

## SECTION 15 - OTHER PROGRAMS

### SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

The School Lunch and School Breakfast programs provide Federal cash and commodity support for meals meeting minimum Federal nutrition standards. The meals are served by public and private nonprofit elementary and secondary schools and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that opt to enroll and guarantee to offer free or reduced-price meals to eligible low-income children. Both programs are “entitlement” programs, and both subsidize participating schools and RCCIs for all meals served that meet Federal nutrition standards at specific, inflation-indexed rates for each meal; food items not served as part of a meal meeting nutrition standards (a la carte offerings) are eligible for subsidies. Each program has a three-tiered system for cash per-meal Federal reimbursements to schools and RCCIs. It allows children to receive *free meals* if they have family income below 130 percent of the Federal poverty guidelines (\$27,580 for a four-person family in the 2008-2009 school year); these meals receive the highest subsidy rate. Children may receive *reduced-price meals* (no more than 40 cents for a lunch or 30 cents for a breakfast) if their family income is between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty guidelines (between \$27,580 and \$39,220 for a four-person family in the 2008-2009 school year); these meals receive a subsidy rate either 40 or 30 cents below the free meal rate. And a small per-meal subsidy is provided for “*full-price meals*” (the price is set by the school or RCCI) served to children whose families do not apply or whose family income does not qualify them for free or reduced-price meals. Children covered by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs and households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) households may automatically qualify for free school meals. Information is shared across programs to facilitate this, and the majority of these children participate.

The School Lunch Program subsidizes lunches (5.1 billion in fiscal year 2007) to children in almost 6,000 RCCIs and almost all schools (95,000). During fiscal year 2007, average daily participation was 30.5 million students (61 percent of the 50 million children enrolled in participating schools and RCCIs); of these, 49 percent received free lunches, and 10 percent received reduced-price lunches (Table 15-26). The remainder were served full-price (but still subsidized) meals. More than 90 percent of Federal funding is used to subsidize free and reduced-price lunches served to low-income children. For the 2008-2009 school year, inflation-indexed per-lunch Federal subsidies (cash payments, plus a required, and inflation-indexed, 21 cents a meal in “entitlement” commodity support) range from 45 cents for full-price lunches to \$2.78 and \$2.38 for free and reduced-price lunches,

respectively.<sup>1</sup> Fiscal year 2007 Federal school lunch costs (including commodity assistance) totaled some \$8.7 billion (Table 15-26).

The School Breakfast program serves fewer students than does the School Lunch program; about 1.7 billion breakfasts in 80,000 schools (and 6,000 RCCIs) were subsidized in fiscal year 2007. Average daily participation was 10.1 million children (23 percent of the 43 million students enrolled in participating schools and RCCIs). Unlike the School Lunch program, the great majority received free or reduced-price meals: 70 percent received free meals, and 10 percent purchased reduced-price meals (Table 15-27). In the 2008-2009 school year, inflation-indexed per-breakfast Federal subsidies (cash only) ranged from 25 cents for full-price meals to \$1.40 and \$1.10 for free and reduced-price breakfasts, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Fiscal year 2007 Federal school breakfast funding totaled about \$2.2 billion (Table 15-27).

Cash and commodity support to participating schools is based on the number and type of meals served (e.g., lunch or breakfast, free or full price). However, once the aid is received by the school, it is used to support the overall school meal service budget, as determined appropriate by the school.

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<sup>1</sup> Schools and RCCIs with high proportions of low-income children (over 60 percent) receive 2 cents a meal in addition to the rates cited here. Schools and RCCIs also receive "bonus" food commodity donations from the Agriculture Department; these are commodities acquired by the Department in support of the agricultural economy and distributed, at its discretion, to schools and other outlets. In fiscal year 2007, bonus commodity donations to schools totaled some \$16 million; however, in earlier years, these donations have been as high as \$200-\$300 million.

<sup>2</sup> Subsidies are substantially higher (some 28 cents more for free and reduced-price breakfasts) in schools in which at least 40 percent of lunches are served free or at reduced price. Most participating schools receive this extra per-meal subsidy for free and reduced-price breakfasts.

