



FOOD JOURNAL

Volume XVIII, Number 7 - July 17, 2004

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS REAUTHORIZED

On Wednesday, June 30, 2004, the President signed into law S. 2507, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Act), which reauthorizes expiring provisions and makes changes to programs within the National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and other nutrition assistance programs. The legislation will expand the availability of nutritious meals and snacks to more children in school, in outside-school hours programs, and in child care; and will improve the quality of food in schools.

The President commended Congress and in particular Chairman Cochran and Chairman Boehner for their leadership on this bill. "Among its many important provisions, the bill extends and expands the fruit and vegetable pilot projects, which would make free fresh fruits and vegetables available to many school children. This, along with requirements that school districts establish wellness policies, will help address the growing overweight and obesity problem in children," said President Bush upon signing the bill.

Passage of the bill was praised by anti-hunger advocates. "It is a sign of how fundamentally important, effective, and popular these child nu-

trition programs are that, in an otherwise politically heated environment, Congress paused to unite in support of feeding our nation's children," stated Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) President James D. Weill. "This legislation will provide greater access and improve the nutritional quality of meals served in schools and out-of-school programs for many low-income children. Kids will be healthier, do better in school, and be better cared for in afterschool, summer, and child care programs."

The Act includes the following provisions:

National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs

- Simplify the school meal application process by phasing in mandatory direct certification of food stamp households as eligible for free school meals. This means that those families will no longer need to fill out any paperwork to start receiving free school meals.
- Ease the process for low-income families that do submit school meal applications by extending eligibility through the full school year and allowing them to fill out only one application for all the children in the household.
- Provide migrant, homeless and runaway children with automatic eligibility for free school meals.
- Create new ways to improve the nutri-

tion environment in schools by establishing local Wellness Councils and by funding efforts to provide technical assistance and best practices to schools and states.

- Expand the popular fresh fruit and vegetable pilots (currently in Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan and Mississippi) to additional states, with special emphasis in new states on serving children in low-income areas.
- Eliminate paperwork requirements for schools in low-income areas to automatically receive higher "severe need" school breakfast reimbursements.
- Make it possible for up to five states to offer free school meals to families that are currently eligible for reduced price meals, relieving them of the cost of up to 40 cents per meal (depending on future Congressional funding).
- Make it possible for more children from military families to receive free and reduced price school meals by excluding privatized housing vouchers from being counted as income.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

- Expand the successful SFSP paperwork reduction program (formerly known as "Lugar Pilots") to private non-profit sponsors, which has already resulted in thousands more low-income children receiving nutritious meals during the summer months in 13 states (the pilot currently only applies to public sponsors).

Archived 2004 issues of the Food Journal are now available on line at www.tacaa.org. New issues will be posted as they are released.

- Add six new states - Colorado, Mississippi, Louisiana, Michigan, Oregon, and Ohio - to this expanded SFSP paperwork reduction program.
- Change the SFSP area eligibility threshold in rural areas of Pennsylvania from 50 to 40 percent for two years (in effect, expanding eligibility).
- Provide for 60 sponsors in five states to implement innovative solutions to rural transportation barriers in the SFSP.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

- Extending eligibility for snacks and meals for children in homeless and domestic violence shelters up to the age of 18 (the current cut-off is 12).
- Allow for-profit child care centers that serve significant numbers of low-income children to feed children using CACFP.
- Extend the CACFP area eligibility threshold for family child care homes in rural areas of Nebraska from 50 to 40 percent for two years (in effect, expanding eligibility).

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

- Provide vendor management cost containment requirements for WIC-only stores in order to reduce higher prices charged by many of these stores which, if unaddressed, could lead to fewer WIC participants.

The Food Journal welcomes your comments and ideas for stories. To contact us, please call 462-2555 ext. 203, or e-mail comments and suggestions to foodjournal@tacaa.org.

ORGANIZATION AIMS TO REDUCE HEART DISEASE BY ELIMINATING PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE OIL FROM FOOD SUPPLY

The Center for Science and the Public Interest (CSPI) is waging a campaign to remove partially hydrogenated vegetable oils from the American food supply. The consumer group formally petitioned the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to prohibit the use of partially hydrogenated oil as a food ingredient and launched a major grassroots campaign to encourage food manufacturers to reformulate their products.

Although small amounts of trans fat occur naturally in beef and dairy products, the FDA estimates that 80 percent of the trans fat in Americans' diets comes from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil (PHVO). Treating vegetable oil with hydrogen gas results in a fat that is solid or semi-solid at room temperature and that has a long shelf life. In 2003, the National Academies' Institute of Medicine concluded that the only safe level of trans fat in the diet is zero, and in 2004 an FDA advisory panel concluded that trans fat is even more harmful than saturated fat.

