

2003 Summer Meals Program Report

This past summer, about 133,000 children per day ate lunch or breakfast through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). As reported by the PA Department of Education (PDE), average daily participation was up by about 2 percent over the summer of 2002. However, the number of meals served throughout the summer declined from 7.4 million to 7.2 million.

PDE efforts to recruit additional sponsors of the SFSP were moderately successful as the total reached 181, up from 166 in the summer of 2002.

As in previous years, during the summer of 2003 low-income children in 14 rural counties had no access at all to these meals because no local organization sponsored the program. Shut out entirely were children in Bedford, Bradford, Cameron, Clinton, Elk, Forest, Huntingdon, Jefferson, Juniata, Montour, Perry, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming counties. Children in 20 other counties (Bucks, Butler, Carbon, Clarion, Clearfield, Columbia, Cumberland, Erie, Franklin, Fulton, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Mifflin, Pike, Snyder, Somerset, Washington, Wayne and York) had severely limited access.

Children had excellent access to summer meals in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties where the number of low-income children served per day over the summer approached 75 percent of the number served when schools are in session. Children in Berks,, Blair, Chester, and Lackawanna counties had moderate access, with participation approaching 40 percent of the school rate. In all other counties summer participation was below 30 percent.

Hunger Action is calling on Congress to make changes in the law that would make summer meals available to more rural children. Two changes are needed: lower the threshold for "area eligibility" from 50 to 40 percent, thereby making available many more sites to host the meals; and simplifying financial administration so that sponsors may obtain meal reimbursements on a set rate per meal served.

Hunger Action, along with PDE, is recruiting new sponsors for the summer of 2004. Rural nonprofit organizations with interest in sponsoring the SFSP should contact Sue Mitchem at 717-233-6705.