



New York State Council on Food Policy

Commissioner Patrick Hooker, Chairman

CHILD NUTRITION AND WIC REAUTHORIZATION ACT PRIORITIES

July 2009

Ensuring that all New Yorkers, especially children, have access to safe, affordable, nutritious and fresh food is a top priority of the New York State Council on Food Policy (NYS CFP). Therefore, the NYS CFP asks that Congress support the following recommendations for strong Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization legislation.

Enacting these recommendations will provide nutrition professionals with the tools and funding necessary to provide healthier meals and food options for our children, promote economic security, and improve nutrition for pregnant women, new mothers and children.

WE RECOMMEND that Congress enact legislation that will:

School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs

1. Apply consistent nutrition standards based on the most recent US Dietary Guidelines to all foods and beverages sold, served or offered in schools.
2. Include additional funding for school meal programs and expand the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.
3. Expand efforts that aim to maximize participation in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.

Summer Food Service Program

4. Expand efforts that aim to maximize participation in the Summer Food Service Program.

Child and Adult Care Food Program

5. Increase funding and resources for CACFP to enhance nutritional quality of meals served and increase program participation.
6. Provide funding for nutrition education.
7. Expand the implementation of the at-risk supper program.

WIC and Farmers Market Nutrition Programs

8. Maintain the nutritional integrity of the new food packages by requiring that the food packages be reviewed and revised at least every 10 years.
9. Strengthen the nutrition education components of the WIC Program and increase funding for these services.
10. Continue authorization for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and expand the current level of funding.



SCHOOL BREAKFAST AND NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS

Aside from providing nutritious meals for our children, school meal programs are increasingly being asked to meet the daily food security needs of low income children while pro-actively combating the current childhood obesity epidemic.

- 1. Apply consistent nutrition standards based on the most recent US Dietary Guidelines to all foods and beverages sold, served or offered in schools.** The existing national nutrition requirements and food policies at many schools are inconsistent with current nutrition science and public health priorities.

To accomplish this, the USDA Secretary of Agriculture needs to be granted the authority to update, regulate and enforce nutrition standards of competitive foods and beverages sold in schools.

- 2. Include additional funding for school meal programs and continue to expand the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.** The NYS CFP recommends that school meal programs serve more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy. The cost of improving the nutritional quality of meals, strengthening the connection between locally grown produce and schools, and personnel costs for preparing fresh whole foods far exceeds current reimbursement rates.

To accomplish this, school meal reimbursement rates need to increase by at least 70 cents per meal in the first year. In subsequent years, reimbursement rates should reflect food and labor costs. We further recommend that Congress direct USDA to interpret the Farm Bill ruling on geographical preference and encourage 10 cents of this increase to be designated to be spent on State specific grown or produced food products which conform to the US Dietary Guidelines.

- 3. Expand efforts that aim to maximize participation in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program.** Current research indicates a clear link between food insecurity and health and the impact that nutrition has on child development, readiness for learning and academic achievement. Children receive a significant portion of their daily calories and nutrient intake at school.

To accomplish this, the “free” meal category should be expanded from 130 percent of poverty to 185 percent, consistent with the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) income eligibility guidelines (eliminating the “reduced” price meal category).

We further recommend that alternative free meal eligibility criteria be established. Based on census tract data, school districts with consistently large low-income populations should automatically qualify for low-income nutrition programs.

Together measures will increase the number of children receiving nutritious meals each day, will ease administrative burdens and streamline meal services.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

Almost 3 million children in low-income areas nationwide depend on Summer Food Service Programs for free, nutritious meals and snacks during the summer.

- 4. Expand efforts that aim to maximize participation in the Summer Food Service Program, especially in rural areas.** Hungry or food insecure children in rural areas are historically difficult to reach and under-served. Lowering the eligibility threshold will allow programs and providers to serve more children in low-income areas free, nutritious meals and snacks.

To accomplish this, lowering the open-site eligibility threshold from areas where 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced meals to a threshold of where 40 percent are eligible will simplify the program for large city sponsors while allowing rural sponsors to serve more areas. We further recommend that a pilot program be established that encourages innovative approaches to increasing access to rural areas.

CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM

Like children in the school environment, younger children being cared for through child care centers and family day care home providers should also have access to safe, affordable, nutritious and fresh food. The CACFP provides reimbursement for nutritious meals and snacks served to more than 300,000 New Yorkers enrolled in day care programs.

