



Summer Feeding

U.S. Programs



IMPACT REPORT 2021

Summer Feeding Grants

Closing the Summer Hunger Gap

Summer should be a time of refreshing fun for kids. But the reality is that summer can be the hungriest time of the year for families with children, putting children's growth, development and well-being at risk.¹ When school lets out, millions of children in low-income communities lose access to the school meals and healthy afterschool snacks they receive during the regular school year. Nearly all (six out of seven) U.S. children who eat a free- or reduced-price lunch at school don't have access to the same nourishing meals during the summer and even fewer have access to breakfast.² Families with low incomes spend an extra \$316 per month on food during the summer when students miss out on school breakfast and lunch, meaning family food budgets are stretched even more.³

Save the Children works to close the summer hunger gap and ensure that all children across rural America have access to nourishing food – the fuel they need to learn and thrive. Increasing access to nourishing food is a key component of our strategy to combat hunger, along with advocacy and innovation. We focus on hunger as a support to educational outcomes for children, complementing our robust early education programs to ensure that children are ready for kindergarten and are reading proficiently in third grade, key measures that correlate with success in school and life.



We are committed to a community-led model of combatting rural child hunger. Community representatives worked with Save the Children program staff to develop and implement a plan to bring about the deepest impact on child hunger during the summer months. The financial resources and technical assistance provided to partners aligned to these community-driven plans.

Special emphasis was given to projects designed to increase the amount of nourishing food available to children, particularly fruits and vegetables. Many partners also included the distribution of educational materials alongside the food, to further the impact of the intervention and connection to learning.

In summer 2021, Save the Children provided nearly **\$1,000,000** to support the distribution of over **2.2 million meals** to more than **90,000 children** in partnership with schools, food banks, and other community-based organizations across **87 rural counties**.

¹ National Education Association (2021), *Student Success - Nutrition Programs*. <https://www.nea.org/student-success/smart-just-policies/funding-public-schools/nutrition-programs>.

² Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report. Food Research and Action Center. July 2019. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-summer-nutrition-report-2019.pdf>

³ <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/download-resource/National%20Summer%20Meals%20Survey%20Major%20Findings.pdf>

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Counties Served

Save the Children provided summer feeding support across 87 rural counties within 9 priority states: Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia.



Alignment with Advocacy

Our strategic approach to combatting rural child hunger pairs our high quality programmatic interventions with a strong focus on policy and advocacy – to achieve the greatest impact for kids. This foundational approach to our work remained a critical underpinning to our summer feeding efforts. Federal nutrition programs are critical in the fight of ending child hunger and food insecurity. Save the Children, in parallel with our advocacy affiliate Save the Children Action Network (SCAN), continue to take learnings from the pandemic and apply them to advocacy efforts. The extension of the pandemic emergency declaration allows for the continuation of key program flexibilities to better serve children and their families. These waivers allowed schools and community organizations to meet the needs of children during the summer, especially in rural communities. For example, they allowed for meals to be dropped off at a student's home, or for parents to pick up multiple days' worth of meals. Because of federal waivers allowing for service flexibility, creative solutions to food distribution were implemented to keep children safe and well-fed during the ongoing pandemic.

We have been advocating for improved summer programs in several federal bills. The first bill is the reconciliation package, known as the Build Back Better Act. Save the Children and SCAN have been tirelessly advocating for expanding, and making permanent, the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (Summer EBT), which provides funds directly to families to purchase nutritious food during the summer. A temporary extension has been included in this bill and we continue to work for this legislation's final passage. Simultaneously, we continue to advocate for key flexibilities proven beneficial during the pandemic to be made permanent via the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. One of these provisions allows for home food delivery in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which is beneficial to children who live in food deserts where Summer EBT cannot be utilized. Save the Children and SCAN will continue to advocate for these and other permanent solutions that increase access to nourishing food for children in rural communities and beyond.

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Interventions Supported

Save the Children supported a plethora of community-led programmatic interventions during summer 2021 to close the summer hunger gap across rural communities; these interventions included mobile meals, home delivery, pop-up pantries, backpack programs, grocery store vouchers, and other creative approaches. Watch a video compilation of our summer feeding efforts in action [here](#). The stories and outcomes below highlight the program strategies and innovations supported by Save the Children, in partnership with local cross-sector leaders and organizations, to ensure children had access to nourishing food throughout the summer months.

