A New Year of Changes and Opportunities

As many of you, our valued partners, have heard, Midwest Regional Administrator Ollice Holden retired in January after almost ten years as our Regional Administrator. Ollice leaves an impressive legacy, much of which is linked to the partnerships and support he encouraged within the Midwest Region. As he often noted, FNS does all of its work through partners. Without the support and involvement of all of you, we would not be the most successful FNS Region in reducing hunger through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or in growing our Summer Food Service Program.

That said, there’s a lot more that we can do. After working for a number of years as the Midwest SNAP Director, and most recently as Deputy Regional Administrator, I learned the value of working closely with our state, local and not-for-profit partners to improve SNAP. As Acting Regional Administrator, I intend to continue to work closely with all of you and to identify opportunities for improving all of our programs and increasing our reach.

FNS has increased opportunities to improve communities in our Region and across the country. From Farm to School, which supports family farmers and rural economies and provides access to fresh, healthy food to American children, to Summer Food Service Program demos which reduce hunger during the summertime, FNS is collaborating with many of you to increase our reach and make a greater impact. In this edition of At the Table, we highlight a number of success stories, model programs and initiatives, with a special focus on summer meals. The stories shared by our partners reflect the many ways our programs are making a difference in preventing hunger, improving health and nutrition, and educating people about healthy food choices. We hope these stories inspire you and provide ideas for utilizing our programs in ways that you might not have known were possible.

I look forward to working with you and to achieving continued success in all of the 15 nutrition assistance programs that we administer together. Thanks for all that you do.

Tim English
Acting FNS Midwest Regional Administrator
Healthier School Meals, Healthier Kids

Update on School Meals Standards

This school year, schools across the country began implementing the new school meal nutrition standards required by the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010. The new school nutrition standards are based on the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and Institute of Medicine recommendations. They are the first significant changes to the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs in more than 15 years.

The focus this school year is on changes to the school lunch menu pattern. Schools are required to serve more fruits and vegetables, more whole grain-rich foods, only low-fat or skim milk and water. Reductions to saturated fat, sodium and added sugars are being phased in and trans fats eliminated. USDA received considerable feedback on one aspect of the new standards – the restrictions on maximum protein and bread servings. In response to these concerns, USDA issued a recent policy memo that provides flexibility to schools on the protein and bread requirements until the end of school year 2013-14.

The positive stories about the new school meals keep on coming, as schools across the country experiment with recipes and encourage students to try new fruits and vegetables. During March (National Nutrition Month), the Let’s Move blog website will feature best practices in school nutrition from the Midwest and around the country.

More Schools Taking the Challenge

USDA’s HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC) recognizes schools participating in the National School Lunch Program that have achieved excellence in school nutrition and fitness. HUSSC schools commit to creating a healthy school environment, not just in the cafeteria but throughout the school day. They serve school meals that exceed USDA nutrition requirements. They also provide nutrition education in the classroom and ensure students get adequate physical activity.

In February 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama introduced her Let’s Move! initiative and made the HUSSC an integral part of the campaign. As of March 8, 2013, 5,524 schools have received HUSSC incentive awards ranging from $500 to $2,000. Click here to see a list of award winners, by state. Visit the HUSSC website to see videos of principals, teachers and school foodservice directors sharing their success stories.

Happy Anniversary, Let’s Move!

In February 2013, the Let’s Move! campaign celebrated its third anniversary. First Lady Michelle Obama launched Let’s Move! in February 2010 to combat the epidemic of child obesity and raise a healthier generation of children through a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to improving child nutrition and physical activity. Read about the highlights of the past three years of Let’s Move! in a recent blog.
Obesity is increasingly linked to chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. The epidemic now impacts 23 million school children. Across the country, schools have worked diligently this year to implement the new school meal nutrition standards. And now a growing body of research points to the need for comprehensive science-based nutrition standards for all foods sold in schools. In 2010, Congress directed USDA to set these standards as part of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA). On February 8th, 2013, the proposed rule, Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold in School, was published in the Federal Register. The comment period is open for 60 days.

