

TO: Tom Freedman, Mary Smith
FROM: David Hochschild
RE: Summer Food Programs
DATE: July 20, 1998

President Johnson established the Summer Food Program in 1968 to meet the needs of children from low-income families who were out of school and therefore unable to receive free or subsidized lunches. The food, which meets strict nutritional requirements, is served to children 18 or younger at selected sites in low-income areas. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service operates the program by having about 3,500 sponsoring organizations - either public agencies or private non-profits - assume the administrative responsibility for the program while the federal government pays for the food. Every state (usually the state education agency which oversees school lunches) advertises the program and solicits applications for potential sponsors.

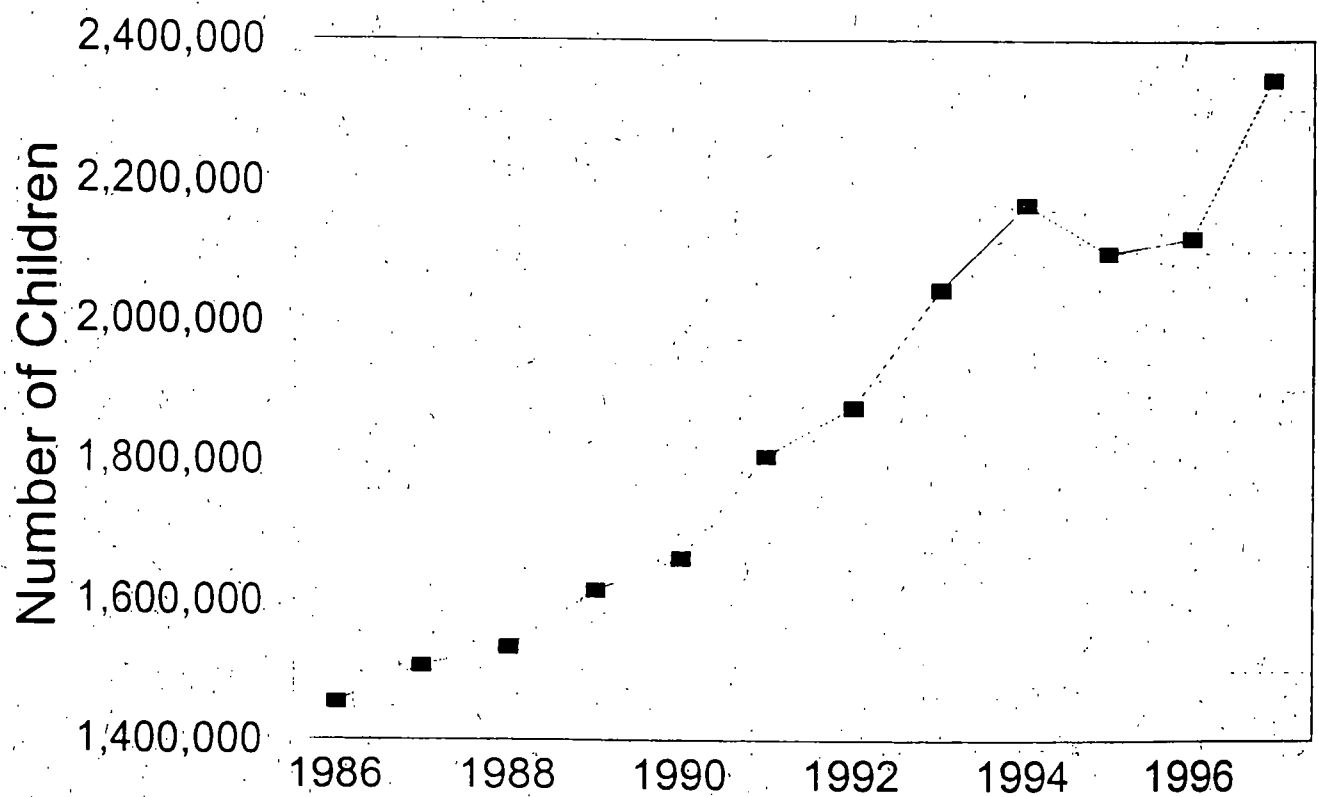
In June, the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) released its annual report on the Summer Food Service Program for Children. Their main findings:

