



# ANTI-HUNGER POLICY PLATFORM

*For New York State and City  
2007 – 2012*

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# LIST OF SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS\*

Alianza Dominicana  
Ammi Evangelical Baptist Church  
Blanche Memorial Church  
Broadway Community Inc. (BCI)  
Brooklyn AIDS Task Force  
Brooklyn Rescue Mission  
Cathedral Community Cares  
Central Harlem Sobering Up Station, Inc.  
Chance for Children  
Child Development Support Corporation  
Christian Fellowship Life Center Food Pantry  
Church of God Feeding the Hungry  
City Harvest, Inc.  
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun  
Council of Jewish Orgs of S.I.  
Crown Ministries International Inc.  
East 233rd Street Senior Center  
EJD PLACE  
Episcopal Charities  
Feed the Solution  
First A.M.E. Bethel Church  
FOCUS Churches of Albany  
Food Bank For New York City  
Food Bank for Westchester County, Food-PATCH  
Food Bank of Central New York  
Food Bank of the Southern Tier  
FoodChange  
Foodlink  
Fraternite Notre Dame  
Full Gospel Tabernacle of Faith  
Glenridge Senior Citizen Multi Service & Advisory Center  
Grand Concourse Community Service  
Hanac Ravenswood NORC  
Hands on New York, Inc.  
Helping Hands Food Pantry  
Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen  
Hope Center Development Corporation  
HopeLine Resource Center for Community Development, Inc.  
Hour Children  
Hunger Action Network of New York State (HANNYS)  
Island Harvest  
Jackson Heights SDA Church Community Services  
Jewish Community Center of Staten Island  
Lenox Hill Neighborhood House  
Little Mt. Bethel Baptist Church  
Long Island Cares  
Macedonia Church of Christ  
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty  
Moore Residence Home, Inc.  
Neighbors Together  
New Gethsemane B.C. Soup Kitchen  
New Haven S.D.A. Temple  
New York City Coalition Against Hunger (NYCCAH)  
New York City Emergency Food & Shelter Program  
Nutrition Consortium of NYS  
Part of the Solution (POTS)  
Path of Blessing  
Project Hospitality  
Reaching-Out Community Services, Inc.  
Reflection of God Ministry  
Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York  
Rescue Ministries Inc.  
Sacred Heart of Jesus Church  
Saint Benedict the Moor Neighborhood Center, Inc.  
Shout for Joy Baptist Church, Inc.  
St. Edward Food Pantry  
St. John's Bread and Life Program, Inc.  
St. Mary's Episcopal Church Soup Kitchen/Food Pantry  
Stapleton U.A.M.E. Church  
The Father's Heart Ministries  
The Momentum Project, Inc.  
Thorpe Family Residence  
United Methodist Center  
Village Temple Soup Kitchen  
United Way of NYC Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH)  
World Hunger Year  
Yorkville Common Pantry

\* as of June 2007

# INTRODUCTION

Released in September 2006, the Anti-Hunger Policy Platform for New York City and State, 2007 – 2012, was developed by a collective of leading city and state anti-hunger organizations. The platform addresses specific federal, state and city hunger-related policies and funding and outlines a comprehensive set of near- and long-term policies that inform the advocacy efforts of each supporting organization, as well as broader policy discussions in the food, hunger and nutrition sector.

Noting that close to one in five New Yorkers is living below the federal poverty level, and more than 1.2 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food, the platform's proposals are designed to:

- ◆ In the near-term, address more than five years of cuts in government funding for emergency food services, by securing multi-year increases in the following federal, state and city emergency food programs: USDA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), the New York State Department of Health's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).
- ◆ Address obstacles to full participation of eligible New Yorkers in government nutrition programs, such as the federal Food Stamp Program, by streamlining the processes of, enhancing coordination among and supporting increased access to government nutrition programs to maximize enrollment.
- ◆ In the long-term, address the lack of permanent and local access to affordable, nutritious food in low-income communities with new City and State initiatives to expand and fund farmers markets, community supported agriculture projects and local grocery stores, increase the supply of fresh food in local food stores, food cooperatives and emergency and community food programs and support enhanced nutrition, education and financial services programs for low-income individuals.
- ◆ Ensure coordination of all services and policy relating to food, hunger and nutrition issues and achieve the policy recommendations outlined within this policy platform by creating City and State Offices of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy.