For the very first time, federal nutrition standards will be established for all foods sold outside of the school cafeteria during the school day. The standards impact all venues on the school campus where foods are sold – a la carte, vending, school stores, fundraisers, etc. The standards do not apply to foods brought in from home, helping preserve traditions such as birthday and holiday parties. Occasional fundraisers would also be exempt.

The proposed federal nutrition standards are minimal standards. This leaves room for state and local agencies to implement additional standards that further the goals of the rule. The rule requires that any food sold in schools be:

1) a fruit, vegetable, “whole grain-rich” product, or combination food that contains ½ cup of fruit or vegetable;

2) or the foods should contain 10% of the Daily Value for calcium, potassium, vitamin D and fiber and meet the following requirements:
   • No more than 35% total fat (excludes some nutrient dense foods)
   • Less than 10% saturated fat (excludes some nutrient dense foods)
   • No more than 200 mg of sodium per snack and 480 mg per entrée
   • No more than 35% sugar either by weight or by calories (excludes some nutrient dense foods)
   • No more than 200 calories per snack and 350 calories per entrée.

The proposed rule sets limitations on beverages, which vary by school level. All schools could sell plain water, plain low-fat milk, plain or flavored fat-free milk, and 100% fruit or vegetable juice. Limitations are set on portion sizes. The proposed rule also allows for wider beverage choices at the high school level. Under Secretary Kevin Concannon’s recent blog, “Join the Conversation on Smart Snacks in Schools,” offers a good perspective on the proposed rule.

According to a recent report by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, restricting the sale of “unhealthy” foods and beverages may be linked to a lower proportion of overweight school youth. Moreover, a new CDC report shows that 78% of states have already implemented nutrition policies or standards for competitive foods. Schools can have a great impact on students by creating environments that expose them to healthy, nutrient-dense foods. On the average, students consume 35% of their daily calories at school.

Comments on the proposed rule must be submitted by April 9. Please see the Federal Register notice for more information.
The Illinois No Kid Hungry (NKH) Campaign aims to end childhood hunger by using proven strategies, including first-year priorities of increasing access to federally-funded school breakfast and summer meal programs. The Campaign is the first recommendation of the Illinois Commission to End Hunger to be implemented.

In the summer of 2012, the Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign partnered with the Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) organization to have Parent “Food” Ambassadors do door-to-door outreach in hard-to-reach, at-risk neighborhoods in Chicago. For six weeks, the food ambassadors knocked on over 4,900 doors, went to local businesses, and attended festivals to let families know about summer meals sites in their neighborhood. They spoke to over 2,400 people. Daisy Rivera, one of the food ambassadors, retold this story about the importance of door-to-door outreach:

“A mother came to the door and said, ‘I don’t know what I would’ve done if you hadn’t come.’ She was recently separated, cut off food stamps, had been in a car accident, and didn’t have a car or money. We gave her the flyers. She was crying....She thanked us for the information. She had been laid off, didn’t have a car to take her kids to school. It was rewarding... to know we made a difference.”

The Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign Targets Summer Meals

by Dawn Melchiorre, IL No Kid Hungry Campaign

Share Our Strength and Illinois No Kid Hungry Summer Grants

Share Our Strength, in partnership with No Kid Hungry Illinois, will offer a grant program to help organizations expand access to and participation in USDA-supported summer meals programs. The intent of these grants is to provide small investments that can help current meal sites/sponsors expand their capacity or increase the number of days they operate; help with the barriers of transportation; or help establish new summer meals sites.

Eligibility
Organization must be:
- located in Illinois
- a nonprofit organization eligible to receive grants and/or tax-deductible donations
- providing a SFSP or NSLP Seamless Summer supported meal program during summer 2013

Eligible Uses of Funding
Funding may be used for equipment, personnel, transportation, and other non-food program expenses. The cost of food is not an allowable expense.

