



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of Domestic Social Development

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROGRAMS

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ISSUE

In 2007, 36.2 million Americans, including 12.4 million children, were suffering from hunger or living in homes on the edge of hunger (U.S. Department of Agriculture). Essential federal programs target hunger and food insecurity, generally through partnerships between the federal and state governments and cooperating organizations. They provide children and needy families with access to food, a healthier diet and nutrition education in a manner that also supports agriculture in the United States. Unfortunately, every day in our country, there are millions of children and adults who go to bed and wake up hungry.

UPDATE

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill), signed into law June 18, 2008, included significant improvements in nutrition assistance programs and renamed the Food Stamp Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Improvements include: raising the minimum monthly benefit and standard deduction; applying full costs of child care, excluding retirement and education savings and military combat pay when determining income eligibility for the program; and introducing annual inflation adjustments to the amount of savings allowed for participation.

The American Recovery Reinvestment Act of 2009 (economic stimulus bill), signed into law February 17, 2009, provided a \$20 billion investment to nutrition programs. Beginning in April 2009, SNAP participants will receive a 13.6 percent increase in their benefits and states will receive additional funds of approximately \$150 million per year for two years to help with the administrative expenses for processing SNAP cases. The legislation also lifted the restriction on certain able-bodied adults without dependents. The law includes an investment of \$500 million for WIC (\$400 million for increased caseloads and \$100 million for MIS/administration) and \$150 million for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

BACKGROUND

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): SNAP, formerly food stamps, is the first line of defense against hunger. It enables low-income families to buy nutritious food. An average of 28.4 million people participated in the program each month during 2008, according to USDA estimates. The amount of SNAP benefits given is based on an estimate of how much it costs to buy food to prepare nutritious, low-cost meals for a household. Food stamps are expected to supplement a family's food budget. Eligibility is determined by household resources and income. Both U.S. citizens and some non-citizens are eligible for SNAP benefits. Adult immigrants are eligible only after they have resided in the United States legally for at least five years; legal immigrants who are children or disabled are eligible, regardless of date of entry into the United States. There are also limits on eligibility for adults 18-50 years old without dependent children.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): The CACFP provides support for children through nutritious school meals and nutrition assistance for day care, after school and summer programs, and homeless shelters. Charitable and non-profit community organizations feeding children in these programs can receive reimbursement for food and meal preparation, as well as training in the nutritional needs of children. The program is administered at the national level by the USDA and at the state level through the State Department of Education or Child Nutrition. Over three million children received nutritious meals and snacks through CACFP programs in 2007 at child care centers and family child care homes across the country.

WIC Program: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) improves the health of mothers and their children by providing supplemental foods, nutrition and

breast-feeding education, nutrition screening and referrals to other social services. It serves low-income, nutritionally at risk pregnant women; breast-feeding women; mothers for up to six months after the birth of an infant; infants and children up to their fifth birthday. WIC is a federal grant program for which Congress must authorize a specific amount of funds each year. In fiscal year 2008, over 8.7 million women and children participated in WIC.

Food Distribution Programs: Food distribution programs strengthen the nutrition safety net through commodity distribution and other nutrition assistance to low-income families, emergency feeding programs, Indian Reservations, and the elderly. For example, children can receive nutritious food through USDA distribution programs such as the National School Lunch Program, the CACFP and the Summer Food Service Program. Through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the USDA makes commodity foods available to food banks and soup kitchens through states and local agencies, allowing low-income people, including elderly people, to receive emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost.

Federal School Nutrition Programs: The National School Lunch Program operates in over 101,000 public and non-profit private schools, including Catholic schools, and residential child care institutions. In 2008, it provided nutritionally-balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more than 31 million children each school day, almost half of the participants were eligible to receive lunch at no cost. In the 07-08 school year, 3,381 Catholic schools nationwide participated in Federal School Nutrition Programs. They served 90,636 breakfasts and 190,441 lunches to students in those schools.

USCCB POSITION

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the bishops reiterated that a primary goal of food and agricultural policy should be providing basic food and nutrition for all. In *Food Policy in a Hungry World*, the bishops called for strengthening the domestic food assistance programs to ensure that no one in America goes hungry or suffers malnutrition. "When the economy fails to provide the jobs and income necessary to prevent hunger and malnutrition, the various local, state, and national food assistance programs must be funded and expanded to provide food to all in need."

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Support Funding for Child Nutrition Programs: Congress will reauthorize various child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch and Breakfast, Child and Adult Care Food, After-school Snack, Summer Food Service, and WIC, in 2009. *Contact your Senators and Representatives on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee and urge them to support the strongest possible funding levels for these critical programs—including adjusting the benefit level to reflect increasing food costs and promoting access to more nutritious foods.*

Assure Low-Income Families Have Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP): Approximately 40 percent of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are not getting them. Many families leaving welfare do not realize they can get transitional SNAP benefits for five months, and may still be eligible for SNAP after that. Other families are unable to meet the program's administrative requirements. It is important that agencies serving low-income people instruct them that regardless of the states' welfare rules, they may still be entitled to SNAP benefits. It is important educate the public that legal immigrant children regardless of date of entry are able to receive SNAP benefits under new eligibility rules, as well as immigrant adults who have been in the United States legally for five years. *Work with your local agencies, parishes, and others that serve low-income families to help them inform families of their potential eligibility for SNAP even if 1) they have exhausted their welfare benefits or 2) possible eligibility regardless of immigration date. Continue to advocate for program simplification and outreach efforts to ensure that eligible families receive supplemental nutrition assistance.*

For further information, contact

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