

The Future of the Summer Food Service Program

The challenges discussed in this report are not unique to the state of Montana. Anti-hunger advocates as well as the USDA have begun to rethink the way the SFSP is administered. Here are some ways experts are hoping to increase the effectiveness of the Summer Food Service Program and decrease seasonal hunger throughout the country.

Changing site eligibility requirements. In order to host a SFSP site, at least one area school must have 50% or more of its students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRP) or qualify via Census tract data. While FRP meal rates are one indication of need, it is not always the most accurate source of data. As students get older, both they and their parents are less likely to fill out the application, resulting in lower FRP rates than may truly exist. In addition, rural environments, like much of Montana, may have populations too low to reach the eligibility requirement in any given area. Many anti-hunger advocates have called for the eligibility to host an SFSP site be lowered from 50% to 40% to increase availability of meal sites. Four of the 18 Montana counties without the SFSP have a county level FRP rate above 50% compared to 7 that have rates above 40%. Lowering the eligibility guidelines can potentially increase access to summer meals to over 1500 children in these 7 counties alone.



An outdoor sign (left) and bag lunch at Russell School in Missoula

The Enhanced Summer Food Service Program projects. The USDA has initiated pilot programs to test a variety of new delivery and structural changes to the existing SFSP in order to make it more effective. These pilot programs are being run in a small number of states for two years and have showed promising results in making the SFSP more successful. Projects being investigated include:

- The USDA is providing sites in some states with higher per meal reimbursement to sites that remain open for more than 40 days. The goal of this program is to ensure food insecure children have access to meals throughout a greater portion of the summer.
- Additional funding and grant opportunities are being provided to increase the amount and variety of recreational and educational activities offered at SFSP sites. Oftentimes, a meal alone is not enough incentive for a child to travel to a meal site, but having the site also provide activities that will allow children to socialize will entice them to attend.
- The USDA is providing some states with funding to deliver meals directly to children who may not otherwise be able to get to a meal site.
- Backpacks of food are being distributed to children over the weekend or when meal sites are unable to operate to ensure that children have access to enough food. Sometimes it is impossible for a meal site to remain open all summer, and backpacks can help fill the gap when an SFSP site is unable.



The Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (SEBTC). Rather than the traditional SFSP, the SEBTC will provide families with children who are eligible for FRP meals with \$60 per month per child on an Electronic Benefits Card similar to the card used for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to purchase additional food for children during summer months when FRP meals in school are not available.

Preliminary results of this study suggest that it does help decrease food insecurity amongst children during the summer months, but the full report will not be available until next year.



Montana Summer Food Service Program Report Card

Summer 2012



The Summer Food Service Program in Montana

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was created in 1975 as a way to serve nutritious meals to all children age 18 and under during the summer months at approved meal sites in low-income areas. The SFSP is a federally funded program administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Montana Office of Public Instruction administers the program at the state level.



During the school year, many families rely on Free and Reduced-Price Schools Meals to help feed their children nutritious food and stretch their food budgets. If a child eats breakfast and lunch every day at school that is ten meals a week, per child, that parents do not have to worry about providing. However, school is only in session nine months out of the year and many families find it difficult to pay for the additional meal costs when school is out. As a result, summer can mean hungry bellies and malnutrition for many kids across Montana. Kids that do not receive adequate nutrition over the summer months are at a disadvantage when school starts again in the fall. The Montana Food Bank Network is working to increase the number of summer food sites across the state and increase participation at existing sites.



Summer 2012 Fast Facts:

- During the summer of 2012, Montana SFSP sites served over 430,000 meals at 167 different locations, a 2.66% decrease in number of meals served from 2011.
- Throughout the 2011-2012 school year about 45,000 students who were eligible for Free and Reduced Price (FRP) meals ate lunch on a typical day. On average, SFSP sites were open for 38 days and served approximately 7,980 children each day a site operated, meaning only 17% of FRP students eating lunch at school were accessing the SFSP in 2012.
- Montana sponsors collectively received almost \$1.3 million in federal reimbursements for meals served through the SFSP.
- Thirty-eight of Montana's 56 counties hosted at least one SFSP site. The following 18 counties did not have a SFSP site in 2012:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| • Carter | • McCone |
| • Chouteau | • Petroleum |
| • Daniels | • Powder River |
| • Dawson | • Richland |
| • Fallon | • Sheridan |
| • Garfield | • Still Water |
| • Golden Valley | • Sweet Grass |
| • Granite | • Treasure |
| • Liberty | • Wibaux |

Key Findings in 2012

There was a decrease in number of sites.

