



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

AUG 16 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Please find the enclosed annual report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service on the demonstration projects to end childhood hunger and the related evaluation authorized and funded by Section 141 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Section 141 provided \$40 million in new, mandatory funding to test innovative strategies to end child hunger and food insecurity, and it authorized USDA to carryout and evaluate demonstration projects to end childhood hunger. The authorizing legislation required an independent and rigorous evaluation of the demonstration projects, and it also required that at least one demonstration take place in a rural Indian tribal organization where the prevalence of diabetes is at least 15 percent.

The law also directed USDA to submit a report to Congress by the end of December each year describing the status of each demonstration project and the results of any evaluations of the demonstration projects completed during the previous fiscal year. Enclosed is the report on USDA's activities during fiscal year (FY) 2015 and plans for FY 2016.

If you have any questions about this report, please have a member of your staff contact Todd Batta, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, at (202) 720-7095. A similar letter and a copy of the report are being sent to Senator Debbie Stabenow, Congressman K. Michael Conaway, Congressman Collin C. Peterson, Congressman John Kline, and Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas J. Vilsack".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

Enclosure

Demonstration Projects to End Childhood Hunger 2015 Report to Congress

Section 141 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 added a new section 23 to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. This section provided substantial, new and mandatory funding to test innovative strategies to end child hunger and food insecurity. Section 23 (b) authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to carryout and evaluate demonstration projects to end childhood hunger and provided \$40 million for this purpose, making the funds available from October 1, 2012 until September 30, 2017. The authorizing legislation required an independent evaluation of each demonstration project, using rigorous experimental designs and methodologies to produce scientifically valid evidence of project impacts on food security. It also required that at least one demonstration take place in a rural Indian tribal organization where the prevalence of diabetes is at least 15 percent.

HHFKA also directed the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report by the end of December each year to the House of Representatives Committees on Agriculture and Education and the Workforce, in addition to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The annual reports are to describe the status of each demonstration project and the results of any evaluations of the demonstration projects completed during the previous fiscal year (FY). This report describes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) activities during FY 2015 and plans for FY 2016.

FY 2015 Achievements

Award announcements and orientation meeting

Three States (Kentucky, Nevada, and Virginia) and two Indian tribal organizations (Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation) were selected to receive cooperative agreements to operate demonstration projects. Both Indian tribal organizations are conducting projects in rural areas where the prevalence of diabetes is at least 15 percent. USDA sent award letters to grantees in February 2015, and we also made a public announcement in early March 2015. Representatives from each project, the evaluation contractor, and the project team from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) took part in an orientation meeting on March 4, 2015. The meeting familiarized grantees with the evaluation of the demonstration projects and strengthened communication and working relationships. Grantees presented their project plans, the evaluation contractor provided an overview of the evaluation, and grantees met individually with the evaluation team and the FNS project leader in break-out sessions to discuss project-specific evaluation needs.

Overview of demonstration projects and progress in FY 2015

Chickasaw Nation

Chickasaw Nation was awarded \$9,718,832 for its demonstration project. Chickasaw Nutrition Services (CNS) and its partner, Feed the Children, will provide eligible households with monthly home delivery of one food box per eligible child. The project will serve an estimated 4,900 households and 8,900 children, ages 4 and older, who are eligible for free school meals or are attending a school where all children receive free school meals. It will operate for 24 months in 12 rural counties within Chickasaw Nation. School districts will be randomly selected to participate in the project, and all eligible households within the selected school districts will be

offered food boxes. The food boxes, valued at \$40, will contain shelf-stable foods selected by CNS's Registered Dietitians, along with recipes and nutrition information. Additionally, each food box will include a \$15 cash voucher to purchase fresh and/or frozen fruits and vegetables from authorized retailers. During 2015, Chickasaw Nation and its partner decided on the content of the food boxes, setup the food ordering Web site, developed a system to track the services provided, selected retailers to accept the vouchers, and received study approval from the Chickasaw Nation Institutional Review Board (IRB). Chickasaw Nation also recruited and established agreements with participating school districts to distribute consent forms, and they obtained consent from eligible households to participate in the demonstration and evaluation.

Kentucky

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services was awarded \$3,566,810 for its demonstration project, which will provide an additional benefit to enhance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for eligible households. This additional benefit will be determined through a fixed transportation deduction from income based on each demonstration county's average distance to the grocery store and an additional earned-income deduction equal to 10 percent of earned income. Kentucky estimates that the additional benefit will be approximately \$40 to 60 per eligible household. The independent evaluator will randomly select an estimated 2,820 households to receive the additional benefit from among households in designated counties that receive SNAP, have children under age 16, and have positive net income. It will operate for 15 months in 17 rural counties in eastern Kentucky. (These counties include the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone, a Federal designation that provides the local community with Federal support to implement its economic and community development goals.) During 2015, Kentucky hired a project manager, notified households about the demonstration and evaluation, and began preparing administrative systems to calculate and distribute the enhanced SNAP benefit amounts to eligible households.

Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Division of Health (NDOH) was awarded \$2,410,113 for its demonstration project. NDOH will implement the Food Access Navigation Project for 24 months. The project will serve an estimated 13,000 households, each containing children under age 18, who reside in randomly selected tribal chapters in three rural NDOH health districts (regions) located in New Mexico and Arizona. To carryout this project, Navajo Nation will hire a project director and administrative assistant, as well as 12 food access navigators (FANs), three regional coordinators, a community liaison, and a policy coordinator.

This project team will carryout a three-pronged strategy to reduce child food insecurity. First, the FANs will evaluate assets and gaps in the food access infrastructure (such as nutrition programs, local farms, and resources for food storage and transportation); work with school boards and administrators, leaders at chapter houses, and community members to address existing barriers; and increase the availability of and enrollment in nutrition assistance programs. Second, regional coordinators will integrate information from local chapters to identify and strengthen community assets. Finally, the liaison and policy coordinator will translate lessons from the ground to improve policies that support access to nutrition programs.

During 2015, Navajo Nation obtained approval from the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board and agency councils to participate in the demonstration and evaluation, and they also hired a FAN Liaison.

Nevada

Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health was awarded \$3,143,079 to implement a demonstration with the Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services and their partners. One group of 2,500 households will be randomly selected to receive an additional \$40 per month per eligible child to enhance their SNAP benefits, and a second group of 2,500 households will be randomly selected to receive the same additional SNAP benefits plus nutrition education and case management to help them access nutrition assistance programs. The project will serve households with children under age 5 and whose household incomes are below 75 percent of the Federal poverty level. It will operate in 12 neighboring zip codes in Las Vegas (Clark County) over 12 months. During 2015, Nevada notified households about the demonstration and evaluation, began preparing administrative systems to calculate and distribute the additional SNAP benefit amounts to eligible households, and set up space and resources for case management.

Virginia

The Virginia Department of Education was awarded \$8,803,902 to provide (1) three meals a day during the school day and food backpacks for weekends and school breaks to all children in participating intervention schools, (2) \$60 monthly benefits during the summer for each child eligible for free/reduced-price school meals, and (3) nutrition education for parents and guardians. The project will serve about 7,660 children in 3,650 households. It will operate for 16 months in 10 randomly selected schools in rural southwest Virginia and in 9 randomly selected schools in Richmond City (One is a high school and the others are middle or elementary schools). During 2015, Virginia informed schools about the demonstration and whether they were randomly selected to receive benefits. They also raised awareness about the demonstration in school communities and hired a grant project manager and a regional coordinator.

Evaluation activities, FY 2015

Evaluation Overview

The comprehensive evaluation of the demonstration projects includes (1) providing evaluation technical assistance to grantees and (2) conducting an implementation study, a cost study, and an impact study. The impact study will estimate each project's impact on food security and other outcomes based on household surveys. The main outcome of interest will be food insecurity among children over the past 30 days. The evaluation of Chickasaw Nation's project will also focus on diet quality, since this project is designed to improve household access to healthy food. Each demonstration project will be evaluated individually using a random assignment study design, the most rigorous design methodology. If feasible, projects will participate in one household survey at baseline (that is, just before their demonstration project is implemented). Every project will be surveyed at followup (approximately 12 months after the baseline survey). Chickasaw Nation, which will implement its project for 24 months, will receive a second followup survey. Surveys will be administered to households that receive project benefits and a comparison group of households that were not selected for benefits.

The implementation study will describe each demonstration project's design and operations based on information collected during two or three rounds of site visits, indepth interviews with participants, data on service provision and participation, and written project documentation. The first site visit will occur towards the end of the planning stage to capture project plans and the planning process, and the second site visit will occur during the implementation stage to capture operational processes, successes, and challenges. The two grantees with 24-month implementation periods (Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation) will receive an additional site visit. Site visits will include interviews with grantee staff and their partners and focus groups with project participants. Indepth, one-on-one interviews with participants will focus on how families meet their food security needs and their experiences with the demonstration project. The cost study will describe each project's total cost, cost per household, and cost efficiency based on information in detailed cost forms that grantees systematically complete.

