

spotlight on
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The Danger of Summer Break: A Hunger Message from the USDA

Dr. Janey Thornton, USDA

During the regular school year, nearly 21 million kids from low-income households get free and reduced-price meals at school through USDA's National School Lunch Program—healthy meals that provide the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

Summer is a different story.

Though hunger doesn't take a summer vacation, fewer than three million kids are fed through USDA's Summer Food Service Program when the weather turns warm and school doors are closed.

That's why we need to redouble our efforts to make sure that the doors to healthy nutrition stay open in schools and parks and community centers, and all the other wonderful places where local sponsors offer USDA's Summer Food Service Program to kids in low-income areas—kids who might otherwise go hungry.

We need to ensure that the other 18 million kids who receive healthy meals at school during the regular school year have access to the nutrition they need through the balmy days of summer. So they can return to school in the fall healthy—and ready to learn.

The good news is everyone can help. In fact, USDA relies on our partners - folks like you - to highlight the important nutrition benefits provided by the Summer Food Service Program and other healthy meal options available for low-income children across the country.

Whether you are part of an organization or an individual, there is something that everyone can do. Here are a few ways you or your organization can help this summer:

- **Conduct Community Outreach with the National Hunger Hotline.** Help ensure families know about the Summer Food Service Program and where kids can go to receive a nutritious meal. They can contact the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE, or contact their local Summer Food Service Program state agency to find a participating site in their community. Summer Food Service Program state agency contacts can be found at www.summerfood.usda.gov. Encourage sites and sponsors in your community to register and promote their site using the National Hunger Hotline

- **Volunteer.** Many Summer Food Service Program Sponsors and Sites need volunteers to help make their programs successful. Encourage program sponsors and sites to post their volunteer opportunities at www.serve.gov/endlunger. This website allows volunteer opportunities to be posted, so volunteers can search for opportunities. Volunteers can be used for things such as setting up or cleaning up a site, or planning recreational or educational activities for children. Looking to be more involved? Search for a volunteer opportunity near you and help your local sponsors and sites

- **Promote the Summer Food Service Program Outreach Toolkit.** The Outreach Toolkit helps sponsors and sites create outreach materials that help the community learn about the program. The Outreach Toolkit and other resources can be found at www.summerfood.usda.gov

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- Make Your Commitment. Don't let children in your community go hungry this summer. Make your commitment. Become a champion to end hunger. Visit: www.endhunger.usda.gov. If there isn't a Summer Food Service Program site in your community, it is a great time to start planning for next year

The Summer Food Service Program, by the way, is one of 15 nutrition assistance programs overseen by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service that include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly called the Food Stamp Program), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.

Together these programs touch the lives of one in four Americans over the course of a year and form a national safety net against hunger. Visit www.fns.usda.gov for more information about FNS nutrition assistance programs.

Working together, we can make a real difference in the lives of our nation's children through the Summer Food Service Program by ensuring that "Food is In when school is Out." For more information on the Summer Food Service Program, visit: www.fns.usda.gov.

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