Application will be online at the Illinois No Kid Hungry website beginning in March of 2013. Please visit: http://il.nokidhungry.org/

For more information about No Kid Hungry initiatives in Illinois, contact Dawn Melchiorre, No Kid Hungry Campaign Manager: dmelchiorre@gcfd.org

Food Ambassadors in Chicago’s Humboldt Park
In 2012, the Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin in Madison embraced a new challenge: improving food security for low-income families when school meals aren’t available. They decided to focus on helping the sponsors in their 16-county service area serve more children through the Summer Food Service Program. In February 2012, the food bank’s Board of Directors committed to funding a pilot SFSP Mini-Grant Program, in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The grants, modeled after the successful program of Second Harvest Heartland (St. Paul, MN), were designed to support new and returning SFSP sponsors’ efforts to increase the number of children served.

Second Harvest recognized the struggle many SFSP sponsors face in operating strong, effective summer feeding programs. They encouraged each grant applicant to be creative in brainstorming ways to increase the number of participating children. Sponsors who received the grants used them in a variety of ways, including extra staffing, fun recreational activities to complement the meal service, transportation of food, and purchases of needed equipment and supplies. A few sponsors launched city-wide media campaigns to build community awareness.

Impact of the Grants
By the end of the summer, Second Harvest’s grant program had succeeded in achieving its primary goal: increasing SFSP participation. Altogether, five new sponsors received $9,540 in grants and 13 returning sponsors received $52,239 in grants. Collectively, the sponsors served 405,799 summer meals to children and teens. This represents a 16.6% increase over 2011 (or 66,886 more meals).

Beyond the impressive participation gains, the grants had other positive outcomes. Sponsors reported that the knowledge and best practices shared by Second Harvest staff inspired ideas to improve their programs. The grant program also led Second Harvest to develop new partnerships with schools and community organizations to maximize food resource opportunities.

Gina Wilson, Second Harvest Director of Agency Services and Programs, noted, “The SFSP grants were a perfect example of how our Foodbank could play a significant role in summer meals by collaborating with strong SFSP sponsors. We were very pleased with the outcomes and by our partners’ creativity and commitment.” She underscored the importance of local partnerships: “We would encourage SFSP sponsors to seek additional support from local companies, foundations and nonprofit organizations to help increase participation and build community awareness.” The food bank will offer the grants again this summer.

For more information, contact: GinaW@shfbmadison.org

Thanks to a summer grant, the School District of Beloit (WI) attracted more kids to their summer meals sites with fun activities like face-painting and balloon art.
Collaborating for **Summer Meals** in Ohio

Despite rough roads and cold winds, January’s third annual statewide Ohio Summer Food Service Program Summit, sponsored by [Share Our Strength](http://www.shareourstrength.org) and the [Ohio Association of Foodbanks](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org), saw hundreds of Ohioans gathered in the Mid-Ohio Foodbank’s community room to network and to learn about how to increase participation in the program.

Featuring USDA Under Secretary Kevin Concannon, who spoke to attendees about the importance of the program and innovative efforts to increase participation, the event also included a panel presentation on Best Practices and Innovative Strategies for Outreach with representatives from ProMedica, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, Share Our Strength and the Food Research and Action Center.

"The nutrition gap low-income children face when school is out of session underscores the need and importance for USDA’s summer meal opportunities," said Under Secretary Concannon. “We anticipate bolstering this investment by working to increase the number of sites where disadvantaged Ohio children can receive a meal in a constructive, safe environment.”

The event also featured a panel presentation by participants in the Ohio Governor’s Summer Weekend Meals Program, a unique partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, 31 Summer Food Service Program sponsors and 265 SFSP sites. This program delivered over 600,000 weekend meals to vulnerable children through SFSP last summer across Ohio. The week after the SFSP Summit, Ohio’s Governor Kasich issued an executive order providing an additional $1.5 million to continue this critical program in the summer of 2013.