"When partially hydrogenated vegetable oil was first used in foods many decades ago, it was considered safe," said Dr. Walter Willett, professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health. "Now that studies have demonstrated that partially hydrogenated oil is a major cause of heart disease, it should be phased out of the food supply as rapidly as possible and replaced with more-healthy oils."

New rules requiring food processors to disclose trans fat content on Nutrition Facts labels take effect in 2006, and those rules are prompting some companies to reformulate products or add trans-free versions to their product lines. Frito Lay has removed partially hydrogenated oil

from many of its snack foods; Campbell's Pepperidge Farms unit is introducing trans-free Goldfish crackers and other foods; Kraft is removing trans from Triscuits and many other foods; and supermarket chain Whole Foods sells no products that contain partially hydrogenated oils. Even Crisco now sells a trans-free version of its shortening. But CSPI notes that despite this progress, many companies have done nothing.

"Unlike fats that occur in nature, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil is totally artificial and absolutely unnecessary in the food supply," said CSPI executive director Michael F. Jacobson. "Food-processing companies should worry less about the shelf life of their products and more about the shelf life of their customers. Getting rid of partially hydrogenated vegetable oil is probably the single easiest, fastest, cheapest way to save tens of thousands of lives each year."

The new labeling rules would not help consumers avoid trans fat in restaurant foods. Pies, scones, cinnamon rolls, and other sweets are often high in trans fat. Moreover, McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC, Dunkin' Donuts, Applebee's, Red Lobster, and countless other chains deep-fry in partially hydrogenated shortening. Only a few chains, like Ruby Tuesday and Legal Sea Foods, now deep-fry in trans-free liquid vegetable oil.

"We, along with numerous medical experts and nutritionists, believe that trans fats are a major contributor to heart disease, and we support efforts to raise awareness of their health risks," Ruby Tuesday said in a written statement. Ruby Tuesday is also currently the only restaurant chain that provides nutrition information on its menus for all items.

McDonald's announced in 2002 that it would switch to a healthier (though not entirely trans-free) cooking oil, but the chain has never followed through on its promise, according to CSPI. Accordingly, CSPI is urging visitors to visit

www.TransFreeAmerica.org to contact McDonald's USA president Mike Roberts and urge McDonald's to deep-fry in safer oil. Future grassroots actions will target more fast-food chains, processed food manufacturers, supermarket chains, and key government decision makers.

The 37-page petition CSPI filed with the FDA would prohibit the food industry from using partially hydrogenated oils. Based on FDA data, CSPI estimates that 11,000 to 30,000 lives, perhaps many more, would be saved each year if those oils were removed from the food supply.

The economic benefit over 20 years would be about \$1 trillion. The FDA had concluded that requiring trans-fat labeling alone would save between 240 and 480 lives each year. In Denmark, food companies are required to limit artificially created trans fats to two percent of the total amount of fat in the food. Consequently, McDonald's and Burger King fry in trans-free cooking oil there.

CSPI's legal filing and lists of foods with and without hydrogenated oils can be found at www.TransFreeAmerica.org.

GRANTS INCREASING FOOD STAMP AWARENESS AWARDED

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced six grants totaling \$5 million to organizations to help increase awareness of the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Stamp Program for low-income households. The grants, authorized by the 2002 Farm Bill, are designed to help simplify food stamp applications and eligibility systems through the use of innovative strategies.

"The grants are part of the Bush Administration's commitment to help eligible recipients access food stamp benefits," said Veneman. "Partnerships with federal and state governments as well as community and faith-

based organizations are vital to our efforts to reach families in need."

The grantees include states and community and faith-based organizations, including the Iowa Department of Human Services, which received \$882,452. During a grant presentation in Des Moines, Iowa, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Eric M. Bost said that it was USDA's goal to simplify the food stamp application process and improve the access of eligible households to food stamp benefits by eligible household. "We are confident that these grantees are ready for the challenge," he said.

USDA also encouraged state agencies administering the Food Stamp Program to partner with community-based or faith-based organizations. This year, the South Carolina Department of Human Services in partnership with the Southern Institute on Children and Families and the Agape Ministries of Charleston will be awarded \$1 million for this collaborative effort.

The other four grantees are the Community Action Project of Tulsa, Oklahoma, (\$818,484), the Illinois Department of Human Services (\$967,664), the Nevada Department of Human Resources (\$487,729) and the New Mexico Association of Food Banks (\$835,000). The six grantees were selected from over 40 proposals submitted by states, nonprofit groups and other organizations.

In addition to these grants, USDA's efforts to improve food stamp access include the recent announcement of the end of the "paper era" in the Food Stamp Program. Today, all 50 states and the U.S. territories now provide Food Stamp Program benefits with Electronic Benefits Transfer instead of the traditional paper coupon. This transition has improved the administration of this program and is cost effective.

Additional information about each project is available online at www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/2004/fsp-grants.htm.