In 2011, 91 sponsors operated 191 sites in 37 counties across the state. In 2012, 90 sponsors operated SFSP sites; however there were only 167 sites operating throughout 38 counties, a decrease of 13% from 2011. This decrease in number of sites resulted in fewer meals being served and less children accessing these meals on daily basis.

Despite an overall decrease in participation and meals served, many sponsors had notable improvements in Summer 2012.

In 2012, the total number of meals served decreased by 2.66% from 2011. However, there were many superstar sponsors that improved their number of meals served and average daily participation (ADP) significantly from 2011. The majority of these sites engaged participants in recreational, educational or social activities. The following sites had a 48%-111% increase in meals served from 2011-2012:

- Centerville Elementary
- Ayers Elementary
- Fromberg Elementary
- Vaughn Elementary
- Boys & Girls Club of the Little Rockies
- Deerfield Elementary
- Browning High School
- Gildford Colony School
- Boys & Girls Club of Northern Cheyenne
- Plains Elementary

The number of days a site is open has a significant impact on average participation.

There is no standard protocol for the number of days a SFSP meal site is required to be open. In 2012, serving days for sponsors ranged from 5 days to 94 days, making it important to note the average number of serving days in each county in addition to ADP. MFBN supports all SFSP sponsors and sites that provide children with valuable nutrition during the summer. However, we must recognize the difference between a site that feeds 54 children for 5 days during the summer and a site that feeds 16 children for 60 days. We want to emphasize that our ADP calculation represents the average number of kids eating a meal every day a site was open, NOT each day throughout the entire summer. To better understand this difference we calculated ADP at the state level two different ways:

- On average, 7,980 kids accessed a summer food site each day a site was open (each sponsor operated a site an average of 38 days).
- Comparatively, if we stretch the meals served throughout the state over the total number of possible weekday serving days in June, July, and August (64 days), an average of just 4,786 children ate each day.



We must work to increase participation at existing summer food sites.

While there are many communities throughout the state in need of an initial summer food site, there is also significant need to increase participation at existing sites. Students who eat Free or Reduced Price meals during the school year often miss these meals greatly during the summer months. The SFSP was created to help fill this gap, but the program often struggles to reach all of the children it was intended to benefit. During the 2011-2012 school year, approximately 72% of FRP eligible students at public and private schools ate a meal each day (approximately 45,000 students). On an average day during Summer 2012, only 17% of these students ate a meal at a SFSP site, down from 19% in 2011. Throughout the state, participation rates ranged from 73% in Wheatland County to just 2% in Teton County.

Montana's rural environment makes participation a challenge at many SFSP sites. Sites are often too far from a child's home to walk, and many families work throughout the day, or do not have enough gas to drive their child to the site. Ideas to increase participation include offering prizes to children who attend on a regular basis, delivering meals to children, and providing fun, educational activities to encourage parents to bring their children.

Inability to travel to SFSP sites is not the only barrier limiting participation in the SFSP in Montana. MFBN's Hungry in Montana 2012 report found that the primary reason food pantry clients reported not participating in the program was due to lack of awareness.

There are many ways to increase awareness of and participation in the SFSP including:

- Send flyers and letters home with children at the end of the school year to introduce the program and to let parents know where the closest sites are as well as their operating times.
- Distribute these flyers throughout the community. Place them in locations frequented by low-income families including Office of Public Assistance locations, WIC offices, and food pantries, as well as places generally visited by kids and families such as parks, local businesses, and churches. Make sure that these notices stay up throughout the summer to remind parents where and when the programs are located.
- Host a kick-off event for kids and families! Show parents what the SFSP is all about. This is a great way to get input from parents and get kids excited for the summer.
- Make your SFSP site a social experience. Have themed days such as Halloween in July or pajama day. Invite local celebrities to visit and each lunch with the kids.
- Remember that SFSP sites are open to any child under 18 years old! Many middle and high school students may feel that they are too old to go to a site and take advantage of the program. Invite older children to act as volunteers and have them help distribute meals or run activities for the younger ones.

