and ensure a more consistent level of food security among rural, low-income children at a sustainable cost.

Food Backpack Demonstration Project:

This demonstration project will provide funding for approved sponsors in the selected State(s) to provide eligible children food backpacks to take home with meals to cover the days that SFSP meals are not available, typically on weekends. Approved sponsors must operate a congregate meal site under the SFSP for a majority of the week and use the backpacks to supplement the traditional meal service.

Backpacks are not intended to replace a congregate meal program nor reduce the number of days a congregate meal program operates. The goal of the Food Backpack Demonstration Project is to evaluate if providing a supply of nutritionally-balanced foods on the days that children do not receive meals through the congregate SFSP will help sustain levels of food security observed during the school year, when children have access to NSLP and SBP meals.

Grant Solicitation

The RFA was released to all State agencies that administer the SFSP on October 20, 2010. Applications were due to FNS on December 15, 2010, and are being evaluated. State agencies may apply for both demonstration projects, if interested, but will be selected for only one. Along with information on State-level administration of the demonstrations, each State agency's application to FNS includes information from eligible sponsors in the State interested in operating the demonstration project.

Awards

Awards for the Phase 2 demonstration projects are scheduled to be announced in February 2011. State agencies will be selected to participate in these demonstration projects based primarily on the merit of the proposals submitted by sponsors within the State.

Evaluation of the Phase 2 Demonstrations

The evaluation of the Phase 2 SFSP enhancement demonstrations will determine the impact of the meal delivery and backpack models on participation and meal service; assess food security among recipients of delivered meals and backpacks; determine targeting accuracy in the meal delivery and backpack demonstrations (e.g., did the food provided to households reach the intended participants?); describe and document the process of project implementation; and determine and document the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations.

Phase 3: Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children—SEBTC (summers 2011, 2012, and 2013)

Project Overview

The SEBTC demonstration will test a *household-based* method of delivering nutrition assistance to low-income children during the summer. There are two types of models that will be implemented—one that uses the SNAP EBT technology as the delivery mechanism, and one that uses WIC EBT technology.

The expectation is that school food authorities (SFAs) and State EBT, SNAP (or WIC), and school meal program officials will work together to arrange for the families of children certified to receive free or reduced price school meals to receive an electronic benefits card valid for use in the summer. Parents will use the card at SNAP-authorized food retailers to purchase SNAP-eligible food for their children to compensate for the loss of school meals during the summer. In the WIC model, parents will use the card at WIC-authorized food retailers to purchase a special WIC food package designed for school-age children. The ultimate objective is to reduce the level of summer food insecurity among children to a level at or below that of childhood food insecurity during the school year.

Summer 2011: Proof of Concept Model:

In summer 2011, FNS will implement proof-of-concept demonstrations to test the feasibility of delivering summer food benefits to school children via EBT technology. FNS selected Connecticut, Missouri, and Oregon to demonstrate the provision of household-based summer food benefits using SNAP EBT technology as the delivery mechanism, and Michigan and Texas to demonstrate the provision of household-based summer food benefits using WIC EBT technology. In the selected States, the demonstrations will operate in one or more contiguous SFAs within the State. Proposed demonstration areas will have 10,000 to 12,000 children certified for free or reduced-price meals but may vary in geographic size according to population density.

Summers 2012 and 2013:

If the proof-of-concept demonstrations are successful, FNS intends to expand SEBTC demonstrations to operate in up to 15 sites for summer 2012. These additional demonstrations are intended to evaluate whether the impact on food security of household-based delivery of summer benefits differs in urban and rural areas or varies by specific community and/or demonstration characteristics (such as region of the country, characteristics of the local school system, or different levels of benefit amount). A second RFA will be issued to offer the opportunity to expand demonstrations to more States and geographic areas in summer 2012.

Grant Solicitation

On August 9, 2010, the 2011 SEBTC RFA was released to all State Agency Directors and Commissioners that oversee school meals, SFSP, SNAP, and WIC. There were separate RFAs for the SNAP and WIC models. Letters were also sent to the Governor of every State encouraging them to apply and support interagency coordination in their States. Applications were due to FNS on October 29, 2010. Twelve States applied to participate in the demonstration project.

Awards

On December 11, 2010, FNS made awards to Michigan and Texas for operation of the SEBTC-WIC model, and to Connecticut, Missouri, and Oregon for the SEBTC-SNAP model.

Evaluation of the Phase 3 Demonstrations

An evaluation contract for the household-based demonstrations was awarded on November 29, 2010. It will assess the implementation of the SEBTC demonstrations as well as their impact on food security and nutritional status. The contract will cover the evaluation of both the SNAP model and the WIC model demonstrations. The objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Determine the operational feasibility of SEBTC-SNAP and SEBTC-WIC.
2. Determine the impact of participation in SEBTC-SNAP and SEBTC-WIC on the level of very low food security among children among demonstration participants.
3. Determine the impact of participation in SEBTC-SNAP and SEBTC-WIC on the nutritional status of demonstration participants.
4. Compare and contrast the impacts on very low food security and nutrition status among children for households that participate in SNAP versus households that do not participate in SNAP.
5. Determine how impacts on very low food security and nutrition status among children vary not only by the type of intervention (SEBTC-SNAP versus SEBTC-WIC), but by a range of participant and demonstration site characteristics.

6. Describe and document the process of project implementation.
7. Determine and document the total and component costs of implementing and operating the demonstrations.
8. Assess the impact of the availability of a summer benefit on the aggregate number of children or households certified for or participating in NSLP, SBP, SNAP, and SFSP.

NEXT STEPS

FNS is working closely with demonstration awardees and its evaluation contractor to prepare for operations in the summer of 2011. When all projects are fully implemented, these demonstrations could serve as many as 75,000 to 100,000 children in as many as 25 communities with innovative approaches to address the nutrition gap during the summer.

SCHEDULE								
Demonstration	2009/10 School Year	Summer 2010	2010/11 School Year	Summer 2011	2011/12 School Year	Summer 2012	2012/13 School Year	Summer 2013
			Status Report to Congress (December)		Status Report to Congress (December)		Status Report to Congress (December)	
SFSP Enhancements								
Incentives to Extend Duration of SFSP Site Operations	Grants to: Arkansas	First Year Operations	Evaluation Report on 2010 Demos (Spring)	Continued Operations	Evaluation Report on 2010/11 Demos (Spring)	Continued Operations	Evaluation Report on 2011/12 Demos (Spring)	
Funding for Enrichment Activities at SFSP Sites	Mississippi							
Meal Delivery in Rural Areas			Grant awards TBD	First Year Operations	Evaluation Report on 2011 Demos (Spring)	Continued Operations	Evaluation Report on 2011/12 Demos (Spring)	
"Backpack" Food Packages for Days Site Not Open								
Household-based Approaches								
Demonstrations of Summer Child Nutrition Benefits delivered through SNAP and WIC- EBT technology			Grant awards TBD	"Proof-of- Concept" Operations	Evaluation Report on 2011 Demos (Spring)	"Full" Operations & More States	Evaluation Report on 2011/12 Demos (Spring)	Continued Operations (dependent on funding)