



SUSTENANCE

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CHILD NUTRITION REAUTHORIZATION



Executive Director Policy Report

The authorization for four child nutrition programs including the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** and the **Summer Food**

Service Program for Children expired at midnight on September 30, 2003. Neither Congress nor the Administration appears to be overly concerned about this development in part because the programs will be included in an omnibus continuing resolution which will fund various government operations. Committee staff have prepared draft legislation but Congressional action may be deferred until early next year because Congress may adjourn shortly. Child nutrition programs are vital components of a nutrition safety net for our nation's poorest children. These programs are only reviewed once every 4 or 5 years. Hence, action by the authorizing committees incorporating critical program improvements and expansions early next year is essential.

The anti-hunger and nutrition community are at loggerheads with the Office of Management and Budget (which controls USDA priorities) and the Congress over funding needed for program improvements and expansions. Anti-hunger groups are seeking improved access to federal child nutrition programs for poor and hungry children and their families. Their priorities include:

- Funding for the expansion of the "Lugar pilots" which reduce paperwork in the Summer Food Program
- Lowering area eligibility requirements in the Child and Adult Care and Summer Food Programs so that more children from rural areas can participate in these programs
- Restoring funds to sponsors of CACFP programs so that increased nutrition services and proper administration goals can be achieved
- Expanding nationwide after-school supper programs
- Eliminating the reduced-price category in School Lunch
- Providing funding for universal free school breakfasts programs

Nutrition community activists are seeking legislation that will reduce the incidence of childhood obesity.

Their priorities include:

- Increased funding for nutrition education and physical activity in school and after school
- Getting fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers to school children
- Controlling the nutritional quality of foods sold in school vending machines

All of these priorities cost money and OMB and the Congress have not provided any funds for expansion in the FY04 budget. Complicating this dilemma further, USDA initially suggested that "a billion dollars" could be saved by properly ensuring that children who participated in School Lunch were placed in the correct category for federal reimbursement. USDA suggested that these "savings" from ineligible children receiving federal benefits could then be spent on program improvements and benefits. The problem with this approach is that USDA's own studies have now determined that the "billion dollar savings" was actually not accurate and further, that increased verification requirements (currently 3% of school meals applications are verified) would result in eligible children leaving the program.

USDA, Congress and the anti-hunger and nutrition communities all agree that poor and hungry children should have access to federal nutrition programs. All parties also agree that federal nutrition programs should be well managed. What's needed is the political will to agree on the top priorities for program improvements and expansion and then to find the funding for these priorities.