FLORIDA REQUESTS FEDERAL APPROVAL TO PRIVATIZE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Florida's proposal to privatize the Food Stamp Program is being opposed by a coalition of anti-hunger organizations. The information that follows contains excerpts from a letter sent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture outlining their concerns.

As anti-hunger organizations, we recognize that the Food Stamp Program is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. We are deeply concerned about a pending request submitted to you by Florida, which seeks to turn over to yet-to-be identified private sector vendor(s) essentially the entire operation of this vital federal benefit program, and do so on a statewide basis. This radical experiment puts at risk benefits for a significant number of vulnerable people.

Currently, nearly 1.2 million people in Florida receive food stamp benefits. An estimated 1.2 million more people likely are eligible but not receiving benefits, especially many elderly people, working families, legal immigrants and citizen children residing in immigrant households.

We had serious reservations about the 2002 waiver request that Florida submitted for a three-county pilot project for private contractors to handle food stamp benefits for households also receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. While USDA approved that request, it did so for a project that was time-limited and targeted and that required evaluation.

We are especially concerned that Florida would pursue a new and radical request for a wholesale privatization experiment when the state has not even used the authority under the three-county pilot to test the effects on client access, payment accuracy, and efficiency. The current proposal calls for rapid state-wide implementation with virtually no testing and no fallback plan in the event that the contractor fails to perform.

We also do not believe that the state has yet maximized all its opportunities under existing food stamp rules to improve program operations and potentially reduce costs in other ways. For example, it can make better use of outreach campaigns, waiver of face-to-face interviews and streamlined reporting. And it can do so without turning over eligibility determinations to private sector vendors less accountable to the community and its elected leaders.

At a minimum USDA should require much more specificity from the state in its waiver request. As submitted, the request leaves many open questions. It is unclear how many vendors will operate the program and in what areas. While vendors will be asked to describe their approach on a litany of issues, including dealing with language access barriers, the request does not explain what, if any, minimum standards vendors must meet to satisfy criteria. It is unclear, among other things: how client access, especially for hard-to-serve populations and those in rural areas, will be protected; how decisions on office locations and operations will be responsive and accountable to community residents and their representatives; how payment accuracy, confidentiality of recipient information, and program integrity will be adequately safeguarded; how continuity of operations will be ensured when the state abandons its role in favor of private companies that may change over time; what quality of work force will handle operations; how work currently performed by state employees will not be sent offshore; what time frame applies to the experiment; or what plans ensure a thorough and independent evaluation.

In the absence of such information, it is impossible to say that any rights clients have under federal and state law (and also under the Constitution) will be protected.

The Food Stamp Program is a federal entitlement, whose benefits are paid for 100 % by the federal government and whose administrative

costs are split between the federal government and the state. The federal government has an important stake in ensuring that eligible people have access and that the program is run efficiently and with integrity. USDA should not be asked to approve a statewide venture that not only is untested and risky, but that is not even defined by the state. Approving a "framework" for a contract or a contract on a statewide basis is not what Congress had in mind when it provided USDA with waiver authority.

**For a copy of the full letter, visit
www.frac.org.**

WORKING TO PREVENT HUNGER IN THE CLASSROOM

Senator Eddie Lucio, chair of the Joint Committee on Nutrition and Health in Public Schools recently authored this editorial on the importance of school nutrition programs in Texas.

The face of hunger in the Texas classroom is no longer confined to low-income children. It is now readily found on children from middle- to high-income families. All our efforts to develop an appropriate public school finance system, enrich curricula, enhance tutoring programs and purchase technological learning aids will miss the mark if a child is trying to learn on an empty stomach. And many are. As chairman of the Joint Interim Committee on Nutrition and Health in Public Schools, I am also addressing research indicating that skipping breakfast is associated with a significantly higher risk of obesity among adults.

Generally people who do not eat breakfast get very hungry later on in the day and tend to overeat as a result — consuming additional calories. Nutrition habits are formed early in life, so encouraging children to eat a healthy breakfast might prevent obesity in their adult years. And in a state recently pegged as having the highest number of overweight and obese children, we should seriously discuss implementing a universal feeding program in our public school

system. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) reports that early morning school bus schedules, long commutes to jobs and non-traditional work hours make it difficult for families to prepare or sit down for a nutritious family breakfast. These situations affect families in every socio-economic level, including children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Halfway through the morning, hunger pangs develop and attention diminishes. Study after study shows that students who eat school breakfast increase their math and reading scores, as well as improve their speed and memory in cognitive tests. Those who eat breakfast closer to class and test-taking time perform better on standardized tests than those who skip breakfast or even those who eat breakfast at home.

