



breadfortheworld
INSTITUTE

Background Paper

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Feed Our Children Bread for the World's 2015 Offering of Letters

Food affects many parts of our lives, both individually and collectively. Your own, personal weight and health is directly connected to the food you eat. And the desire of many consumers to buy organically grown food is an example of how food use affects many of us.

We have learned in recent years that giving toddlers an early start in their education can give them advantages as they enter kindergarten—better-developed speaking skills, for example. These advantages can produce other advantages and build upon each other. Children will learn more quickly, which often translates into a better education, which, in turn, can mean a better job and higher productivity and pay. In important ways, we all benefit from a more educated and highly productive workforce.

The same is true of food, given how integral it is to our lives from the day we are born. Ensuring children eat consistently and receive the nutrition they need has advantages that can grow and multiply as children grow. Well-fed children are healthier, have fewer behavioral problems, and learn more easily. This often means that, over the years, they become responsible and productive as they progress through school and enter the workforce and family life as adults. This means fewer widespread problems, such as lack of skilled workers or public-health issues like diabetes and obesity.

Our Collective Concern for Children's Nutrition

Nearly 16 million children in the United States—one in five—live in households that struggle to put food



on the table. Many of these children have parents who have job and work hard, but their wages aren't high enough to cover the high costs of rent, transportation, and utilities—and daily meals. So our federal government's feeding programs serve as a lifeline for vulnerable children and families. Because children are hit especially hard by the effects of hunger and malnutrition, nutrition programs aimed at children are particularly important. A healthy start in life—even before a child is born—pays off for years, not only for individual children and families, but for communities and our nation as a whole.

What the Federal Government Does

Only one out of every 20 grocery bags that feed people who are hungry come from church food pantries and other private charities. Federal nutrition programs, from school meals to SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), provide the rest. Our government's child nutrition programs serve millions of children each year. Here are the major programs and their functions for low-income children:

	National School Lunch Program	School Breakfast Program	Summer Food Service Program	Child and Adult Care Food Program	WIC Program
What does it provide?	Free or reduced-price lunches	Free or reduced-price breakfasts	Meals during the summer months	Healthy meals and snacks	Nutritious food, nutrition education, and healthcare referrals
For whom?	21.5 million low-income children	11.2 million low-income children	2.4 million children in 2013	Approximately 3.4 million children	8.3 million low-income pregnant women, infants, and children up to age 5
Where?	In more than 100,000 schools	In more than 89,000 schools	Over 47,000 community-based sites	In child care or qualified after-school programs	Food is bought by recipients with WIC checks or a debit card

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service

As the table shows, most of these programs provide ready-to-eat food in places where children can be reached directly. Food provided through these programs meets science-based nutrition guidelines.

To receive free or reduced-price meals or WIC benefits, children must live in households that are “low-income” as defined by the federal government. The illustration below shows the programs that a typical family of four is eligible for at various income levels.

The Current State of These Programs

Congress must review and renew child nutrition programs every five years, and they are up for “reauthorization” in 2015. Currently, these programs are governed by the Healthy, Hunger-free Kids Act of 2010. When Congress reauthorized child nutrition programs in 2010, it made some of the biggest investments in their histories. Nutrition standards were set for all food served in schools, and more children were given access to the meals they needed.

Despite these gains, however, gaps in participation remain, and far too many children continue to live at risk of hunger. Of the 21.5 million low-income children who receive a school lunch, only a little over half also receive breakfast. And only about one in seven receive meals during the summer months. Children are most at risk of hunger during the summer and school breaks.

What Do We Want Congress to Do?

