

Improve Access to Nutritious Food

ACHIEVEMENTS: USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers an array of Federal nutrition assistance programs that provide access to nutritious food for eligible children and low-income families, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Child Nutrition Programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). All of these continued to reach their eligible populations at high rates:

- SNAP is the Nation's largest nutrition assistance program, serving 45.4 million people in September 2015. The latest study shows that in 2013, of nearly 51 million individuals eligible for SNAP benefits in an average month in FY 2013, approximately 43 million participated (85 percent), and more than 7 million did not, a participation rate of 85 percent.
- During the school day over 51 million children attend schools operating the National School Lunch Program with over 30 million children participating each day. Of the 30 million children participating, over 21 million are receiving free or reduced price lunches each day. USDA met its target of increasing the annual percentage of eligible people participating in the National School Lunch Program to 55% in FY 2015. FNS is focusing on implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which provides an alternative to household applications for free and reduced price meals in high poverty LEAs and schools. As of July 1, 2014, the provision became available nationwide to eligible LEAs. Beginning in SY 2015-16, schools or districts in all 50 states and the District of Columbia will participate in CEP.
- The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) works with the school meals programs to provide nutritious meals to children in low-income areas and in residential camps during the summer months, and at other times when school is not in session. FNS provided enhanced technical assistance with 13 identified Target States in 2015. Additional efforts in 2015 included expanding technical assistance state projects, advancing Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping technologies for strategic targeting for outreach and promotion, continuing year round summer partner engagement and further cultivating the sustainability of the program. Successful partnerships built in 2014 and expanded in 2015 included Rural Development, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), libraries, and Feed the Children.
- SNAP payment accuracy was 96.34 percent in 2014, the latest year for which data are available. The number reflects the excellent performance by State agencies in administering the program. This combined rate reflects 2.96 percent in overpayments and 0.70 percent in underpayments for a total of 3.66 percent in erroneous payments. Forty-five States had a payment accuracy rate greater than 94 percent, including 24 States with rates greater than 96 percent. There were 5 fewer States with greater than 96 percent accuracy from the previous year.

CHALLENGES: The SFSP is still reaching only a fraction of the children in need of nutrition assistance when school is out. Challenges include outreach to eligible children, identifying viable site sponsors and transportation of food. The Summer EBT program, where eligible households receive a supplement to their SNAP or WIC EBT card, is a highly successful strategy

for reaching substantial proportions of eligible children and significantly reducing food insecurity. A rigorous evaluation indicated that SEBTC is a highly effective model for addressing food insecurity among children. Results from the 2012 implementation indicate that SEBTC can reach a significant proportion of children eligible for free/reduced price school meals, that it reduced the most severe form of childhood hunger by a third, and that SEBTC-participating children ate more healthfully.

The prevalence of food insecurity in households with children has remained relatively constant since rising to 21 percent in 2008 from 15.8 percent in 2007. There is a need for developing and implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce the prevalence of food insecurity in households with children. Section 141 of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 authorized the development of a research program to study the causes and consequences of childhood hunger and food insecurity. The HHFKA also provided funding to conduct demonstration projects designed to reduce childhood hunger and food insecurity. The alignment of the timeline for the annual performance measure with the availability of the annual food security statistics is also a challenge. The actual measure for 2015 will be released in September 2016.