- On an average summer day, the Summer Food Program reaches only one in six of the children who eat a free or reduced-price lunch during the school year (there are 14.6 million of them).
- About half of all food banks report a seasonal increase in requests for emergency food for children during the summer when school is out.
- The participation rate in the program reached a high point in 1977 at 2,790,585 but it declined through the late 1970's and 1980's. Since 1989, the Summer Food Service Program has grown 45%. The program has increased by 10% since 1997 although the record among states is uneven, with some serving more and some serving fewer children than the year before.
- Efforts in Congress are now pending to improve the program during the child nutrition reauthorization process. These include:
 - supporting summer food enrichment grants for rural and underserved areas
 - raising to 25 the limit on the number of sites private nonprofit organizations participating in the program can operate
 - removing the limitation on the total number of children that such a sponsor may serve.

(The Food Research and Action Network calls itself "the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.)

Summer Food Program

Participation, 1986-1997



HISTORY OF THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

- 1968** **Special Food Service Program for Children** enacted. It established the Summer Program as part of an out-of-school nutrition initiative, along with funding for child care food. The Program provided funding for state administrative expenses.
- 1975** **National School Lunch Act and Child Nutrition Act of 1966 Amendments of 1975 (P.L. 94-105)** separated the Summer Food Service Program from the year-round portion of the Special Food Service Program (which became the Child Care Food Program); made nonprofit residential summer camps eligible as Sponsors; extended program through FY 1977. For area eligibility, areas with poor economic conditions were defined as areas in which at least one-third of the children were eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches (free meals: household income under 125% of poverty; reduced-price: household income under 195% of poverty). The expansion of eligibility led to large increases in program participation.
- 1977** GAO issued study reporting substantial food service problems mostly involving private, nonprofit program operators serving substantial numbers of children at many sites using private food service companies for food delivery. Congress amends law (P.L. 95-166), increasing monitoring and tightening program requirements, including restrictions on programs using private food service management companies or vendors for meal service and new definitions of eligible Sponsors. Also, administrative reimbursements are separated from meal reimbursements. The program is extended to FY 1980. Children's participation drops in the following years.
- 1980** **Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-499) or OBRA** passed to reduce federal spending in child nutrition programs by \$400 million in FY 1981. For the Summer Food Program: reduced number of meals from three to two (lunch or dinner and breakfast or a snack) in all but residential camps and day programs serving migrant children, both of which continued to be allowed up to four meals (including one snack). Program reauthorized until FY 1984.
- 1981** **Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 (P.L. 97-35) or OBRA** further reduce child nutrition program funding; prohibited sponsorship by all organizations other than public and private nonprofit school food authorities, local municipal or county governments, and public and nonprofit residential summer camps, thus excluding about one-fourth of existing Sponsors; changed geographical eligibility criteria from areas with one-third to one-half of the child population income eligible for free or reduced-price lunches; excluded all schools and institutions participating in other child nutrition meal service programs from participation in the special milk program; and modified income eligibility guidelines, eliminating the March inflation update, and raising free meal eligibility to 130% of federal poverty income guidelines and lowering reduced-price eligibility to 185% of federal poverty income guidelines.
- 1982** Participation dropped to 1.4 million, and funding dropped by \$18 million from previous summer.
- 1988** USDA published results of Mathematica Policy evaluation of Summer Food Service Program and characteristics.
- 1989** **Child Nutrition and WIC Amendments of 1989 (P.L. 100-435)** restore private nonprofit organizations as eligible Sponsors, as well as National Youth Sports Camps, with numerous restrictions on them.
- 1994** **Healthy Meals for Healthy Americans Act of 1994** reauthorized Summer Food Service Program until 1998; Permanently authorized a start-up and expansion grants fund (starting at \$5 million/year, with increases up to \$7 million/year by 1996) for Summer Food Service Program; and placed private nonprofit sponsors with proven track records at the same priority level as other non-school sponsors with proven track records.
- 1996** **Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 or "welfare reform"** eliminated start-up funds for the Summer Food Service Program and reduced number of meals for migrant and residential camps from 4 meals to 2; also cut meal reimbursement by 10 percent.