Resources shared included the Ohio Association of Foodbanks AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associate program and a series of maps showing county participation and underserved areas. The Ohio Department of Education also provided information in a series of breakout sessions, informing attendees on how they could be involved in the program, food safety, preparing healthy appetizing meals and offer versus serve requirements.

To learn more about the event and to view presentations and media clips, visit [www.ohiofoodbanks.org/sfspsummit](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org/sfspsummit).
SNAP Farmers Markets Expand Healthy Choices

With the help of new wireless technology, USDA grants, and innovative state and local partnerships, a record number of farmers markets and farmers accepted SNAP benefits in 2012. Increasingly, SNAP recipients are spending their federal nutrition benefits on fresh, healthy, locally-grown foods – a clear win-win for local farmers and low-income customers and a boost to Midwestern economies.

More Farmers and Markets
From 2011 to 2012, the FNS Midwest Region (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI) had a combined increase of 65% in the number of farmers markets and individual farmers (or “direct marketing farmers”) accepting SNAP benefits. The result was a 89% increase in SNAP dollars spent at farmers markets and roadside stands in one year and healthier diets for low-income families. In Chicago alone, SNAP farmers’ market redemptions increased 56% from 2011 to 2012. Nationally, more than 3,200 farmers markets and direct marketing farmers were authorized to accept SNAP in FY 2012. Nearly 1,900 were farmers markets -- an almost 100% increase since 2012.

SNAP Purchases Increase
Nationally, 267,433 SNAP households made at least one purchase at a farmer’s market in FY 2012. The redemption total was $16.6 million (an increase of more than 120% since 2010). Thirty-five percent of all U. S. counties have a SNAP-authorized market or direct-marketing farmer. Local economies received a boost of $1.80 for every dollar spent.

A farmer at Chicago’s 61st Street Farmers Market, a program of Experimental Station, a nonprofit incubator for innovative projects and enterprises. Experimental Station manages SNAP EBT services for City of Chicago farmers markets and Link Up Illinois, providing customer incentives and support to Illinois SNAP farmers markets.

Midwest SNAP Farmers Markets/Farmers - FY 2011 to 2012

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2011 Number of Farmers Markets/DMF</th>
<th>2012 Number of Farmers Markets/DMF</th>
<th>2011 SNAP Redemptions</th>
<th>2012 SNAP Redemptions</th>
<th>2011/2012 Redemptions Increase %</th>
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</table>

*DMF = Direct Marketing Farmers. This means individually authorized farmers who accept SNAP at farmers markets, roadside stands, etc.
MSU SNAP Nutrition Educator Reaches Refugees

Imelda Galdamez is happy. She’s happy about what she refers to as an “amazing accomplishment” for Michigan State University Extension. What’s happened that has Imelda, an MSU Extension health and nutrition educator, so excited?

Many refugees from the Middle East and Africa live in District 11, which includes Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. Overcoming language and cultural barriers to make significant connections with this population, as well as barriers to partnering with other organizations to make that happen, presents a challenge.

Imelda supervises MSU Extension program instructor Sulaiman Mansour. Sulaiman worked diligently to secure partnerships with the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) of Detroit, Lutheran Social Services of Macomb County and Lutheran Social Services of Oakland County to provide nutrition classes to recently resettled refugees.

Sulaiman teaches a nutrition class once a week for two hours at all three partner locations. He includes a short physical activity, information about healthy eating, food safety, community resources and goal assessment.

Sulaiman teaches a class in Arabic.

Able to speak Arabic and some African dialects, Sulaiman possesses the language skills to effectively teach our curriculum, Eating Right Is Basic, to this audience. He uses PowerPoint presentations in their native languages. Not only that, he uses pictorials of their native foods to adapt the curriculum to meet their needs.

Imelda said, “I can honestly say this is the first time in District 11 that MSUE has established concrete working relationships with the refugee communities. Sulaiman’s passion, dedication, and ability to sit down with these agencies and work something out is something to be proud of.”

