United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

# EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF INCENTIVES DEMONSTRATIONS ON PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM (SFSP): FY 2010 ARKANSAS AND MISSISSIPPI

**Office of Research and Analysis** **September 2011**

## Background

Pursuant to the 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Act, FNS initiated and carried out the Summer Food for Children demonstration project, aimed at preventing food insecurity and hunger among children during summer months. The project includes the "eSFSP" demonstrations, which are testing the impact of a number of enhancements to the existing Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the "Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children" (SEBTC) demonstrations, which will test a household-based benefit provided to families with children during the summer months.

The eSFSP demonstrations include four separate initiatives, two of which began in summer 2010 with two more planned for launch in summer 2011. This report presents findings from the 2010 eSFSP demonstrations in Arkansas and Mississippi:

- The Arkansas demonstration offered per-lunch incentives to encourage SFSP providers (sponsors) to operate for a greater portion of the summer.
- The Mississippi demonstration offered new recreational or educational activities at SFSP feeding sites to induce higher levels of low-income child participation.

## Methods

State and Federal administrative data were used to compare six outcomes thought to be associated with reductions in food insecurity. Four measures were assessed in both States:

- A measure of the average number of children served per day (ADA)
- Summer lunches as a percent of school-year lunches (participation rate)
- Total meals served by SFSP in 2010
- The number of SFSP sponsors and sites

Two measures linked to the specific intervention were also assessed:

- In Arkansas, the number of days of operation, and
- In Mississippi, the number and types of activities offered

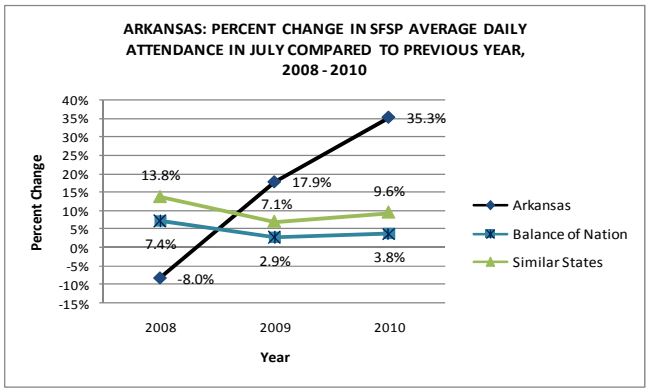
The findings for Arkansas and Mississippi were compared to similar measures for the balance of the Nation, and for the group of eight other States that were eligible to apply for these two incentives demonstrations (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming).

## Findings

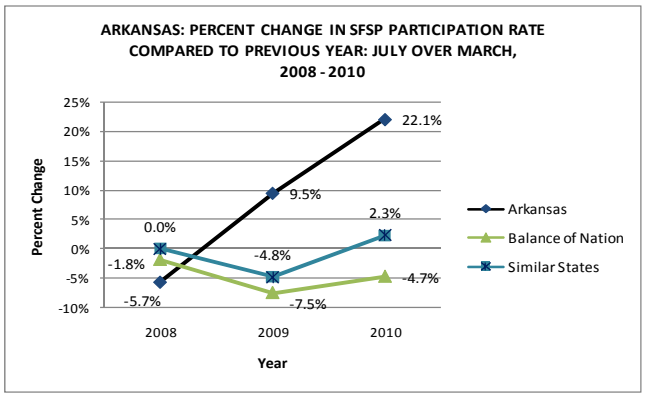
### Arkansas

Arkansas did not demonstrate use of incentives in isolation. Instead, the State used Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Contingency funds to add a transportation component and to allow adults to eat summer meals with their children. The TANF funds were more than triple the incentives funds. The transportation component may have induced site operators to remain open for more of the summer, independent of the FNS per-meal incentives. The Arkansas findings below reflect the effects of transportation and adult meal subsidies as well as per-meal incentives. In the eight comparison States, seven did not use TANF funds to support SFSP activities and one provided only a small amount.

- ADA in July increased by 35.3 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to just 9.6 percent in similar States.