Mobile Meal Distribution

Children in rural areas often live in isolated locations where safe access to meals provided by other programs is limited. Bringing meals to children through mobile meal delivery is a solution to this barrier. Meals are delivered to a central location such as a library or community park. Normally, mobile meals funded by the federal Summer Food Service Program must be consumed by children on-site. Waivers enacted as a result of the pandemic allowed flexibility in service models, such as parents picking up multiple meals for their children. One of the partners that received funding for this intervention was Grandview School District in Washington. They served 14,674 meals from the food truck and reached 600 children in the summer of 2021. A local news outlet produced great coverage of the program; watch it [here](#).



“Our school district has learned that we need to take food to where the children are; we cannot assume that they can come to us. In the past we tried to put meal sites in apartment complexes where children lived but were not allowed to by the management companies due to legal concerns. Our district Migrant Outreach staff went door to door and discovered that parents were working and would not allow their children to walk to nearby food sites for safety reasons. The food truck eliminated all these concerns as we could simply drive through neighborhoods and apartment complexes without setting up a site. The children came running! They felt special because we had a truck just for them, and there was no stigma associated with receiving meals because we could serve all children.”

- Marcia Wagner, Grandview School District

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Direct Home Delivery

The West Virginia Association of Housing utilized grant funding to distribute meals to 4,507 children in partnership with seven different housing authorities. Nutritious food was provided through direct home delivery, including hot meals and weekend backpacks. A local farmers market also provided fruits and vegetables such as zucchini, squash, tomatoes, corn, and cucumbers. In addition, four housing authorities participated in the 100 Days of Reading challenge, and family engagement evenings were hosted with reading, science, and art activities. Community partners worked together to distribute food and educational materials as well as information about different services available to families such as financial literacy. Partners included law enforcement, church leaders, a local recycling center, the United Way, public libraries, and local fire departments. Watch a video highlighting the program [here](#).



"I'm currently raising four grandchildren on my limited income. I want to keep my grandchildren together and safe under my roof, and I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the support and food."

- A grandmother in Beckley County, West Virginia

School Food Pantry

In many rural communities, the school is the hub of activity and trusted resource center for families. An on-site school food pantry provides students access to nutritious food during school breaks. A benefit is that students and their families have easier access to food assistance and feel more comfortable accessing it from a trusted source. Batesville School District in Arkansas used the grant funding to keep their school food pantry operating during the summer months, and to supply fresh fruits and vegetables. The district served over 350 families and distributed 15,000 meals through their school food pantry this summer.

"Thanks to the funding, Batesville School District was able to not only keep our pantry open all summer long but also offer fresh fruit to our families. Normally, due to cost, we can only offer shelf stable items in our pantry. Our pantry is hit very hard over the summer and often we are shelf bare when August rolls in. This year we were able to stay stocked and open for families."

- Laurie McClure, Batesville School District

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Pop-Up Pantry

A pop-up pantry is a combination of a school food pantry and a mobile feeding program. Families pick up food boxes delivered by a school or a community-based organization to a central community location, such as the local library's parking lot. This maintains the benefit of providing food through a trusted source for schools that do not have the capacity to operate a food pantry on site. Regional food banks may provide support and food for pop-up pantries. For example, Central California Food Bank designed a special summer food distribution program at Tipton Elementary School in Tulare County California. Children were provided culturally appropriate and nutritious foods along with nutrition education materials and crayons. The grant also supported their efforts to provide food boxes and supplemental food items to families with children at schools in rural areas of Fresno County. The food bank distributed over 36,000 meals and reached 1,520 children through this effort.



One of the family served in California included Fatima, a mother to three children ages 10 months, 11 years, and 13 years old. Her husband works at the local dairy, while Fatima stays home to care for their children. The food distributions helped alleviate their struggle to afford enough food for their family while waiting to receive CalFresh/SNAP assistance. There is only one small market in their town so they usually have to travel to the next town to buy groceries, spending more money on gas. Fatima was grateful that the food distribution was near to their home.

Curbside Drive-Through Food Distribution

In this model, parents or families stay in their vehicles while receiving meals. Families are asked to open their trunk from inside their vehicle so that meals can be placed there, eliminating in-person contact. Another option is to place meals on a table and then have families pull forward to collect the meal from the table rather than handing off the meal.

Liberty Hill A.M.E. Church in Clarendon County, South Carolina, used grant funds to support two drive-through food distributions. There are no grocery stores within a 10-mile radius of the town of Summerton, where the church is located. The contents of these boxes included wholesome, healthy, and nutritious snacks selected exclusively for children. 500 children each received a meal as a result of the grant funding.

