

The Nutrition Consortium of New York State's
Campaign for a Hunger-Free New York
Public Policy Priorities for 2009-2010

The Nutrition Consortium of New York State, Inc., formed in 1985, is a statewide, private, non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the problem of hunger in New York State (NYS). Our mission is to alleviate hunger for poor and near poor residents of NYS by expanding the availability of, access to, and use of government nutrition assistance programs.

The Nutrition Consortium maintains that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that all New Yorkers are able to secure adequate food and nutrition. While New York's response to hunger includes a number of federal and state nutrition assistance programs, too many New Yorkers still struggle with hunger. Recent USDA data shows that one in ten New Yorkers are "food insecure," which is defined as lacking consistent access to enough food on a regular basis. To address this unacceptable reality, the Nutrition Consortium of NYS presents this set of public policy priorities for 2009-2010 to achieve the following specific goals:

- Reduce the number of food insecure New Yorkers to 1 in 20
- Double the number of low-income children eating breakfast through the School Breakfast Program; from 353,721 to 707,442 (from 27% to 54% of low-income children)
- Double the number of low-income children eating lunch through the Summer Food Service Program; from 280,000 to 560,000 (from 30% to 60%)
- Reduce by 50% the number of non-participating eligible individuals in the Food Stamp Program; from 771,908 to 385,954 (numbers based on most recent available data)

FEDERAL PRIORITIES

Child Nutrition Programs: National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

These federally-funded child nutrition programs will be reauthorized this year through the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2009. This legislation presents a significant opportunity to make improvements in these programs, which can reduce childhood hunger in New York State. To this end, the enacted bill should:

1. Increase access to child nutrition programs by low-income children through funding more outreach, modifying financial eligibility criteria and/or simplifying procedures.
2. Increase the reimbursement rates for meals served.
3. Improve the nutritional quality of meals served.
4. Streamline/simplify program administration.

Food Stamp Program (FSP): The nation's largest federally-funded nutrition assistance program needs to be strengthened and expanded so that benefit levels more adequately meet the needs of individuals and families, and more people who need assistance can qualify for, and access, benefits. Through federal appropriations, additional economic stimulus legislation, USDA administrative changes, and other legislative/administrative opportunities, action should be taken to:

- 1) Increase the adequacy of benefits provided through the FSP.
- 2) Increase the number of people who are eligible for FSP benefits
- 3) Increase access to the FSP by eligible people by funding more outreach, simplifying procedures and/or improving the ways through which people can apply.

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STATE PRIORITIES

Food Stamp Program (FSP): In recent years, NYS has taken many positive steps towards increasing access to, and participation in, the FSP. However, opportunities still exist for the state to reduce hunger by increasing the number of eligible people who receive FSP benefits. To this end, NYS should:

1. Improve FSP administration through the following:
 - Require all local districts to participate in all available waivers that would enhance access, eligibility, and/or benefit allotments.
 - Improve timeliness in the FSP application process.
 - Simplify the FSP application process.
 - Reduce the amount of documentation involved in the FSP application process.
 - Improve the application process for expedited FSP benefits.
 - Eliminate finger imaging as part of the FSP application process.
 - Improve the ability of FSP recipients to successfully utilize EBT to access benefits through consistent, appropriate, and accessible education.
 - Provide local districts with adequate funds for FSP administration.
2. Improve and expand state-level outreach and education efforts, including increasing the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), so that it can be expanded to all upstate counties as well as increased in New York City and other large counties.
3. Increase FSP access for immigrants and older adults—vulnerable populations with the lowest participation rates.

Child Nutrition Programs: There are several specific actions that NYS should take this year to improve the administration of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). These actions will result in an increase in the number of low-income children receiving federally-funded, free meals through these programs, and may be accomplished through a combination of administrative and legislative changes. NYS should:

1. Directly certify students for school meals (NSLP and SBP) through state level electronic data matching, and eliminate the letter method of direct certification.
2. Make breakfast after the bell through the SBP a regular part of the school day.

3. Require all schools with 50 percent or more free and reduced price eligible students to operate the SFSP, if there are no other SFSP sponsors in the community.

LOCAL PRIORITIES

While the majority of the Nutrition Consortium of NYS's efforts are focused on achieving federal and state priorities, it has developed public policy recommendations that local entities can pursue in support of anti-hunger goals. The Nutrition Consortium will gladly provide this information as well as advice and assistance to groups interested in undertaking such efforts.