As a bonus, the number of participants in SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education) has increased, due to the partnerships. Congratulations to Sulaiman and Imelda, and thanks to them for their leadership!

For more information, contact Dawn Contreras: contrer7@anr.msu.edu
Across the country, demand for local and regional foods is strong and growing, and schools are no exception. Increasingly, schools and school districts are joining the “farm to school” (F2S) movement. They are seeking out locally grown foods for their school meals programs and opportunities to increase “food literacy” by educating students about food, farming, and nutrition.

The term F2S encompasses a broad spectrum of activities: sourcing local or regionally-produced foods for school cafeterias; hands-on student learning (e.g., school gardening, farm visits, and cooking classes); and integrating food-related education into the curriculum. USDA supports F2S efforts through its Farm to School Program and Farm to School grants. F2S is one component of USDA's local and regional foods initiative: Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food.

New Grants for FY 2014
The Healthy-Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 authorized USDA to spend $5 million annually to improve access to local foods in schools, including training, technical assistance and F2S grants. On February 6, USDA Deputy Secretary Merrigan announced a request for applications for a new round of Farm to School Grants for FY 2014. Three types of grants will be available: planning, implementation, and support services. Grant proposals are due April 24, 2013. Schools, state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, nonprofits, and agricultural producers are eligible to apply.

2013 USDA Farm to School Grantees
In November 2012 USDA Deputy Secretary Merrigan announced the awardees from the first round of Farm to School grants. These FY 2013 grants fund 68 projects nationwide and benefit more than 3,200 schools and 1.75 million students. Midwest Region grantees are:

- Chicago Public Schools
  Chicago, IL - $100,000

- Michigan Land Use Institute
  Traverse City, MI - $100,000

- Waterford School District
  Waterford, MI - $44,900

- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
  Minneapolis, MN - $100,000

- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
  Cloquet, MN - $33,750

- Cleveland Municipal School District
  Cleveland, OH - $45,000

- Growing Power, Inc.
  Milwaukee, WI - $99,868

- Sparta Area School District
  Sparta, WI - $35,085

Click [here](#) for a national summary of grant awards.

Click [here](#) for USDA’s new Farm to School fact sheet.
What’s New in the FNS Nutrition Assistance Programs

Eat Healthy. Be Active:
Workshops for Nutrition Educators

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services has created an new resource for nutrition educators -- Eat Healthy, Be Active Community Workshops. This colorful guidebook contains six, one-hour workshops for community nutrition educators, health promoters, dietitians/nutritionists, and cooperative extension agents. The guidebook’s messages are based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines and 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. The workshops focus on helping adults make nutritious food choices, balance calories with physical activity, and create an individual physical activity plan. Click here to view the guidebook and download files. Print copies are available to teachers and nutrition educators.

MyPlate: a Yummy Curriculum

USDA’s Team Nutrition website has a wealth of new resources for elementary school teachers. Serving Up MyPlate—A Yummy Curriculum helps integrate nutrition education into English, Language Arts, Math and Science classes, with engaging hands-on activities for grades 1-5. The materials include teacher guides, original songs, posters, parent handouts, games and more. The teacher guides will be available later this year. Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program or other Child Nutrition Programs are eligible to receive free copies of the materials. All materials can be downloaded at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/myplate.html

Child Care Nutrition and Wellness

USDA’s new handbook, Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children, provides resources for Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) providers to create a healthier child care environment. The materials are targeted to child care providers serving 2-6 year olds. They help providers incorporate current nutrition and wellness recommendations and best practices into menus and daily schedules. This handbook is only available online; however, print copies will be available to CACFP providers in summer 2013. Click here to view or download the materials.