County	2012 Summer Meals Served	% Change from 2011-2012	Number of Sites	Number of Sponsors	Average # of Serving Days	Average Daily Participation	% Eligible that Participate	Rank
Beaverhead	422	-26.74%	1	1	21	20	7%	33
Big Horn*	29294	-2.58%	9	5	32	627	43%	6
Blaine	20814	6.50%	6	4	49	455	66%	2
Broadwater*	2452	22.48%	1	0	58	42	21%	20
Carbon	1428	17.82%	3	3	21	42	12%	28
Cascade	16294	-41.59%	8	7	30	329	9%	31
Custer	5923	-5.05%	2	1	57	104	29%	13
Deer Lodge	11556	3.59%	9	1	49	166	45%	5
Fergus	14047	28.39%	5	5	68	133	23%	17
Flathead	10087	56.19%	5	3	36	191	5%	37
Gallatin	8283	15.19%	9	1	52	159	7%	34
Glacier	24773	48.24%	7	1	64	314	21%	21
Hill*	31933	6.32%	7	4	47	407	29%	14
Jefferson	1774	3.50%	1	1	25	57	17%	24
Judith Basin	2716	-4.53%	1	1	57	24	26%	16
Lake*	23422	-4.78%	9	7	25	719	34%	9
Lewis & Clark	15965	2.24%	5	3	48	348	16%	25
Lincoln	7800	-21.41%	5	3	36	135	13%	27
Madison	812	-19.04%	1	1	29	16	7%	36
Meagher	1760	-	1	1	39	31	30%	12
Mineral*	3733	-17.48%	3	2	25	113	39%	7
Missoula	32053	8.04%	9	5	36	451	11%	29
Musselshell	4174	37.44%	1	1	57	54	21%	19
Park	3466	-11.83%	2	2	20	76	14%	26
Phillips	1320	-45.75%	1	1	26	30	10%	30
Pondera*	15075	-5.68%	3	1	50	179	50%	3
Powell*	799	-24.19%	1	0	31	26	48%	4
Prairie	1329	-4.39%	1	1	34	25	36%	8
Ravalli	5533	2.08%	3	3	40	123	7%	35
Roosevelt	20690	-7.51%	5	3	37	408	32%	10
Rosebud	10523	-30.20%	7	3	34	251	22%	18
Sanders	11312	20.98%	6	4	29	235	30%	11
Silver Bow	17205	-7.02%	10	3	26	370	28%	15
Teton	825	-89.63%	1	1	61	8	2%	38
Toole	5021	-18.34%	2	1	63	41	20%	22
Valley	3227	38.08%	1	1	63	38	8%	32
Wheatland	12543	-2.40%	4	1	54	119	73%	1
Yellowstone	51534	-7.89%	12	4	44	1115	18%	23
Montana	431917	-2.66%	167	90	38	7980	17%	

Average Daily Participation

There is no set methodology for ADP calculation. States often disagree on the "correct" method, which often differs from what the USDA reports on a national level. For this report, average daily participation for each sponsor is calculated by dividing the total number of meals served at whichever meal had the highest meal count, typically lunch, by the number of operation days reported for that sponsor. County level ADP was calculated by finding the sum of all sponsor ADPs and state level ADP was determined by finding the sum of all county level values. MFBN uses only one meal to calculate ADP to avoid counting children who eat multiple meals at each site as two different individuals.

Key:

2012 Summer Meals Served: The total number of breakfasts, lunches, suppers, and snacks served to children through the SFSP.

% Change from 2011-2012: The relative change in total meals served through the SFSP in 2011 compared to the total meals served in 2012.

Number of Sites: Total number of SFSP sites located throughout each county.

Number of Sponsors: Total number of SFSP sponsors (those fiscally responsible for a site) in each county.

Average Number of Serving Days: The average number of serving days reported for each sponsor throughout each county divided by the total number of sponsors.

Average Daily Participation: ADP is calculated for each site based on the meal service during which the most meals are served (typically lunch) divided by the number of serving days reported by its sponsor, then totaled for all sponsors per county (this ensures that children who eat more than one meal are not counted more than once).

% Eligible that Participate: Compares the average number of children who ate at least one meal through the SFSP each day a site was open to the average number of children who ate a FRP lunch during the school year through the National School Lunch Program.

Rank: Based on % Eligible that Participate (1=highest rank).

* Some sites in these counties were sponsored by organizations in a different county.