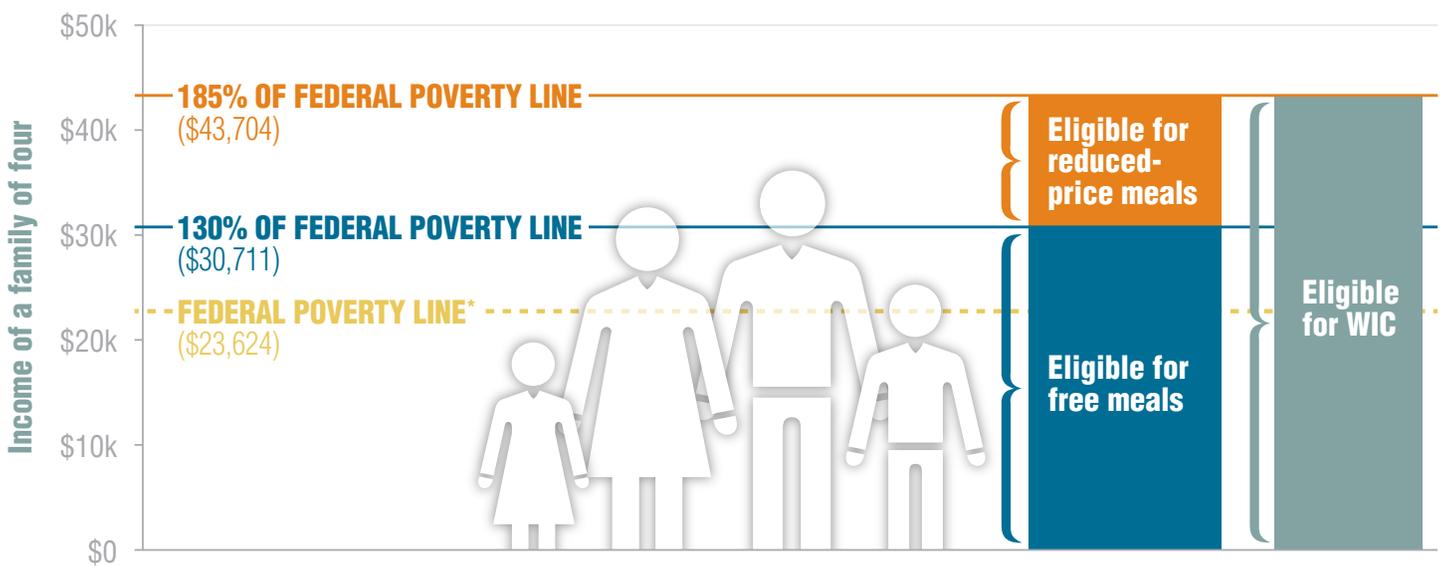
The new Congress has an opportunity to give more children at risk of hunger access to the healthy food they need. But there are challenges in doing so. With the start of the 114th Congress in 2015, there are new members and new leaders with little to no experience with child hunger or child nutrition programs. These members of Congress must be educated on the importance of feeding children. Additionally, the tight national budget and political climate make it harder to talk about programs that require more funding.

Still, Congress must act by September 30, 2015, when authority

for many of these child nutrition programs end. Bread for the World is urging Congress to pass a child nutrition bill that protects nutrition programs and gives more hungry children access to the meals they need to thrive. Specifically, we are asking Congress to:

- 1. Continue strong investments in child nutrition programs.** These programs keep hunger at bay for millions of children, allowing them to learn and grow. Without these programs, child hunger and food insecurity would be much worse, and many more children would suffer from inadequate nutrition. Congress should maintain the gains made in the 2010 child nutrition bill, preserving both the funding and the nutrition standards that have proven effective.
- 2. Improve children’s access to feeding programs.** Despite gains made in 2010, too many children are unable to get the meals they need to stay healthy and hunger-free, especially during non-school hours. Since 2010, a number of pilot projects have explored how to reach more children through the Summer Food Service Program the school lunch and breakfast programs. Congress should use this research to improve access and ensure children are receiving much-needed meals.
- 3. Ensure improvements to child nutrition programs are not paid for by cuts to other vital safety-net programs** like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps). For the past several years, Congress has cut SNAP funding to pay for other programs. SNAP was also cut in the 2014 farm bill. Nearly half of all SNAP recipients are children, and so Congress must no longer look to SNAP or any other safety-net programs to pay for investments in our children.

Congress and our country should view child nutrition programs as investments in our children. Such investments will not only produce a healthier and stronger generation of adults in the coming decades, but they can be a big step on the road to ending hunger by 2030. But that means we need to plant—invest—today in order to have something to reap later.



1. How long have federal child nutrition programs been around?

Our country has recognized the value of child nutrition for well over a century. Congress made the school lunch program permanent by passing the National School Lunch Act in 1946. At the time, it was seen as “a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children.” Recruits needed for World War II were unable to pass the physical examination due to malnutrition. Between 1965 and 1975, Congress responded to increased poverty and hunger among children with the War on Poverty. School breakfast, summer meal, and childcare feeding program pilots quickly proved successful in reducing child poverty. These expansions created a more complete approach to child nutrition by providing food and nutrition assistance to children beyond lunchtime. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) began in 1974 to fill the gap before children start attending school. WIC provides food and nutrition support to expectant and new mothers and young children.

2. Why do we need child nutrition programs? Isn't it a parent's responsibility to feed their children?

Parents do have the primary responsibility for feeding their children. But many children live in working-poor families in which the parents don't earn enough to pay for everything their family needs, such as rent, transportation, utilities, and even food. Some parents cannot work for a variety of reasons, such as a disability, or because they cannot find a job.

National nutrition programs allow many parents to work full days without having to worry if their children will get nutritious meals. These programs provide food while children are away from home. Free and reduced-price meals are offered



Joseph Molieri/Bread for the World

We care for our bodies by eating well. We care for our children. We should also care that our children eat well.

to qualifying, low-income children to ensure they receive at least one full, nutritious meal a day.

As Christians, it is our mandate from the Bible to care for our neighbors, whether they are next door, in the next state, or on the next continent. This care includes providing food for people when they are hungry. The Bible shows over and over that God has a special concern for people who are poor or hungry. As people of faith in a wealthy country, we have a responsibility to ensure that children, who deserve protection and care from adults, have all of their needs met.

