



**OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET**
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ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: Summer Food Access in Rural Ohio

In Ohio today, more than 529,000 children live in food insecure homes. Ohio ranks 14th highest for childhood food insecurity in the nation (Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap 2018). In rural areas, such as Southeast Ohio, food insecurity is even higher, with 1 in 4 children living in food insecure homes. In the summer months, when these children lose access to their safety net of school breakfasts and lunches, they are at greater risk of not having enough to eat.

Policy

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), provides funding to operate meal sites for children and teens in low-income areas when school is out.
- State agencies administer the program on behalf of the USDA. In Ohio, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is the administering agency.
- Sponsors such as schools, local government agencies, faith-based groups, and other non-profit community organizations enter into agreements with ODE to operate the program and are reimbursed a per meal cost through the SFSP.
- Meal sites are located in a variety of settings including schools, parks, community centers, health clinics, hospitals, apartment complexes, churches and migrant centers. They offer a safe and supervised environment for children 18 and younger to receive meals free of charge.

Challenges

- In the summer, SFSP requires all meals to be consumed at a congregate feeding site to qualify for the federal reimbursement.
- In very rural areas, such as Vinton County, there are limited options for congregate meal sites. Few children are within walking distance and the lack of reliable transportation restricts access to sites that are accessible only by car.



- These transportation challenges make it very difficult to provide food access to children that not only qualify for the SFSP meals but desperately need access to food.
- For example, in Vinton county, one of the most impoverished counties in Ohio, there are 1,914 children that qualify for free- or reduced-price meals. However, an average of only 110 children per month (or less than 6 percent) accessed an SFSP congregate meal site in the summer of 2018. A staggering 94 percent of children at risk for food insecurity in Vinton county did not access the program.

Opportunities

Ohio could do more with SFSP if the USDA's demonstration project, which grants exceptions for summer congregate feeding, were considered for rural food access. In 2018 the USDA only considered exception requests for extreme weather such as excessive heat, and for violence.

The Summer Meals Program administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services on behalf of the Governor's Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives (GOFBCI) has implemented innovative solutions to help overcome these challenges in rural areas. The program consists of three individual initiatives designed to combat hunger and food insecurity by increasing the availability of food for children and improving their access to it in the summer months.

1. In 2017, the Summer Rural Delivery Meals Program provided 277,200 pounds of shelf-stable meals to over 2,800 children in 10 rural counties, primarily in Southeast Ohio.
2. The Summer Weekend Meals Program provided 600,000 meals to children in 26 urban and rural counties.
3. The Mobile Farmers Market Program provided 860,211 pounds of fresh produce to children enrolled in the Rural Delivery and Summer Weekend Meals Program.

The USDA has awarded Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demonstration grants to 12 states and tribal nations since 2011. Through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the grants provide a monthly benefit to eligible children during the summer. The program is designed to help overcome the unique summer feeding challenges facing rural communities. Findings from the 2011-2014 demonstration projects showed that SEBTC reduced the prevalence of food insecurity by nearly 20 percent. For FY 2019, the USDA received \$28 million in additional appropriations for summer demonstration grants, which had to be applied for by early January 2019.

Support Child Well-Being: Recommendations

- In conjunction with ODE and contingent on continued demonstration fund availability, submit a request to USDA for consideration of a demonstration project for non-congregate feeding for rural summer food access.
- With excess TANF funds available, continue and expand the initiatives and increase funding for the GOFBCI Summer Meals Program appropriated in the current State of Ohio FY 2018-19 biennial budget. The program is currently funded at \$2.8 million, through State ALI 600-689 TANF Block grant, within the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services budget. Allow for separate bids for the current three or any added components of the Summer Meals Program instead of requiring one vendor for all components of the program. This will allow for increased competition and program diversity.
- Work with Ohio's congressional delegation to increase flexibility of the four TANF purposes to enhance summer food access when Congress considers TANF reauthorization in the 116th Congress.
- Request USDA funding, if made available, through the Ohio Department of Education in FY 2020 and FY 2021 for the SEBTC demonstration grants to address summer food access in rural Ohio.

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