- 5. Increase funding and resources for CACFP to enhance nutritional quality of meals served and increase program participation.** Incorporating foods high in nutritional quality, such as fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products into child care center menus is essential to establishing healthy dietary patterns in young children. Current reimbursement rates are not sufficient to cover the costs associated with providing healthy meals to children in day care centers, family day care homes and after-school programs.

To accomplish this, reimbursement for CACFP meals and snacks need to be increased and “at-risk” and Tier 1 eligibility definitions need to be redefined to increase program participation. Area eligibility for the at-risk snack and supper program and family day care home providers (Tier 1) is currently defined as low-income schools (50% or more of children live in households that are eligible for free or reduced price meals) or census block groups (50% of children 12 and younger live in households at or below 185% of federal poverty level). In order to increase access to CACFP, this standard should be lowered from 50 percent to 40 percent. Lowering the area eligibility cut-off will bring more programs and providers that serve low-income children into CACFP.

We further recommend that all meals served through the child nutrition programs receive the commodities currently provided for school lunch. Breakfasts served in CACFP-participating child care centers and schools do not receive the support from the commodities program that programs participating in the National School Lunch Program receive. Expanding the commodities program to include CACFP breakfasts would increase the resources available to plan and serve nutritious breakfasts.

- 6. Provide funding for nutrition education.** In 2004, Congress authorized USDA’s Team Nutrition Network with funding based on the number of child nutrition meals served. However, funds to carry out this provision have never been appropriated. Obesity prevention is currently of utmost importance. Funding these provisions previously established in law would allow for nutrition education efforts to be coupled with federal nutrition programs and target young children to work to prevent obesity.

To accomplish this, funding for provisions in Public Law 108-265 Section 205 Team Nutrition Network should be appropriated to each child nutrition program based on the number of meals they serve. This measure will help ensure that all child nutrition programs receive funds to initiate appropriate nutrition education activities.

- 7. Expand the implementation of the at-risk supper program.** This program reaches low-income children by providing a nutritious meal after the school day has ended and keep teens engaged in positive after-school programs. New York CACFP is one of the six states originally selected for implementation of the at-risk supper program beginning in 2001. This program, which now serves more than 100,000 low-income youth per day in New York State, has been hugely successful.

To accomplish this, we recommend that this program be implemented nationwide.

WIC AND FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAMS

For over 30 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) has improved children’s health, growth, development, and readiness to learn. Evaluation studies of WIC have proven it to be a cost effective program. Congress should continue to invest in and strengthen the WIC Program.

- 8. Maintain the nutritional integrity of the new food packages by requiring that the food packages be reviewed and revised at least every 10 years.** The recent revisions to the WIC food packages (the first in 30 years) were implemented in alignment with the research-based recommendations of the Institute of Medicine, and support the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

To accomplish this, we recommend that the WIC food packages be reviewed and updated, as necessary, every 10 years or whenever there is a significant change in national nutrition recommendations.

- 9. Strengthen the nutrition education components of the WIC Program and increase funding for these services.** Nutrition education is a key factor in achieving improved health outcomes in WIC participating women and children.

To accomplish this, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act should assure that the definition for nutrition education includes breastfeeding support, peer counseling, and technology-based contacts. Funding for “special nutrition education such as breastfeeding peer counselors and other related activities” should be increased from \$20 million to \$40 million per year.

- 10. Continue authorization for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and expand the current level of funding.** WIC FMNP is a key connection between low income WIC families and farmers as it provides a one time per season benefit to WIC families, to be spent on fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. The benefits of encouraging a healthy diet are far-reaching, including reduced obesity and chronic disease, as well as increased academic achievement. The WIC FMNP is often a WIC family’s first introduction to a farmers market and fresh, locally grown foods.

Many of the farmers markets operating in low-income communities have begun to accept SNAP benefits and will be able to adopt the WIC Vegetable and Fruit Check Program. These programs cannot replace the WIC FMNP as they are not tied to fresh, local foods nor are they tied directly to farmers. Only the WIC FMNP has a direct connection between the beneficiary and local farmers. Over 975 farmers in New York State participate in this program.

To accomplish this, it is imperative that the WIC FMNP continues to be supported and that funding be expanded from \$19.8 million to \$25 million in the first year with increases in funding that keep pace with the increasing WIC caseload and increasing number of farmers’ markets participating in the program.

The NYS Council on Food Policy believes that these measures will go a long way to ensure a healthy and prosperous future for our children and our communities.

Respectfully submitted to New York State Governor Paterson by:

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