*\*In November 2006, the Mayor announced the creation of a Food Policy Coordinator to oversee food, hunger and nutrition issues in the city.*

In addition to recommending specific policies to reduce hunger and expand financial education, the platform lends support to other initiatives that seek long-term socioeconomic sustainability, such as: the creation and maintenance of affordable housing; a living wage with benefits; affordable and comprehensive universal healthcare; open and equal access to education and training; career advancement opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed; affordable, accessible transportation; high quality affordable childcare; and a more progressive tax code.

As a living document, the platform will be revised regularly in the coming years to account for changes in government policies, shifts in the economic climate and the availability of funding sources. The platform expresses a unified voice on hunger policy and represents a concrete coalition of groups determined to eliminate hunger and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food.

# SUMMARY

## Select Federal Policy Recommendations

### Farm Bill 2007

#### ***The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)***

TEFAP distributes surplus commodity food to low-income families and individuals:

- ◆ Increase TEFAP entitlement funding to \$250 million, adjusting for inflation in future years. Increase the TEFAP storage and distribution grant to \$100 million.
- ◆ Maintain the current process for States to administer the program, without adding bureaucratic barriers that would result in increased administrative costs and make it difficult for small emergency food programs to access TEFAP commodities.

#### ***Food Stamp Program (FSP)***

FSP provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income families and individuals for the purchase of nutritious foods:

- ◆ Restore eligibility for all documented immigrants.
- ◆ Increase the resource limit and the list of exempt saving categories.
- ◆ Calculate benefit allotment using a more accurate and up-to-date measurement.
- ◆ Eliminate the face-to-face interview in favor of alternative methods of gathering and verifying information.
- ◆ Simplify household access to food stamps and public health insurance simultaneously, through combined application and outreach efforts, and by eliminating or minimizing work requirements.
- ◆ Prohibit the ability of states to require finger-imaging in order to receive FSP benefits.

#### ***Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)***

CSFP provides food packages specifically designed for low-income populations. Elderly adults age 60 and older account for 90 percent of program participants.

- ◆ Restructure CSFP to reflect its role as the national senior nutrition program, including renaming the program the "National Senior Nutrition Program", operating initially as a pilot with the goal of increasing funding to expand the program to all 50 states and all counties.

#### ***The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)***

SFMNP provides annual benefits to low-income elderly adults.

- ◆ Authorize the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program as an entitlement program with independent sources of funding.

## **The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)**

EFSP funding subsidizes meals, groceries, lodging at shelters and other programs, one month's rent or mortgage payment, one month's utility bill, repairs for program facilities and necessary equipment.

- ◆ Increase funding by 42 percent over the next five years, to a FY 2012 funding level of \$214.59 million.

## **Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP)**

CFNP funds the coordination of food assistance resources, the identification of potential sponsors for child nutrition programs and other programs in underserved areas, and the development of innovative approaches to meet the nutritional needs of low-income people.

- ◆ Fully fund CFNP at \$7.28 million.

## **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)**

WIC supplies low-income infants, children and pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women with vouchers for food, nutrition counseling, health screening and referrals for health and others services.

- ◆ Fund WIC at a level that allows the program to be fully implemented without a reduction of services and change WIC into an entitlement program with an independent source of funding.

## **National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs**

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs provide cash and commodities to public and private schools, as a form of reimbursement for lunches and breakfasts.

- ◆ Appropriate increased funding for: meal reimbursements; start-up and expansion grants; administrative costs; and outreach to families with children.
- ◆ Create new funding sources to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables offered on the menu.

## **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**

SFSP funds centers that provide breakfasts and lunches to children ages 18 or younger during the summer months.

- ◆ Appropriate increased funding for: SFSP meal reimbursements; start-up and expansion grants; administrative costs; transportation of children and, where necessary, meals, to SFSP sites; toll-free hunger hotlines; and outreach to families with children.
- ◆ Expand the Simplified Summer Food Program (formerly the Lugar Pilot Program) to all states, which would enable sponsors to use a "meals x rate" reimbursement process.
- ◆ Expand the criteria for "open sites," where all children receive meals at no charge regardless of income, from the current requirement of at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to 40 percent.

# FEDERAL POLICY GOALS

## Farm Bill 2007

The Farm Bill authorizes all federal agricultural programs including those that govern safe water and food production, land and water use, economic and infrastructure development and continued research and innovation in the farm community. The most recent bill, known as the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, expires in FY 2006, and is due to be reauthorized in FY 2007.