TABLE 15-26--SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND  
FEDERAL COSTS, SELECTED FISCAL YEARS 1980-2007

[In Millions]

Fiscal year	Average daily participation <sup>1</sup>				Federal costs	
	Free meals	Reduced-price meals	Full-price meals <sup>2</sup>	Total <sup>3</sup>	Current Dollars <sup>4</sup>	Constant 2007 Dollars
1980	10.0	1.9	14.7	26.6	\$3,044.9	\$7,813.2
1985	9.9	1.6	12.1	23.6	3,034.4	5,841.2
1990	9.8	1.7	12.6	24.1	3,677.1	5,865.0
1992	11.2	1.7	11.7	24.6	4,439.2	6,543.4
1994	12.2	1.8	11.3	25.3	4,919.9	6,858.3
1996	12.6	2.0	11.3	25.9	5,308.7	7,002.2
1998	13.0	2.2	11.4	26.6	5,744.1	7,260.5
2000	13.0	2.5	11.9	27.3	6,099.5	7,331.6
2001	12.9	2.6	12.0	27.5	6,414.5	7,466.5
2002	13.3	2.6	12.0	28.0	6,770.2	7,772.2
2003	13.7	2.7	11.9	28.4	7,037.5	7,889.0
2004	14.1	2.8	12.0	29.0	7,425.5	8,138.3
2005	14.6	2.9	12.2	29.6	7,879.3	8,359.9
2006	14.8	2.9	12.4	30.1	8,162.1	8,349.8
2007	14.9	3.0	12.6	30.5	8,726.5	8,726.5

<sup>1</sup> In order to reflect participation for the actual school year (September through May), these estimates are based on 9 month averages of October through May, plus September, rather than averages of the 12 months of the fiscal year (October through September).

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Government provides a small subsidy for these meals.

<sup>3</sup> Details may not sum to total because of rounding.

<sup>4</sup> Includes cash payments and the value of "entitlement" commodities; does not include the value of "bonus" commodities.

Note- Constant dollars were calculated using the fiscal year CPI-U.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Compiled by CRS.

TABLE 15-27--SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND  
FEDERAL COSTS, SELECTED FISCAL YEARS 1980-2007

[In Millions]

Fiscal Year	Average daily participation <sup>1</sup>				Federal costs	
	Free meals	Reduced-price meals	Full-price meals <sup>2</sup>	Total <sup>3</sup>	Current dollars <sup>4</sup>	Constant 2002 Dollars
1980	2.8	0.2	0.6	3.6	\$287.8	\$738.5
1985	2.9	0.2	0.4	3.4	379.3	730.2
1990	3.3	0.2	0.5	4.0	596.2	950.9
1992	4.0	0.2	0.6	4.9	786.5	1,159.3
1994	4.8	0.3	0.7	5.8	959.0	1,336.8
1996	5.3	0.4	0.9	6.6	1,118.7	1,475.6
1998	5.6	0.5	1.0	7.1	1,272.2	1,608.1
2000	5.7	0.6	1.2	7.5	1,393.3	1,674.7
2001	5.8	0.7	1.3	7.8	1,450.1	1,689.4
2002	6.0	0.7	1.4	8.1	1,566.7	1,798.6
2003	6.2	0.7	1.5	8.4	1,651.8	1,851.7
2004	6.5	0.8	1.6	8.9	1,775.7	1,946.2
2005	6.8	0.9	1.7	9.4	1,927.2	2,044.8

TABLE 15-27--SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND  
FEDERAL COSTS, SELECTED FISCAL YEARS 1980-2007  
[In Millions] – continued.

Fiscal Year	Average Daily Participation				Federal Costs	
	Free meals	Reduced- price meals	Full-price meals <sup>2</sup>	Total <sup>3</sup>	Current dollars <sup>4</sup>	Constant 2002 Dollars
2006	7.0	0.9	1.9	9.8	2,042.9	2,089.9
2007	7.1	1.0	2.0	10.1	2,163.8	2,163.8

<sup>1</sup> In order to reflect participation for the actual school year (September through May), these estimates are based on 9 month averages of October through May, plus September, rather than averages of the 12 months of the fiscal year (October through September).

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Government provides a small subsidy for these meals.

<sup>3</sup> Details may not sum to total because of rounding.

<sup>4</sup> Does not include the value of any federally donated commodities.

Note- Constant dollars were calculated using the fiscal year CPI-U.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Compiled by CRS.

#### SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (the WIC Program) provides food assistance, nutrition risk screening, and related services (e.g., nutrition education and breastfeeding support, medical care referral) to low-income pregnant and postpartum women and their infants, as well as to low-income children up to age 5. Participants in the program must have family income at or below 185 percent of poverty and must be judged to be nutritionally at risk. Nutrition risk is defined as detectable abnormal nutritional conditions; documented nutritionally-related medical conditions; health-impairing dietary deficiencies; or conditions that predispose people to inadequate nutrition or nutritionally related medical problems.

Beneficiaries of the WIC Program receive monthly vouchers for the purchase of a “package” of specifically prescribed food items in participating retail stores (or, in some cases, actual monthly food packages of supplemental foods). The range of permissible food items is set by Federal regulation, although administering State agencies have some latitude in how Federal standards are carried out (e.g., specifying “store” brands, decisions as to what types of infant formula are covered). Among the items that may be included are milk, cheese, eggs, infant formula, cereals, fruit or vegetable juices, and fresh fruits and vegetables. The program requires that vouchers (or food packages) be tailored (by food type and amount) by category of recipient – e.g., infants, women and children with special dietary needs; children; pregnant, postpartum and nursing mothers. In addition to food benefits, recipients also must receive nutrition education and breast-feeding support (where called for) and may receive other services like referral to medical care providers and other services.

The Federal cost of providing WIC benefits varies widely depending on the recipient and the foods prescribed in recipients’ vouchers, as well as differences in

retail prices (vouchers are denominated in food amounts, not dollars) and administrative and nutrition services expenses (like those for nutrition risk screening, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education). Moreover, the program's food costs are significantly influenced by the degree to which States gain rebates from infant formula (and, in some cases, juice) manufacturers under a requirement to pursue "cost containment" strategies; these rebates totaled over \$1.8 billion a year nationwide and pay for the cost of serving a significant portion of the WIC population. In fiscal year 2007, the national average Federal cost of a WIC food package (after rebates) was \$39 a month, and, for each participant, the average monthly "nutrition services and administrative" cost (including nutrition risk assessments and nutrition education) was about \$16.

The WIC Program has categorical, income, and nutrition risk requirements for eligibility. Only pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children under age 5 may participate. As noted above, WIC applicants must show evidence of health or nutrition risk, medically verified by a health professional, in order to qualify. They also must have family income below 185 percent of the most recent annually indexed Federal poverty guidelines (\$32,560 a year for a three-person family for the period July 2008 – June 2009). State WIC sites may (but seldom do) set lower income eligibility cutoff points. Receipt of TANF, SNAP benefits (formerly, food stamps), or Medicaid assistance also can satisfy the WIC Program's income test, and States may consider pregnant women meeting the income test "presumptively" eligible until a nutritional risk evaluation is made. In 2006, 60 percent of WIC enrollees had family income below the Federal poverty guidelines, 9 percent of WIC enrollees were cash welfare (TANF) recipients, 22 percent received food stamps, and 63 percent were covered by Medicaid.

WIC participants receive benefits for a specified period of time, and in some cases must be recertified during this period to show continuing need – e.g., pregnant women may continue to receive benefits throughout their pregnancy and for up to 6 months after childbirth. While it is federally funded, the WIC program is administered by nearly 2,000 State and local health agencies (and more than 30 Indian tribal organizations participating as separate grantees and treated like States). Over 10,000 local clinics/sites carry out the program. State administrative responsibilities extend to certifying eligibility, distributing benefits, redeeming vouchers, and approving retail stores for participation.

Unlike most other Federal nutrition assistance programs, the WIC program is not an "entitlement" program; it is discretionary and participation and benefits are limited by the amount of Federal funding appropriated, whatever State supplementary funding is provided, and the extent of manufacturers' rebates. However, Congress has historically provided funding at levels that meet participation and food cost requirements – called "full funding." In fiscal year 2007, Federal spending was \$5.4 billion, and the program served a monthly average of 8.3 million women, infants, and children: 25 percent women, 27 percent infants, and 51 percent children. In addition to the regular WIC program (which includes special vouchers for fruits and vegetables), the annual WIC appropriation funds a

small (\$20 million a year) WIC farmers' market nutrition program under which WIC applicants and recipients receive vouchers for the purchase of fresh produce at farmers' markets. Table 15-28 summarizes WIC participation and Federal spending. Spending is made up of food costs, just over 70 percent of the total in recent years, and nutrition services and administrative (NSA) expenses (of which approximately two-thirds are typically for service activities like nutrition education and nutrition risk evaluations and one-third are for traditional administrative activities like eligibility determinations and issuing and redeeming vouchers).

