

Summer Food Service Program

Overview

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) federal food assistance program. In conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), USDA provides money (reimbursement) to organizations (sponsors) that serve meals that meet the SFSP nutritional guidelines to eligible children. These meals are served free mainly to low-income children 18 and younger in geographically eligible areas and to disabled individuals over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs.

Sponsor Eligibility

SFSP sponsors can be:

- Public or private nonprofit school food authorities
- Public or private summer camps
- Units of local, municipal, county, tribal or State governments
- Public or private colleges or universities that provide pre-college programs to children
- Private nonprofit organizations.

A sponsor must be fully capable of managing a food service program, follow regulations, and be financially and administratively responsible for running its program. Sponsors typically serve one to two meals per day at sites - physical locations, approved by the DPI.

Participant Eligibility

There are different types of sites: open, restricted open, closed enrolled, camp, and migrant. Open sites are located in geographic areas where at least 50% of the children are approved for free and reduced price school meals during the regular school year OR as determined through census tract data. Once an open site qualifies, any child 18 and under can come to the site to receive a free meal, regardless of income.

Children attending residential or day camps are eligible only if they are income eligible for free or reduced price meals during the regular school year. This is determined by households providing income information to the sponsoring organization.

Access/Participation

In summer 2006, 96 agencies sponsored the Summer Food Service Program for Children at over 450 locations throughout Wisconsin. Approximately 13% of the children in Wisconsin that receive a free or reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Program received a free SFSP lunch during the summer's highest month of participation. All 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands participate in the SFSP.

Benefit Details

Wisconsin's Summer Food sites served 1.5 million meals to children 18 and under. In July, 2006 (the highest month of participation) over 25,000 meals were served each day. Sponsors

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statewide received a total of over \$3 million dollars to operate the Program in 2006. Wisconsin ranked 27th in terms of the number of meals served in 2005.

Program Impact

Summer Food ensures that schools, camps and community organizations that provide enrichment, recreational and educational activities to low-income children during summer months, have the financial resources to provide healthy meals. SFSP provides essential nutrition to children in low-income neighborhoods and programs during the summer when school meals are widely unavailable. Additionally SFSP also helps to stabilize and increase participation at summer recreational and enrichment programs by providing children with the added incentive of nutritious meals.

Positive Developments & Trends

Increasing participation in the SFSP has been a top priority nationwide during the past 5 years. A reduction in the burden of program administration has been implemented in 26 states. The 13 original states that participated in the Simplified Summer Food Program from 2004-2005 saw an overall increase in participation of 7.9 percent. In 2006 Wisconsin was selected to participate and experienced a increase of 9.7% in meals served.

Concerns, Problems & Negative Trends

- Despite the increased participation in Wisconsin, too few low-income children have access to the SFSP. Only 13% of low-income children who participated in free or reduced price meals in the School Lunch program during the school year also received Summer Food meals during some portion of the summer.
- There are areas of the state that qualify, but do not participate for a variety of reasons.
- Some areas have pockets of poverty that do not meet the minimum 50% free/reduced price meal threshold for participation, effectively preventing low-income children in those areas from receiving the SFSP nutritional supports.
- Many sponsors, including schools, operate the program only for a portion of the summer, sometimes only a few weeks. This leaves children without meals during unserved months.
- For many sponsors the funds are simply not enough to cover the cost of operation.
- Rural areas face special challenges because of high transportation costs and fewer summer programs for children where meals could be served.

Summer Food would be more effective if...

- It was available to more children in more areas of the state. This could be accomplished by changing federal rules to enable children to participate if they reside in geographic areas in which 40% of students qualify for free/reduced price meals, instead of the current 50%.
- An aggressive outreach effort is undertaken to inform the public of SFSP benefits. In communities where the poverty is greatest, education is needed to show the importance of summer nutrition for their children's health and well-being.
- Special efforts need to be made to engage rural communities in participating in SFSP.