- ◆ The Nutrition Title (Title IV) of the Farm Bill accounts for 65 percent of federal nutrition aid spending and includes: The Food Stamp Program (FSP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

### *The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)*

Current funding levels for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), established in 1981 to distribute surplus commodity food to low-income families and individuals, are not adequate to meet existing need. TEFAP entitlement and bonus commodities and grants for administrative and storage costs are provided by the federal government to the states, which administer the program through Food Banks and other hunger organizations.

Authorized at \$140 million per year in the 2002 Farm Bill, the entitlement component of TEFAP has been flat in recent years, despite increased need. Further, there has been a decrease of more than half in bonus commodities during the last four years: down from more than \$240 million in FY03 to approximately \$150 million in FY05, and estimates of less than \$100 million are expected for FY06.

In New York City, TEFAP accounts for approximately 40 percent of the food provided by the emergency food program network to people at risk of hunger. In the last four year, the amount of the bonus commodity has dropped by more than 50 percent, a decrease of approximately seven million pounds of food. In addition, increased food, utility and transportation costs have not been offset due to flat-funding for the entitlement and storage grants, resulting in additional decreases in poundage. In total there has been a decrease of approximately 11 million pounds of TEFAP food (more than one-third) in NYC's soup kitchens, food pantries and shelters.

The 2007 Farm Bill needs to include a substantial increase in the level of entitlement commodity assistance, as well as increased funding for administrative and storage costs.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Increase TEFAP entitlement funding to \$250 million, adjusting for inflation in future years. Increase the TEFAP storage and distribution grant to \$100 million.
- ◆ Maintain the current process for States to administer the program, without adding bureaucratic barriers that would result in increased administrative costs and make it difficult for small emergency food programs to access TEFAP commodities.

## **Food Stamp Program (FSP)**

The federal Food Stamp Program (FSP) provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income families and individuals for the purchase of nutritious food. Commensurate with increased need since 2002, food stamp participation has increased. In an average month of 2004, 23 million of the 38 million people eligible for food stamps participated in the program, representing a participation rate of 60 percent.<sup>1</sup> However, participation rates among elderly adults, non-disabled childless adults, individuals living above the poverty line and non-citizens is approximately only one-third of those eligible.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, more than one million NYC residents are participating in the Food Stamp Program but the average food stamp benefit for emergency food participants only lasts 2.5 weeks into the month.<sup>3</sup> Also, research demonstrates that approximately half a million eligible city residents are not yet enrolled in the program.<sup>4</sup> Increasing enrollment would ensure increased access to nutritious food for low-income households and provide the added benefit of increasing spending in the local economy.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Restore eligibility for all documented immigrants.
- ◆ Increase the resource limit and the list of exempt saving categories.
- ◆ Simplify household access to food stamps and public health insurance simultaneously by ensuring that states offer food stamps, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and childcare subsidies together, generally with a combined application and outreach efforts, so long as such outreach increases participation.
- ◆ Prohibit the ability of states to require finger-imaging in order to receive FSP benefits.
- ◆ Eliminate the face-to-face interview in favor of alternative methods of gathering and verifying information.
- ◆ Eliminate or minimize work requirements to align the program more closely with other federal benefit programs, so as to improve access for low-income families (including the newly unemployed and part-time workers) and to clarify that the Food Stamp Program is a nutrition assistance program.
- ◆ Reject optional block grants and extraordinary waiver authority.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2006). *Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2004 Summary*. June.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2006). *Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 2004 Summary*. June

<sup>3</sup> Food Bank For New York City / City Harvest. (2006). *Hunger in America 2006: The New York City and State Report*.

<sup>4</sup> Combination of research: Fiscal Policy Institute. (2006). *Food Stamps: Increasing Access Would Boost the New York Economy*; Food Research and Action Center. (2006). *Food Stamp Access in Urban America*; Children's Defense Fund-NY. (2006). *Hunger in the Midst of Plenty*.