TABLE 15-28--SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC) PARTICIPATION AND FEDERAL SPENDING, SELECTED FISCAL YEARS 1980-2007

[In millions]

Fiscal Year	Average monthly participation				Federal spending	
	Women	Infants	Children	Total <sup>1</sup>	Current dollars <sup>2</sup>	Constant 2007 dollars
1980	.4	.5	1.0	1.9	\$727.7	\$1,867.3
1985	.6	.9	1.6	3.1	1,489.3	2,866.9
1990	1.0	1.4	2.1	4.5	2,122.4	3,385.2
1995	1.6	1.8	3.5	6.9	3,436.2	4,659.5
1996	1.6	1.8	3.7	7.2	2,301.1	3,035.1
1997	1.7	1.9	3.8	7.4	3,843.8	4,939.3
1998	1.7	1.9	3.7	7.3	3,890.4	4,917.5
1999	1.7	1.9	3.7	7.3	3,938.1	4,883.2
2000	1.8	1.9	3.5	7.2	3,982.1	4,786.6
2001	1.8	1.9	3.6	7.3	4,153.3	4,838.6
2002	1.8	1.9	3.8	7.5	4,339.8	4,982.1
2003	1.9	1.9	3.8	7.6	4,524.4	5,071.9
2004	1.9	2.0	4.0	7.9	4,887.3	5,356.5
2005	2.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	4,993.1	5,297.7
2006	2.0	2.1	4.0	8.1	5,075.7	5,192.4
2007	2.1	2.2	4.0	8.3	5,417.9	5,417.9

<sup>1</sup> Details may not sum to totals due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> Includes funding for food costs, administration, nutrition services, studies, surveys, pilots, and farmers' market programs. Does not include support from manufacturer rebates for infant formula and juices. Note- Constant dollars were calculated using the fiscal year CPI-U.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Compiled by CRS.

## DAY CARE, SUMMER, AND OUTSIDE-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

In addition to the school-day-based lunch and breakfast programs, child nutrition laws include provisions for Federal subsidies and commodity support for institutions/organizations offering meals and snacks to children in outside-of-school (e.g., after-school) settings. This assistance is provided to (1) schools and other governmental institutions, (2) private for-profit and nonprofit day care centers, (3) family/group day care homes, and (4) nongovernmental institutions/organizations that offer outside-of-school programs for children. In addition, day care centers for

chronically impaired adults and elderly persons are eligible for assistance under the same general term as centers caring for children.

Federal support for day care, summer, and outside-of-school meal/snack programs totaled some \$2.5 billion in “entitlement” funding (including commodities) for fiscal year 2007. More than 5 million children (and 100,000 adults) participated.

#### CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM (CACFP)

The large majority of assistance for meals and snacks served in outside-of-school settings is provided under the CACFP. This program pays subsidies for meals and snacks served in participating nonresidential child care centers (average attendance 40-50 children) and family day care homes (typically caring for 5-10 children). It also supports assistance for meals and snacks in adult day care centers (averaging 40-45 chronically ill or elderly adults), as well as those offered in participating after-school programs.

The CACFP provides Federal payments for each breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack served in participating centers or homes.<sup>3</sup> In many cases, sponsors giving administrative support to providers also are paid limited amounts for their costs. Subsidized meals and snacks must meet minimum Federal nutrition standards, and providers must fulfill any State or local licensing/approval requirements or minimum alternative Federal requirements (or otherwise demonstrate that they comply with government-established standards for other child-care programs). Federal assistance is made up overwhelmingly of cash subsidies based on the number of meals/snacks served and federally set indexed per-meal/snack subsidy rates; about 3 percent is in the form of federally donated food commodities. CACFP subsidies are available for meals and snacks served to children age 12 or under, migrant children age 15 or under, handicapped children of any age, and (in the case of adult care centers) chronically impaired and elderly adults, but preschool children form the overwhelming majority of those served by the program. Federal CACFP payments flow to individual providers either directly from the administering State agency (this is the case with many child/adult care centers able to handle their own administrative responsibilities) or through “sponsors” who oversee and provide support for a number of local providers (this is the case with some child/adult care centers and all day care homes).