3. With so many different child nutrition programs, is there a lot of overlap and duplication?

Child nutrition programs are a vital piece of a national safety net and help meet the nutritional needs of millions of children, including millions of children at risk of hunger. Programs operate in every state and provide nutritious meals to help children learn and grow. They reach children at different ages, and each is designed to give children access to food in a different location or period. The School Lunch and Breakfast Programs serve meals at schools. The Summer Food Service Program helps

children access meals and snacks during the summer months. The Child and Adult Care Food Program serves children in day care or in after-school programs. Finally, WIC assists low-income women, infants, and children up to age five. It provides foods that supply nutrients lacking in their diets, education on healthy eating, and even health care referrals.

4. What is Congress doing with the programs this year?

Reauthorization is the process by which Congress reviews and renews laws, which include the designation of funding for programs. Child nutrition programs are reauthorized every five years. The last reauthorization happened in 2010 and authorized child nutrition programs through September 2015. On September 30, 2015, the authority for some of these programs will expire. Congress must reauthorize them so that children and families at risk of hunger will continue to receive needed nutrition assistance.

5. What changes were made in the last reauthorization in 2010?

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 made some of the biggest investments in child nutrition programs in more than 30

For more on child hunger

A Bread for the World Institute Briefing Paper, “Ending Child Hunger in the United States” (No. 26), published in November 2014, analyzes the issue. Find it at www.bread.org/institute/papers/briefing-paper-child-nutrition.pdf, or order by calling 800-822-7323, ext. 1072, or by emailing publications@bread.org.



Nutritionists say that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Students have active minds, and ensuring they eat breakfast gives their brains the fuel they need.

years, thanks in part to Bread for the World's advocacy efforts. With a focus on improving nutrition, the act provided additional funding for school lunch programs that met new nutrition standards. The act also included some provisions to improve children's access to the programs. It made the after-school meal program nationwide and allowed schools in high-poverty areas to determine school-wide eligibility based on census data. It also provided funding for improving "direct certification," which allows children participating in one program, like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), to more easily receive free meals at school. As a result, participation of eligible children increased. But gaps remain, and more can be done to connect children at risk of hunger with child nutrition programs.

6. Why aren't more children being reached by these programs?

The school lunch program serves more than 30 million children, including 21.5 million low-income children. While states have made progress in ensuring children are accessing the school breakfast program, access to summer programs in particular continues to be a challenge. According to a survey by Share Our Strength, 80 percent of children are home during the summer and have difficulty getting to summer sites. In some areas, there aren't even summer sites available because of geographical limitations, for example.

7. What are some specific improvements we want to see in this reauthorization?

Congress must pass a bill that gives children who are at risk of hunger easier access to meals when and where they need them, particularly after school and during the summer months. Many states have piloted innovative projects to reach more children during summer breaks. These include mobile summer meal sites, backpack programs, and additional money for families to buy groceries. In areas where children are unable to easily get to summer food sites, states should have the option to implement alternative solutions based on the successful pilot projects.

8. Is there strong support for these programs in Congress?

Child nutrition programs have traditionally had strong bipartisan support in Congress. Operational in every state, the lunch programs alone benefit more than 30 million children, contributing to a healthier labor force and strong economy in the future. Still, given the federal budget climate and divided government, this reauthorization could be impacted by partisan gridlock. It's up to you to make your voice heard and ensure every member of Congress makes passing a child nutrition bill that closes the hunger gap a top priority.

9. Where do the states fit in with these programs? Why does the federal government need to be involved in them?

Child nutrition program rules are set and funded by the federal government but facilitated by the states. Ending child hunger requires a strong partnership between the federal government, state and local governments, and local communities. Churches, local food pantries, and other private charities are doing a lot to alleviate hunger directly. But they can't end hunger alone. For every one bag of groceries provided by charities, the federal government provides 20 times more bags of food assistance.

Oversight and funding of child nutrition programs at the federal level ensures that all children—regardless of the state they live in or what the budget situation in that state may be—have access to the food they need learn and grow.

10. Wasn't there a goal to end child hunger by 2015? How is it possible that almost 16 million children are still at risk of hunger?

In 2008, President Obama and some members of Congress set a goal to end child hunger by 2015. National anti-hunger groups, including Bread for the World, embraced this goal and have advocated for a variety of policies toward reaching it, including protecting SNAP (formerly food stamps), strengthening the earned income tax credit and child tax credit, and increasing the minimum wage. Due to the recession followed by gridlock in Congress, we refocused our advocacy efforts on protecting critical safety-net programs. Still, the number of children living in families at risk of hunger peaked in 2009 and has been slowly declining since then.

11. How does advocacy on child nutrition programs in 2015 fit into Bread's goal to end hunger by 2030?

If we want to have adults in 2030 be hunger-free, the children those adults are now need to be hunger-free today. The fastest, most direct way to reduce child hunger is through existing child nutrition programs. However, ending hunger for good requires a sustainable solution to poverty. Children are hungry because their families are struggling economically. As stated in Bread for the World Institute's 2014 *Hunger Report: Ending Hunger in America*, a long-term solution to hunger requires good jobs, investments in people, a strong safety net, and strong public-private partnerships. Child nutrition programs are a critical component of our country's federal safety-net programs. Strengthening them is critical to meeting the goal of ending hunger by 2030.

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