### **Policy Recommendations (cont'd)**

- ◆ Increase funds for Food Stamp Program administration, which is essential to fund technology improvements and ensure adequate staffing.
- ◆ Fund additional outreach measures to reverse the decline in food stamp participation among working families, particularly through grants to nonprofit organizations.
- ◆ Rename the Food Stamp Program, thereby removing the obsolete reference to coupons, reducing stigma and providing opportunity for new outreach.
- ◆ Change performance measurements so that the success of states and localities in issuing food stamp benefits will no longer be assessed mainly on error rates; rather, performance should be assessed by success in: a) increasing the percentage of eligible people participating; and b) streamlining the administrative process to receive benefits.
- ◆ Calculate benefit allotment using a more accurate and up-to-date measurement.
- ◆ Extend transitional food stamps (TBA) from five months to six months, and ensure that they are renewable to 12 months, so as to better conform to other federal benefit programs.
- ◆ Lengthen certification periods to a minimum of 12 months, so as to counteract the decline in participation that results when working families are required to reapply every three months.
- ◆ Extend the recertification period for older adults without earned income from two to four years.
- ◆ Provide a standard medical deduction similar to the standard utility allowance for use in calculating food stamp benefits with persons whose medical bills exceed the standard deduction allowed so that they may use their actual costs instead.
- ◆ Provide the USDA with more authority and funding to help states, localities and nonprofit groups to increase the usage of food stamps at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects and food-producing community gardens, particularly by simplifying the process by which state farmers' market associations apply for food stamp authorization on behalf of member markets.

### **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) supplies food packages specifically designed for low-income: pregnant women, breastfeeding and other mothers for up to one year after childbirth; children under the age of six; and elderly adults age 60 years or older.

Although CSFP was a precursor to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the two programs differ in significant ways. Most importantly, elderly adults account for 90 percent of program participants. Children between the ages of five and six and non-breastfeeding mothers six to 12 months after childbirth also benefit from the program, and in contrast to WIC, CSFP delivers food packages to participants directly.

In FY 2006, the federal government appropriated \$111.2 million for the program, which served approximately 472,385 people.<sup>5</sup> The President's FY 2008 budget proposes to eliminate all funding for CSFP (for the second year in a row). CSFP is a vital program for many elderly residents across the country and should be funded and developed to meet the growing needs of this vulnerable population.

In New York City elderly individuals account for one in four of the people standing on line at soup kitchens and food pantries and U.S. Census data reveals that one in five of the city's elderly population lives below the federal poverty level (more than double the national average).

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Restructure CSFP to reflect its role as the national senior nutrition program, including renaming the program the "National Senior Nutrition Program", operating initially as a pilot with the goal of increasing funding to expand the program to all 50 states and all counties.

### **The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)**

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) awards state grants to fund programs that provide elderly adults living below 185 percent of the federal poverty line access to fresh produce. The program is also intended as a means of supporting local agriculture through farmers' markets, roadside stands and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. Elderly adults who participate in the program receive a coupon once a year, ranging in value from \$10 to \$540. The SFMNP has been flat-funded in recent years, receiving an appropriation of \$15 million in FY 2002 and another appropriation of \$15 million in FY 2005.<sup>6</sup> Congress authorized to continue this annual funding level through 2007. As of FY 2003, the SFMNP operated in 35 states, three Indian Tribal Organizations, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Authorize the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program as an entitlement program with independent sources of funding.
- ◆ Provide the USDA with more authority – and funding – to help states, localities and nonprofit groups to increase the usage of senior farmers' market benefits at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects and food-producing community gardens.

<sup>5</sup> America's Second Harvest. (2006). *The Almanac of Hunger and Poverty in America 2006*.

<sup>6</sup> Food Research and Action Center. *Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Fact Sheet*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP)

Funded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) was launched in 1983 and subsidizes meals, groceries, lodging at shelters and other programs, one month's rent or mortgage payment, one month's utility bill, repairs for program facilities and equipment necessary to feed and shelter individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The FY 2001 federal funding level for EFSP was \$140 million.<sup>9</sup> In the intervening years between FY 2001 and FY 2006, funding increased by \$13 million to a FY 2006 funding level of \$153 million. Congress then passed an across-the-board cut in discretionary funding of 1 percent, reducing EFSP program funding by \$1.5 million, to a FY 2006 funding level of \$151.5 million.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, New York State and New York City have experienced drastic cuts in EFSP funding. The total New York State award for FY 2006 was \$9,491,104, a decrease of 10 percent from the FY 2005 funding level of \$10,575,458.<sup>11</sup> Over this same span, the New York City EFSP award decreased by 19 percent, dropping from a FY 2005 award of \$5,643,443 to a FY 2006 award of \$4,581,417.<sup>12</sup> New York City's FY 2006 award represents its smallest award since FY 1997. Despite these recent funding cuts, the need throughout the United States has grown significantly. Between 2000 and 2004, poverty has increased by 10 percent.<sup>13</sup>

### Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Increase federal funding by 42 percent over the next five years, to a FY 2012 funding level of \$214.59 million, to reflect increased need and adjusting for inflation at a rate of 5 percent per annum.
- ◆ Increase the percent of funding allocated for administrative costs.

## Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP)

Administered by the Office of Community Services in the Department of Health and Human Services, the Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP) is funded through the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill, as a line item in the Community Services Block Grant.<sup>14</sup> Programs can use CFNP funds to: coordinate private and public food assistance resources; assist low-income communities in identifying potential sponsors of child nutrition programs and initiating new programs in underserved areas; and develop innovative approaches to meet the nutritional needs of low-income people.

CFNP grant money is distributed to states, public agencies, nonprofit groups and Community Action Agencies. Sixty percent of CFNP funds are allocated to states, to be distributed among local programs, while the remaining 40 percent of funds are allocated to state and local programs on a competitive basis. In FY 2004, CFNP was funded at \$7.28 million.<sup>15</sup>

### Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Fully fund CFNP at \$7.28 million.

<sup>8</sup>The United Way of America. (2004). *The Emergency Food and Shelter Program*. May.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The United Way of America. (2005). *The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2001 - 2004). *American Community Survey*.

<sup>14</sup> Food Research and Action Center. (2004). *Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP) Fact Sheet*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is a federally sponsored program that supplies low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and infants and children five years of age and younger with vouchers for food, nutrition counseling, health screening and referrals for health and other services. Because the program is not an entitlement program, funding is appropriated each fiscal year determining how many people can participate in the program. WIC is administered by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. In FY 2005, the federal government spent \$5.16 billion on the program and provided services for slightly more than 8 million individuals.<sup>16</sup> This funding increased to \$5.5 billion in FY 2006.<sup>17</sup> The Administration's FY 2007 budget proposes to fund WIC at \$5.2 billion dollars.<sup>18</sup>

While funding levels continue to fall, the need for WIC has increased significantly in recent years.

### Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Fund WIC at a level that allows the program to be fully implemented without a reduction of services and authorize WIC as an entitlement program with an independent source of funding.<sup>19</sup>
- ◆ Provide USDA with more authority – and funding – to help states, localities and nonprofit groups to increase the usage of WIC at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects and food-producing community gardens.
- ◆ Establish a contingency fund in conjunction with the current discretionary funding structure that would maintain participation throughout the year, should the appropriated amount fall short due to unforeseen events, such as an economic downturn or unexpected increases in WIC food prices.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2002). *WIC Funding and Program Data*. Food and Nutrition Service. April.

<sup>17</sup> United States Department of Agriculture. (2006). *Focusing on the Nation's Priorities*.

<sup>18</sup> Food Research and Action Center. (2006). *Nutrition Program Changes in the President's Budget*. February 6.

<sup>19</sup> Food Research and Action Center. (2006). *Nutrition Program Changes in the President's Budget*. February 6.

<sup>20</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2002). *A Brief Summary of Issues in Making WIC and Individual Entitlement*. April 30. Contingency funds would be distributed at the Secretary's discretion, and, unlike regular appropriated funds that are distributed to all states via a funding allocation formula, could be targeted to those states that experience unanticipated funding shortfalls that might lead them to restrict participation. A contingency fund in addition to the regular appropriation could preserve current program features while establishing a structure to respond quickly to unanticipated funding needs and provide benefits to all participants.

## **National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs**

Authorized under the National School Lunch Act, the National School Lunch Program provides cash and commodities to public and private elementary and secondary schools as a form of reimbursement for lunches. Students living at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line receive free lunches, while those students living between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty line are eligible for reduced-price meals. A total of 30 million children participated in the program in FY 2005, representing 60 percent of all students enrolled in participating schools.<sup>21</sup> The federal government supplied \$7 billion for the program in that year.<sup>22</sup>

The School Breakfast Program is a federally sponsored program that provides reimbursements for breakfasts in public and private elementary and secondary schools. Students living at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty line receive free breakfasts, while those students living between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty line are eligible for reduced-price meals. Throughout the U.S. 41 million children participated in the program in 2005.<sup>23</sup> The FY 2005 budget allocated \$1.94 billion for the program.<sup>24</sup>