Child care centers in the CACFP can be: (1) public or private nonprofit centers, (2) Head Start centers, (3) for-profit proprietary centers (if they meet minimum requirements as to the proportion of low-income children they enroll), and (4) shelters for homeless families. Adult day care centers include public or private nonprofit centers and for-profit proprietary centers (if they meet minimum requirements related to serving low-income disabled and elderly adults). In fiscal year 2007, some 48,000 child care centers, with average daily attendance of 2.2

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<sup>3</sup> Participating centers may include Head Start programs and emergency shelters for the homeless.

million children, participated in the CACFP. Adult care centers totaled 2,500 with an average daily attendance of 105,000 persons.

Day care centers may receive daily subsidies for up to two meals and one snack or one meal and two snacks for each child, so long as they meet Federal nutrition standards. All meals and snacks served in centers are federally subsidized to at least some degree; different subsidies are provided for breakfasts, lunches/suppers, and snacks, and subsidy rates are set in law and indexed for inflation annually. However, cash subsidies vary according to the family income of each child, and applications for free or reduced-price meals and snacks normally must be taken. Subsidies are annually indexed, and the largest subsidies are paid for meals and snacks served to children with family income below 130 percent of the Federal poverty income guidelines (the income limit for free school meals): for July 2008-June 2009, these subsidies are 71 cents for each snack, \$1.40 for each breakfast, and \$2.57 for each lunch/supper. Smaller subsidies are available for meals and snacks served at a reduced price (no more than 15 cents for snacks, 30 cents for breakfasts, and 40 cents for lunches/suppers) to children with family income between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty guidelines (the income range for reduced-price school meals) and for meals and snacks served to children who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals/snacks. "Independent" centers (those without sponsors handling administrative responsibilities) must pay for administrative costs associated with the CACFP out of non-Federal funds or a portion of their meal subsidy payments. In other cases, center sponsors may retain a proportion of the meal subsidy payments they receive on behalf of their centers to cover their costs. Finally, Federal commodity assistance is available to centers, valued at 21 cents a meal for July 2008-June 2009 (the same commodity value provided for school meals).

CACFP-subsidized day care homes serve an average of 5-10 children; just under 30 percent of children in the CACFP (860,000 in fiscal year 2007) are served through day care homes, and about one-third of the money spent under the CACFP supports meals and snacks served in homes. In fiscal year 2007, 143,000 home sites (with some 900 sponsors) received subsidies. As with centers, payments are provided for no more than two meals and one snack (or one meal and two snacks) a day for each child. Unlike centers, day care homes must participate under the auspices of a public or (most often) private nonprofit sponsor that typically has 100 or more homes under its supervision; CACFP day care home sponsors receive monthly administrative payments (separate from meal subsidies) based on the number of homes for which they are responsible. Also unlike centers, day care homes receive cash subsidies (but not commodities) that generally do not differ by individual children's family income. Instead, there are two distinct, annually indexed subsidy rates. "Tier I" homes (those located in low-income areas or operated by low-income providers) receive higher subsidies for each meal/snack they serve: for July 2008-June 2009, all lunches and suppers are subsidized at \$2.18 each, all breakfasts at \$1.17, and all snacks at 65 cents. "Tier II" homes (those not located in low-income areas or without low-income providers) receive smaller

subsidies: for July 2008-June 2009, these are \$1.31 for lunches/suppers, 43 cents for breakfasts, and 18 cents for snacks. However, Tier II providers may seek the higher Tier I subsidy rates for individual low-income children for whom financial information is collected and verified.

While Federal subsidies for centers and homes differ by income and the type of home, there is no requirement that “free” or “reduced-price” meals/snacks be served. Centers and homes may adjust their fees to account for Federal payments or charge separately for meals to account for subsidies. However, the CACFP itself does not regulate the fees they charge.

In fiscal year 2007, the CACFP provided \$2 billion in cash subsidies for meal costs and \$77 million worth of commodities. In addition, it paid \$137 million for sponsors’ administrative costs and expenses related to auditing local operators.

### SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

The Summer Food Service program provides assistance to local public and private nonprofit “service institutions” running summer youth/recreation programs, summer feeding projects, and camps. Assistance is primarily in the form of cash subsidies for each meal or snack served; however, federally donated commodities also are offered. Participating service institutions (also called sponsors) often, but not of necessity, are entities that provide ongoing year-round service to the community and include schools, local governments, camps, colleges and universities in the National Youth Sports program, and private nonprofit organizations like churches.

Sponsors of three types of summer programs can be approved: (1) “open” sites operating in lower-income areas where 50 percent or more of the children have family income that would make them eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, (2) “enrolled” sites where at least half of the children enrolled in the sponsor’s program are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, and (3) summer camps. Summer meals/snacks are provided free to all children at open or enrolled sites and to lower-income children in camps.

