

Summer time shouldn't be hungry time

Written by Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
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Help feed hungry kids through USDA's Summer Food Service Program

In the midst of winter/spring, it can be easy to forget those long, hot days of June, July, and August. Even so, now is the time to start applying and planning to feed hungry children when the school year ends.

More than 21 million children in the country receive free and reduced price meals during the school year, but when summer rolls around, only about 1 in 10 of those kids (3 million) get free meals through federal summer feeding programs.

Clearly, there is a gap that needs filling.

Enter USDA's **Summer Food Service Program**. Kids are at higher risk of going hungry during the summer months, and we are working to fill that void. USDA alone, however, cannot accomplish the important work of feeding our low-income kids. You and your organizations have an important role to play.

Faith-based, community and private non-profit organizations are pivotal in the lives of needy

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children. And schools, churches, recreation centers, playgrounds, parks, and camps are all eligible and encouraged to serve summer meals in neighborhoods with a high percentage of low-income families. These locations, by their very nature, offer safe and familiar environments and are places children gather when school is out.

But feeding hungry young people requires commitment. Sponsors must provide a capable staff, managerial skills and food service capabilities. Sponsors may provide their own meals, purchase meals through an agreement with an area school, or contract for meals with a food vendor.

If you don't want to be a sponsor but still want to be involved, your organization can be a summer feeding site. There are sponsors in your area who can work with you to feed the children in your community. And don't forget to register your summer feeding sites for the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-Hungry or **1-877-8-HAMBRE**.

The most successful summer programs offer activities for kids. Children are much more likely to come out for a meal when there is an activity to keep them there. It can include anything from sports, tutoring and arts and crafts, to other creative activities with community partners. Developing partnerships with other community organizations is often the key to being able to offer great activities.

To learn more about the Summer Food Service Program or to participate in one of USDA's free webinar sessions on opportunities to provide summer meals, please visit www.summerfood.usda.gov. These helpful webinars will highlight the program, offer an understanding of how SFSP works, detail sponsor and site roles and responsibilities, and provide outreach tips and other resources to get started.

Together we can continue to tackle childhood hunger and ensure kids receive the nutritious meals they need in summer, and throughout the year. We look forward to working with you to meet that goal.

Kevin W. Concannon was nominated by President Obama and Secretary Vilsack and confirmed by the U.S. Senate in July 2009 to serve as Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services in the United States Department of Agriculture.