With increasing need and low participation rates, the current structure of both the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs requires overhaul. Between 2001 and 2004, the number of people living in food insecure households increased by 14 percent throughout the United States.<sup>25</sup> Poverty also witnessed a sharp increase, rising by 10 percent between 2000 and 2004.<sup>26</sup> During this same time period, child poverty increased even more dramatically, from a 2000 level of 11.7 million children to a 2004 level of 13.2 million children, representing a 10.8 percent increase.<sup>27</sup>

A wide range of factors prevent full participation in these vital child nutrition programs, including economic, social, psychological, logistical and administrative barriers. Reducing the stigma associated with school meals is necessary to increase program participation. The current program structure invites distinctions between low-income and wealthier students, providing only the former with free and reduced-price meals. The availability of competitive food in vending machines and elsewhere also encourages low-income students to spend their money on less nutritious food, while further increasing the stigma associated with school meals. In addition to these administrative and psychosocial barriers, logistical and economic challenges further undermine program participation. School overcrowding often results in excessively staggered lunch schedules, ranging from early morning to late afternoon, and limited space and lack of adequate staffing also impede participation. The provision of school breakfast before the school day begins presents obstacles to many parents who may not have the option to bring their children to school earlier, particularly working poor parents with limited flexibility in their schedules. Inadequate outreach further exacerbates these difficulties.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Appropriate increased funding for: meal reimbursements; start-up and expansion grants; administrative costs; and outreach to families with children.
- ◆ Create new funding sources to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables on the menu.
- ◆ Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.
- ◆ Restrict the sale of competitive food (in snack bars, student stores, vending machines and à la carte lines) during the school day, so as to improve access to school meals and reduce stigma.

<sup>21</sup> America's Second Harvest. (2006). *The Almanac of Hunger and Poverty in America*. 2006.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> America's Second Harvest. (2006). *The Almanac of Hunger and Poverty in America*. 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Nord, M., Andrews and Carlson, S. USDA Economic Research Service. (2005). *Household Food Insecurity in the United States, 2004*.

<sup>26</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2001 - 2004). *American Community Survey*.

<sup>27</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Census 2000 and the American Community Survey 2001 - 2004*.

### **Policy Recommendations (cont'd)**

- ◆ Improve the type and form of USDA commodities that schools receive, particularly by reducing the fat and sodium levels of processed food.
- ◆ Ensure that school districts adhere to identification guidelines.
- ◆ Encourage schools to schedule lunches as close to midday as possible, and to cease scheduling lunches at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

## **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is an entitlement program that supplies funding for centers that provide breakfasts and lunches to children ages 18 or younger. Providers are eligible for 'open' site status if they operate in a community where 50 percent of children fall below 185 percent of the federal poverty line. Open sites can serve free meals to all children, irrespective of income. Sites that do not qualify for 'open' status may apply for 'closed enrolled site' status only if they can demonstrate that at least 50 percent of program participants qualify for free or reduced-price meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Closed enrolled sites receive funding for meals served to enrolled program participants, and may only serve program participants.

Like school breakfast and lunch, a variety of socioeconomic, logistical and administrative barriers circumscribe SFSP participation. Complicated reimbursement processes that often underestimate program costs deter many providers from opening SFSP sites. Children and parents often have difficulty arranging transportation to SFSP sites, particularly in rural communities, and among low-income families with inflexible working schedules. Further exacerbating each of these problems is a lack of awareness regarding SFSP among low-income families with children.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- ◆ Expand the Simplified Summer Food Program (formerly the Lugar Pilot Program) to all states, which would enable sponsors to use a 'meals x rate' reimbursement process.
- ◆ Expand the criteria for "open sites," where all children receive meals at no charge regardless of income, from the current requirement of at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to 40 percent.
- ◆ Appropriate increased funding for: SFSP meal reimbursements; start-up and expansion grants; administrative costs; transportation of children and, where necessary, meals to SFSP sites; toll-free hunger hotlines; and outreach to families with children.
- ◆ Create incentives for schools to offer nutritious "grab-and-go" meals, and incentives for meals in the classroom.
- ◆ Create new funding sources to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables on the menu.
- ◆ Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.

**For more information or to sign on in support of the platform:**

Visit [www.foodbanknyc.org](http://www.foodbanknyc.org)

or

Contact Food Bank For New York City  
Division of Government Relations, Policy & Research  
212-566-7855, ext. 2249