

Policy Platform for the 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Specific goals

Overall, the Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act must:

- 1) Make significant progress towards ending child hunger and food insecurity in America and protecting the existing anti-hunger safety net, while improving child nutrition programs.
- 2) Ensure that all children have access to high quality, nutritious foods, local and regional whenever possible, in their schools and through other child nutrition programs;
- 3) Support high-quality nutrition education in child nutrition programs as a way to reduce obesity and diet-related diseases and ensure productive, healthy generations; and
- 4) Support and expand regional farm and food economies, increasing jobs, enhancing infrastructure, and reducing unsustainable environmental impact through child nutrition procurement policy

Key Strategies

- 1) Ensure that every child has year-round access to high quality food.
- 2) Maintain nutrition standards and support nutrition education.
- 3) Increase program resources and technical assistance.

Specific Policies¹

Goal #1: Make significant progress towards ending child hunger and food insecurity in America and protecting the existing anti-hunger safety net, while improving child nutrition programs.

School meals, summer meals, and meals served in childcare and afterschool settings are a significant part of children's diets. The Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is an opportunity to increase access to federally funded and regulated meals for all children. This is especially important for the 15.8 million children in the United States who live in "food-insecure" households; households that are unable to afford enough food. In NYC nearly one in four of the city's child population live in food insecure households. Despite this need, many child nutrition programs are currently under funded and underutilized. Children are often unable to access meals offered through the child nutrition programs due to the administrative obstacles described below.

Rationale:

By making eligibility guidelines for school meals programs consistent with other benefits programs, more low-income children will be able to have access to school meals. In addition, by eliminating unnecessary administrative requirements, agencies providing school meals will be better capable of meeting the demand. The last reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act legislated cuts to SNAP, which negatively impacted millions of Americans. No future legislation should include cuts to critical anti-hunger programs. As the impact of the recession resulted in lost jobs that have not since been replaced, more children have fallen into lower income categories leading to increased need for child nutrition programs.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Provide free meals to children as part of their instructional day in all public schools and reimburse all meals served at the free eligibility rate. Maintain Community Eligibility Provision and direct certification provisions to increase meal access, reduce error, and reduce administrative burden.

¹Order of proposed policies therein does not reflect prioritization.

- 2) Consolidate the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) into one year-round program. Ensure that providers who only operate CACFP year-round are not impacted.
- 3) Increase reimbursement rates for CACFP to meet the increased costs of healthy food and transportation. Provide technical assistance in the automation of systems, food ordering/purchasing records and food production records.
- 4) Fund an additional meal through CACFP for center and home-based providers that have children in their care for more than eight hours.
- 5) Fund nutrition services in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program at a level commensurate with the increased demands placed upon WIC in recent years. Provide funding for technical assistance and grants to WIC vendors to improve offerings of fruits and vegetables, including fresh, frozen, and canned.

Goal #2: Ensure that all children have access to high quality, nutritious foods, local and regional whenever possible, in their schools and in other child nutrition programs.

Rationale: Many children live in households with limited access to fresh, healthy, and high quality, nutrient-rich food options. Child nutrition programs can provide children, especially those vulnerable to hunger and diet-related disease, with access to healthful foods.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Maintain federally funded meals in line with the most current Dietary Guidelines for Americans to ensure dietary balance and to promote health. Specifically, protect gains made in the 2010 Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act to increase amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat/fat-free dairy products in weekly menus. Ensure that national nutrition standards set a minimum for healthfulness and do not restrict the ability of localities to implement even healthier standards.
- 2) Expand non-congregate feeding opportunities to increase participation in child nutrition programs, specifically the Summer Food Service Program, while maintaining congregate feeding requirements.
- 3) Establish a loan guarantee assistance program within USDA that will fund school kitchen infrastructure, including full cooking machinery, to ensure programs have the ability to prepare healthful foods. Increase funds for training for culinary and nutrition training for food service staff of school and CACFP meal programs to ensure a skilled workforce can prepare meals using healthful cooking techniques, and can promote positive diet behaviors among students.
- 4) Increase the USDA Foods commodity dollars from \$0.2475 to \$0.75 to encompass all school meals while maintaining current reimbursement rate structure for school meals.
- 5) Support full implementation of Smart Snack standards in all schools.

Goal #3: Support high-quality nutrition education in child nutrition programs as a way to reduce obesity and diet-related diseases and ensure productive, healthy generations

Rationale: Obesity and diet-related diseases are epidemic among children in NYC. Nutrition education and promotion offered through child nutrition programs can serve as a model for children to learn good dietary habits for life, especially when combined with the access to healthy food afforded by CNR. Widespread education can contribute to a generation of healthy adults to reverse the current trend of increasing disease prevalence. However, nutrition education and promotion has been chronically underfunded. The 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization provides an opportunity to reduce childhood obesity and improve children's near and long-term health.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Identify and assess best practices that states are using to coordinate nutrition education across nutrition assistance programs, such as WIC, Team Nutrition, SNAP-Education, and EFNEP. USDA also should promote and assess the materials, trainings, and other products developed through Team Nutrition funding and disseminate best practices to schools about how to utilize these resources effectively.
- 2) Provide reimbursements for meals of CAFCP staff and volunteers, including for a fourth meal, to participate in family style meals and extend the family style meal requirement to all early child care settings to model positive dietary habits.
- 3) Continue to support WIC nutrition education, including breastfeeding support, as a vital component to early health and development of the child and continuing care of the mother.

Goal #4: Support and expand regional farm and food economies, increasing jobs, enhancing infrastructure, and reducing unsustainable environmental impact through child nutrition procurement policy

Rationale: Federally funded food programs such as School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, WIC and CAFCP bring millions of federal dollars into New York City each year. These programs can serve as an important economic engine for NYC and the surrounding region, which includes a large agriculture sector that lacks access to adequate markets. These programs provide jobs to many New Yorkers employed in kitchens in schools, childcare and senior centers. Increased investment in the programs, especially institutional purchase of regional food, will have significant positive economic benefits throughout the supply chain.

Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Expand technical assistance to schools and childcare institutions to purchase locally and regionally grown and minimally processed foods, clarify and expand existing local procurement (2002 Farm Bill) and geographic preference (2008 Farm Bill) language to specifically allow for a local product specification, in addition to geographic preference, and expand the definition of food under the DOD Fresh program (2002 Farm Bill, as amended under the 2008 Farm Bill), to allow for more out-of-season local purchasing, from "fresh" to "unprocessed," thus allowing for minimal processing, such as flash freezing and drying.
- 2) Expand and protect mandatory funding for USDA Farm to School Grant program.
- 3) Increase the small purchase, simplified acquisition threshold (SAT) from \$150,000 to \$250,000 allowing for more small purchase procurements to be conducted using informal bid methods.

4) Initiate a USDA study to determine the full costs and benefits of School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, WIC and CACFP procurement and commodity distribution of locally or regionally produced fresh and minimally processed foods based on price, loss through spoilage, environmental impact of local purchasing, and impact on local farm and food economies.