Summer sponsors get operating (food, storage, labor) cost subsidies for all meals/snacks they serve – one meal and one snack, or two meals (three meals for children in programs for migrant children) per child per day. In addition, sponsors receive payments for administrative costs, and states are provided with subsidies for administrative costs and health and meal-quality inspections. For the summer of 2008, the combined (operating and administrative cost) subsidies under the summer program were approximately \$3 for each lunch/supper, \$1.70 for each breakfast, and 70 cents for each snack. Actual payments vary slightly (e.g., by about 5 cents for lunches) depending on the location of the site (e.g., rural vs. urban) and whether meals are prepared on-site or by a vendor.

In fiscal year 2007, some 3,600 sponsors (with 30,000 food service sites) participated in the summer program and served an average of 1.9 million children daily. Program costs totaled to \$286 million -- \$250 million in cash operating cost

subsidies, \$1.5 million worth of commodities, and \$35 million for sponsor administrative costs, state administration, and health inspections.

#### AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Federal assistance for snacks (and, in some cases, suppers) served through after-school programs is provided through two basic alternatives. The CACFP offers subsidies to after-school sponsors (schools or other community-based nonprofit sponsoring entities) for snacks served to “at-risk” children in after-school programs located in lower-income areas where at least half the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. In a few states (eight in fiscal year 2008), CACFP payments also are available for suppers in after-school programs. All snacks/suppers are served free, and CACFP-supported after-school programs can operate year-round. A second avenue is open only to schools as an extension of the School Lunch program. They may operate after-school snack-only programs on school days and provide free snacks in lower-income areas (like the CACFP component), or free, reduced-price, or fully paid-for snacks (differentiated by family income like the School Lunch program) in non-needy areas. Federal cash subsidies for snacks (and, where available, suppers) generally are the same as those paid for snacks and lunches/suppers in the regular CACFP. In fiscal year 2007, average daily participation in after-school snack/supper programs was approximately 1.2 million children. Spending on this assistance is included in the figures for the School Lunch program and the CACFP, noted above.

#### RECENT LEGISLATION

Laws governing child nutrition and WIC programs were reviewed and changed in 2004. In addition, changes affecting child nutrition efforts were made in Title IV of the 2008 Farm Bill (P.L. 110-246; the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act).

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-265) extended virtually all expiring child nutrition/WIC authorities (e.g., authorizations for appropriations) through fiscal year 2009. It also contained important, but incremental, changes in child nutrition and WIC programs. Its major feature was a set of amendments aimed at improving the integrity and administration of school meal programs. Changes were made in procedures relating to the way children’s eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals is certified and verified, and new initiatives to upgrade schools’ administration of their meal programs were put in place. These included new financial support for schools’ administrative efforts, expanded verification of children’s eligibility, and increased reliance on eligibility determinations conducted through public assistance programs. However, minimal revisions were made to the school meal program benefits themselves – for example, expansion of eligibility for homeless, runaway, and migrant children, and loosened rules for schools wishing to receive larger subsidies for school breakfasts.

Relatively minor amendments also affected the Summer Food Service program and the CACFP – e.g., making permanent and expanding coverage of rules facilitating participation by summer program sponsors (reducing required documentation) and making permanent and nationally applicable a rule loosening CACFP eligibility for for-profit sponsoring organizations.

Other areas addressed by the 2004 reauthorization law were nutrition, health, and nutrition education. Here, the biggest initiative was a requirement that all schools participating in school meal programs establish locally designed “wellness policies” to set nutrition, physical activity, and other goals, as well as strategies for meeting them. Coupled with the wellness policy directive were authorizations for funding new nutrition education efforts, an expansion of a project offering free fresh fruits and vegetables in selected schools, and significant changes in school food safety rules.

Finally, the 2004 law contained a number of revisions affecting the WIC program. The most important among them were amendments aimed at strengthening rules designed to help contain food costs incurred by the program; these included provisions placing substantial limits on participation by vendors receiving most of their revenue from WIC food vouchers.

The 2008 Farm Bill incorporated two changes relating to child nutrition. It greatly expanded (and provided mandatory funding for) the program offering free fresh fruits and vegetables in schools (without regard to the children’s family income). It also effectively lifted limits on schools’ ability to buy fresh produce locally.