FRAC notes that eating a good breakfast at school boosts student achievement, reduces absenteeism, and improves student nutrition. A study by the Massachusetts General Hospital found that as children increased their participation in the school breakfast program, they showed improvement on a wide range of measures of social and academic functioning. One of my highest legislative priorities is to implement a universal feeding program in every public school in Texas, or at least begin with a free statewide breakfast program. Already, 40 states have schools with universal breakfast programs.

The National School Lunch Program is available in more than 95 percent of schools nationwide. During the 2002-2003 school year, 8.2 million children participated in the School Breakfast Program. Of these, 7.6 million or 78.8 percent received free or reduced-price meals. Yet only 27.8 million participated in the National School Lunch Program, with 16 million or 57.5 percent of them receiving free or reduced price meals. In Texas, 97.6 percent of public schools participate in the School Breakfast Program. In 2002-2003, schools were reimbursed \$1.17 in federal funds for each free meal, \$0.87

for each reduced price meal and \$0.22 for each paid meal. Schools where 40 percent or more of the lunches served for the two prior years were free or reduced receive slightly higher reimbursements. One inherent advantage to serving free meals is that schools save money by eliminating the labor involved in collecting, handling and verifying applications for discounted meals, as well as the collection of payments. And when all children in a school can participate in a universal meal program, the stigma associated with poverty is greatly lessened.

Another program sponsored by schools and other entities that I wholeheartedly applaud is the Summer Food Service Program. Through SFSP, children 18 or younger in low-income areas can receive free breakfasts and lunches. These meal sites are located in areas where 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program.

The federally funded Summer Food Service Program is two-part: one sponsored by the Texas Department of Agriculture Seamless Program and the other by the Health and Human Services Commission Special Nutrition Programs. In 2003, the average daily participation in the 87 meal sites under HHSC for Cameron County was 1,267, for Hidalgo 10,609, for Kleberg 546 and for Willacy 587.

The Seamless Summer Sponsors operated 147 meal sites in Cameron, Willacy and Hidalgo Counties. Already, 29 school districts and local organizations have applied to sponsor free meals this summer in Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg and Willacy counties.

The agencies administering these programs and the entities sponsoring them in the local communities are to be commended. Those of us who are blessed with plenty to eat should ensure that no child goes hungry in the classroom because of income, schedule or commutes, and outside the classroom because of sheer poverty.

FEDERAL REGISTER

Department Of Agriculture (USDA), 06/22/2004, p. 34637. This notice invites the general public to comment on whether the Food Stamp Program (FSP) should be renamed to more accurately describe its current method of operation and goal of providing nutritional assistance and promoting health among low-income families. USDA and many stakeholders involved with the FSP believe that the program's name is outdated because "food stamps" have not been used for issuing benefits since the early 1940s. Today, all benefits are issued electronically through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system. Additionally, many states that administer the federally-funded program have asked USDA to rename the program in consideration of its purpose and in recognition of the benefit issuance system. Although outdated, the program's name is widely known and changing it may create confusion. Recognizing these different perspectives, USDA intends to proceed with care before making a decision on a name change by requesting public comment. Written comments must be received on or before 08/23/04. Comments may be sent to John Knaus, Chief, Program Design Branch, Program Development Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302. Comments may also be faxed to 703/305-2486 or e-mailed to john.knaus@fns.usda.gov. For additional information contact John Knaus at 703/305-2098.

RESOURCES

A compilation of food, nutrition, and hunger research is available at the Poverty & Race Research Action Council's website. The research guide is broken down by general information, public policies and research studies, the Food Stamp Program, Community Support, and hunger related to housing problems. The website is www.prrac.org/.



FOOD JOURNAL

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
AUSTIN, TX
PERMIT NO. 1767

Please report address changes to foodjournal@taca.org or fax to (512) 462-2004.

TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES, INC.
2512 IH 35 South, Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78704-5751
Telephone: 512/462-2555
Fax: 512/462-2004
E-Mail: foodjournal@taca.org

TACAA STAFF

Stella Rodriguez	Executive Director
Laurie S. Haney	Executive Assistant
vacant	Office Manager
Pam Lawrie	Program Manager
Janet Leubner	Program Coordinator
Anitra Hendricks	Program Assistant
Gilbert Blanco	Field Representative

TACAA OFFICERS

Joe A. Martinez	President
Karen Swenson	First Vice President
vacant	Second Vice President
Beverly Logan	Treasurer
Leona Johnson	Secretary
Carol Brown	Parliamentarian

The TACAA Food Journal is published monthly by the Texas Association of Community Action Agencies, Inc. (TACAA). Funding for the newsletter is provided under a contract with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) under the Community Food and Nutrition Program. Opinions expressed are those of TACAA staff and do not necessarily represent views of TDHCA, TACAA, or its members. TACAA provides the Food Journal at no cost to readers throughout the state, and encourages readers to submit articles and comments for review and publication.

Volume XVIII, Number 7 - July 17, 2004