New Look for FNS Website

A major redesign of the FNS website is almost complete. An attractive new homepage offers convenient links to popular topics, tools, and FNS priorities, as well as new homepages for each of the FNS programs and major initiatives. Over the next several months, the new site and the old legacy site will operate concurrently to ensure a seamless experience for customers. We encourage you to visit the new website at: www.fns.usda.gov.
What’s New in the FNS Nutrition Assistance Programs, cont’d.

New SNAP Integrity Efforts

In February, USDA Under Secretary Kevin Concannon announced tough new measures to strengthen integrity in SNAP, including a final regulation that updates the legal definition of SNAP trafficking. SNAP recipients can now be kicked out of the program for indirectly obtaining cash for benefits. The new definition includes activities like “water dumping,” or purchasing beverages in deposit containers, wasting the contents, and returning the containers for the cash deposit.

USDA is also seeking public comments on a new proposal that would authorize USDA to immediately suspend retailers suspected of flagrant trafficking violations from receiving SNAP payments. Currently, when a retailer is suspected of trafficking, USDA must first conduct an investigation before suspending the retailer.

“Make no mistake, incidences of fraud in SNAP remain very low, but we must continue to take steps to prevent and address any level of abuse in the program,” said Under Secretary Concannon in a recent blog. Last year, USDA permanently disqualified 1,387 stores for trafficking in SNAP benefits.

FNS has developed a new fact sheet to address common misunderstandings about where SNAP recipients can use their SNAP EBT benefits. Click here to access the fact sheet.

FACT: 4 out of every 100 U.S. children have a food allergy.

Food Safety Guide for Students with Food Allergies

A new guidebook is available to help school food service staff ensure the safety of children who have food allergies. The guidebook was created through a collaboration between the USDA, Centers for Disease Control, FDA, Department of Education, and non-governmental partners. It covers types, symptoms and treatments of various food allergies and provides guidance on how to address food allergies in schools. English and Spanish versions are available online.

Reaching Those in Need: Latest State SNAP Participation Rates

The latest report on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation rates is now available. The report, SNAP: Reaching Those in Need (FY 2010), contains estimates of SNAP participation rates for each state and FNS Region in FY 2010. It also provides SNAP participation rates for the working poor, by state. These estimates can be used to assess program performance and focus efforts on improving access. According to the report, 75% of all people eligible for SNAP received SNAP benefits in FY 2010. The six-state Midwest Region had the highest SNAP participation rate -- 82%. Click here to view the full report.

Americans support helping struggling families put food on the table, but they also want to know taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. Learn more about efforts to reduce SNAP fraud at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/fraud.htm

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Summer Food for Children Demos

In 2010 Congress authorized USDA to study alternatives to the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to help prevent child food insecurity and hunger in the summer. Exploratory findings from USDA’s Summer Food for Children Demonstrations are now available. Two types of demos were conducted. The Enhanced Summer Food Service Program demos studied strategies to enhance the existing SFSP, including giving sponsors an extra 50 cents per lunch served to encourage them to extend their operating days; funding new recreational or educational activities; delivering breakfast and lunch in rural areas to homes or drop-off sites; and providing weekend and holiday meal backpacks to children when meal sites were not open. (Ohio participated in this demo.) Overall, the enhancements appeared to increase participation and meals served.

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer for Children (SEBTC) demos studied the feasibility of giving low-income families an extra $60 in food benefits during the summer on their SNAP or WIC EBT cards. (Michigan participated in this demo.) The findings indicate that the SEBTC substantially reduced food insecurity among children and reached a significant proportion of children eligible for free and reduced price school meals.

USDA’s SuperTracker is an easy-to-use tool for tracking food intake, physical activity and weight. SuperTracker was launched on the ChooseMyPlate.gov website in December 2011. Since then, it has quickly grown in popularity. Currently, SuperTracker has over 1.6 million users. It allows users to create a personalized diet and physical activity plan, track foods and activities, and set personal goals, in addition to receiving online support and coaching. SuperTracker is developed and maintained by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. Visit www.ChooseMyPlate.gov to get started!