- The participation rate increased by 22.1 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to 2.3 percent in similar States.

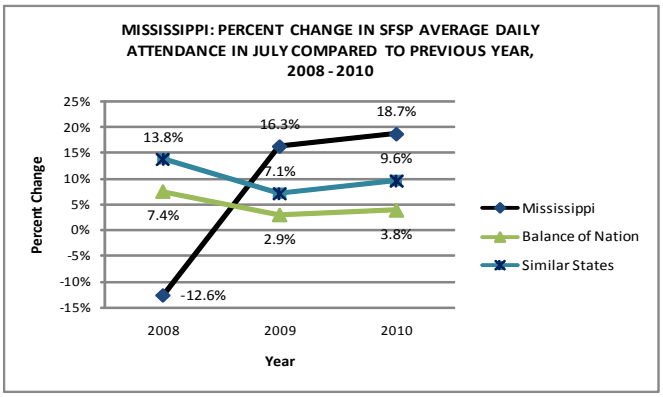


- Total July meals served increased by 36.5 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to a 4.9 percent increase in similar States over the same time period.
- The number of sponsors almost tripled (from 110 in 2009 to 306 in 2010).
- Among all SFSP feeding sites within the State, the median number of days open increased from 24.5 days in 2009 to 28 days in 2010.

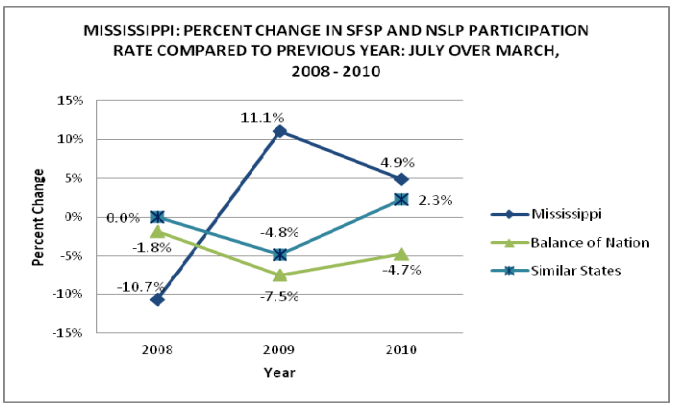
**Mississippi**

Mississippi encountered significant challenges in setting up the demonstration, which delayed the start date of the sponsors' activities. As a result, only about half of the sites that were approved for mini-grants actively participated in the demonstration. The following findings were based on all sites in Mississippi.

- ADA in July increased by 18.7 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to 9.6 percent in similar States.




- The participation rate increased by 4.9 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to the 2.3 percent increase in similar States.




- Total July meals served increased by 16.7 percent from 2009 to 2010, compared to a 4.9 percent increase in similar States over the same time period.
- The number of SFSP sponsors throughout the State increased by 5.1 percent between 2009 and 2010 (from 117 in 2009 to 123 in 2010).
- All of the 22 actively participating demonstration sites that used incentive funding implemented some type of new activity.

## Summary

While each State showed improvement over a number of outcomes, it is important to note that there are many factors external to the program changes demonstrated that could influence the estimates shown in this report, such as other sources of funding, delays in demonstration setup, State outreach efforts, local economic factors, and other issues. It is difficult to disaggregate the effects of the demonstrations from confounding factors that may have impacted demand for the SFSP. The results of this initial year of these demonstrations (2010) need to be carefully viewed in that context.

Nonetheless, the changes observed are consistent with a generally positive impact of measures of SFSP service levels.

The full report[1] is available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis

[1]Peterson, A., Geller, D., Moulton, B.E., Suchman, A., Haddix, D. (2011). *Evaluation of the Impact of Incentives Demonstrations on Participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP): FY 2010 Arkansas and Mississippi.* Prepared by Insight Policy Research under Contract No. AG-3198-B-10-0011. Alexandria, VA: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.
Project Officer, Dr. Chan Chanhatasilpa. Alexandria, VA: May 2011.

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