FY 2015 Evaluation Activities

In FY 2015, the evaluation team took major steps to design and plan for data collection:

- Prepared a detailed study plan that describes each project's random assignment design and process for collecting and analyzing data from the household surveys, interviews with grantee staff and partners, focus groups, participant interviews, administrative records, and cost records. The study plan serves as a roadmap for executing each component of the evaluation.
- Prepared data collection materials, including household surveys, protocols for interviewing grantees and their partners, protocols for focus groups and interviews with demonstration participants, forms for tracking costs and services provided, and training manuals for data collectors.
- Obtained approval and clearance from the Office of Management and Budget to collect and analyze information to support the evaluation.
- Obtained study approval from the New England IRB, and IRBs in Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation, including approval for projects' recruitment materials, consent forms, and data collection plans. IRB approval is required for research involving human subjects to ensure that the research is conducted in accordance with Federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines.
- Prepared for the baseline household survey by training survey telephone interviewers, pre-testing the survey, and began gathering household contact information from grantees.
- Baseline data collection began in two sites: Nevada and Chickasaw Nation.
- Began planning the first round of site visits to gather information for the implementation study.

A key component of this HHFKA-funded initiative is the provision of evaluation technical assistance to grantees to ensure each demonstration can be rigorously evaluated. Major technical assistance achievements during FY 2015 included improving project designs to enable a rigorous evaluation and holding group Webinars and regular, individual telephone calls with grantees. In FY 2015, Webinars and telephone calls focused on supporting grantees as they notified participants about the project and evaluation, began gathering household contact information for the baseline survey, and began preparing administrative data systems to collect data that are specific to each project's design (such as data on services provided and household participation in federal nutrition assistance programs). The evaluation contractor also worked on establishing

a Memorandum of Understanding with each grantee to collect project-specific data. In FY 2015, two agreements were finalized, and three were pending final details and grantee review.

Planned Activities for FY 2016

Anticipated timeline and milestones for project implementation

During FY 2016, the major milestone for each grantee will be the launch of the demonstration project. Planning efforts that began in FY 2015 will continue until projects launch (For example, Kentucky and Nevada will continue preparing their administrative systems). The anticipated timelines are as follows:

- Chickasaw Nation: Households will begin ordering food boxes in January 2016, and deliveries will be made in February 2016 through January 2018.
- Kentucky: The grantee will disburse enhanced SNAP benefits beginning sometime between June and September 2016 and continuing for 15 months.
- Navajo Nation: In early FY 2016, the grantee will seek approval from tribal councils and school authorities to implement the demonstration and evaluation. It will also update its timeline for providing services and hire FANs and other implementation staff.
- Nevada: The grantee will disburse enhanced SNAP benefits beginning in June 2016 through May 2017. Case management to help households access nutrition assistance programs and nutrition education will be offered throughout the demonstration period to households that were randomly selected to receive these supplemental services.
- Virginia: The grantee will distribute school meals and food backpacks during the 2016 spring semester and the 2016–17 school year, and it will provide summer benefits in summer 2016. Nutrition education will be offered throughout the demonstration period to the parents of students in schools that receive project benefits.

Evaluation activities, FY 2016

In FY 2016, the evaluation contractor will complete the baseline household survey and the first round of site visits for the implementation study, and they will begin collecting project-specific data on costs, services provided, and participation in Federal nutrition programs. The evaluation contractor will continue to monitor the performance of the demonstration projects and provide evaluation technical assistance to grantees on an ongoing basis. Technical assistance will focus on how to track and submit data on demonstration project services and costs, how to submit administrative data on Federal nutrition assistance programs, and how to update household contact information for the followup surveys. Data analysis will follow each round of collection. The baseline findings for grantees that receive a baseline survey will be available in interim evaluation reports approximately three to six months after the completion of the baseline survey.

Evaluation Activities, FY 2017–2018

Most of the evaluation work will take place in FY 2017 and 2018. The major activities will be the administration of the followup household surveys, which will be used to determine each project's impact on food security, as well as site visits to hear from grantees, their partners, and participants about their experiences with the demonstration projects. Data analysis will follow each round of collection. The impact findings from each grantee will be available approximately six months after the completion of the followup surveys. The estimated timelines are as follows – evaluators will:

- Visit all grantees 9 to 12 months into project implementation. Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation (which will have 24-month implementation periods) will receive an additional visit 15 to 18 months into implementation.
- Administer each followup household survey approximately 12 months after the baseline survey was administered and before the intervention ends. Chickasaw Nation households will receive a second followup survey approximately 6 months after the first followup survey.
- Conduct indepth interviews with a subset of participants who received benefits in each project and participated in the followup survey. These interviews will occur after the followup survey and before the conclusion of the project.
- Collect data on costs and administrative data on services provided and participation in Federal nutrition programs (ongoing while projects are active).

USDA will share the findings from the evaluation in several reports and briefings for policy and research staff. The key products will include interim reports, final grantee-specific evaluation reports, a final integrated evaluation report, a final summary report for nontechnical audiences, and restricted use and public use data files with documentation to support future data analysis.