Beaumont Independent School District in Texas also provided curbside food distribution services this summer to ensure students had access to nutritious food during school breaks. The district served 2,500 children and distributed 71,800 meals. Watch news media coverage of their program [here](#).

Backpack Meals

Backpack programs provide nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to children to ensure they get enough food on days when they cannot depend on meals provided by schools and community

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organizations. Food is discreetly distributed in a grocery sack or backpack so they have food to eat throughout the weekend.

Jasper Harvest Food Pantry in Jasper County, Texas provided 400 nourishing backpack meals to 355 children. Nutrition packs for children were provided at Harvest Church's City Nights, a summer evening fair for local families. Included in the packs were fruit, juices, milk, cereal, macaroni and cheese, and canned chili. Project funding also allowed for the establishment of a new backpack nutrition program in partnership with a local charter school. 155 students received a drawstring backpack filled with juices, milk, cereal, granola snack, and a canned protein meal. This program will continue throughout the school year once a month.

Meals for Summer School

Cocke County Schools in Cocke County, Tennessee used grant funding to support the distribution of 86,233 meals to 778 students. Services included breakfast, lunch, and snack for summer school participants, as well as bulk meal distribution. The goal of summer school was to help students regain some the learning time lost during the pandemic, and the district food service department worked hard to provide nutritious and enticing meals to participants.

My child went wild over the summer school snacks. She said the snack helped her be more alert in the hours after lunch time. She loved all the fruits and the different whole grain gold fish or crackers. As a parent, it made a huge difference to our family that all meals were free and we didn't have to provide any food for the longer school day. Thank you for caring so much about our children's' brains, hearts, and their little bellies."

- Mother of a 4th grade student in Cocke County, Tennessee

Other Congregate Meals

Amite River Baptist Association Food Pantry in Amite County, Mississippi served 2,300 hot meals to 263 children with the grant funding. All meals included cooked protein, grains, vegetables, and a beverage. Partner community groups were on site to offer enrollment assistance with housing, health and other food programs.

Grocery Vouchers

Grocery voucher programs expand household's access to healthy and affordable food by stretching their food dollars. Participants receive vouchers set at a particular value to redeem at participating local retail grocery stores. Mabton School District in Yakima County, Washington partnered with Fiesta Foods to provide 25 food vouchers worth \$400 each for 25 families, benefitting 82 children. The purpose of the vouchers was to bridge the three-week gap between the end of the district's summer school program and the beginning of the next school year. Rather than delivering a food box with items that were pre-selected, the vouchers gave families the freedom to shop from an assortment of culturally relevant items from Fiesta Foods. Watch a video featuring this innovative program [here](#).



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Farmers Market

Families in rural Tallahatchie County, Mississippi struggle with limited access to healthy food, with the closest grocery store over thirteen miles away, and recent flooding damaging local crops. Save the Children partnered with the West Tallahatchie Farmers Market to provide 100 boxes every week to 400 families during the summer months. The food boxes included fresh produce from women-owned Foot Print Farms. In addition to providing fresh produce, the Farmers Market distributed books and art supplies to families. A video summary of the program is available [here](#).



Lessons Learned

Families in rural communities face multiple barriers to food access. These include a lack of reliable transportation, relatively few options to conveniently shop for nourishing and affordable food, and inadequate service by food banks. Providing targeted financial and technical support can have a deep impact on communities' efforts to close the summer hunger gap, as described above.

Including a wide variety of nourishing food items in food distribution events is a helpful way to ensure that families have everything they need to create nutritious meals. This is especially meaningful to families in communities without access to a full-service grocery store.

Distributing educational resources along with food can have an even deeper impact on children during the summer months. This helps address summer learning loss and also ensures that meal programs are well attended by families. Offering nutrition education resources, such as recipe cards, has the additional benefit of encouraging consumption of the food distributed.

Finally, rural districts with limited financial resources can leverage partnerships to stretch their budgets further. For example, in California Pleasant View Elementary School District's food services manager had direct access to high quality produce with local vendors. He was able to negotiate reduced prices on the food purchased, so that the district could stretch their food offerings to families and exceed their goal for food distributed for the summer grant.

Conclusion

Children in rural communities across the country are struggling from inconsistent access to the food they need to learn, succeed, and thrive. Save the Children is committed to combatting child hunger in rural America, particularly in the summer months when children miss out on the nourishing meals provided by schools. We are proud to have worked alongside partners in community-led efforts to distribute nourishing food to children in remote communities when they need it most. Because one hungry child is one too many.