

EVALUATION OF 2012 ENHANCED SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM DEMONSTRATIONS  
(SUMMARY)

**Background**

The 2010 Agricultural, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations Act enabled the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to initiate and carry out the Summer Food for Children demonstration projects, aimed at preventing food insecurity and hunger among children during summer months. The projects include the Enhanced Summer Food Service Program (eSFSP) demonstrations, which test the impact of a number of enhancements to the existing Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The goal of the eSFSP projects was to identify ways to reach a greater number of SFSP-eligible children, and thus increase their participation and access to food during summer.

The eSFSP demonstrations include four separate initiatives, two of which began in summer 2010 and ended in 2011 with the other two launching in summer 2011 and continuing in the summer of 2012. This report presents findings from the evaluation of the two 2012 demonstrations in six States:

- The Meal Delivery demonstration (2011-2013) in Delaware, Massachusetts, and New York offered breakfast and lunch delivery to homes or drop-off sites near homes of eligible children in rural areas; and
- The Backpack demonstration (2011-2013) in Arizona, Kansas, and Ohio provided weekend and holiday bags or packs with meals to SFSP children when SFSP sites were not open.

**Methods**

Data were collected through: (1) telephone interviews with parents of participants during summer and fall 2012; (2) interviews with key

informants at the State, sponsor, and site levels gathered during site visits; and (3) cost data collection and analysis. The objectives were to examine factors associated with participation in the demonstration projects, conduct exploratory analyses on various outcome measures, including food security, collect information on the implementation and challenges of the two demonstrations, and compare the results to the findings from the 2011 evaluation.

**Findings**

**Reach and Participation**

Results from the current report indicate that the demonstration projects reached their intended target. For example, participation in the Backpack demonstrations was associated with having higher levels of poverty. The evaluation report for the 2011 demonstrations also found that poverty status was related to participation in the Backpack demonstration.

The reason most commonly cited by households for participating in the Meal Delivery demonstration was that it met a need for participating households. Almost 74 percent of respondents reported that the child participants needed the food, while 8.3 percent indicated that the program helped financially.

The influence of the 2012 demonstrations on participation as measured by average daily attendance and meals served will be evaluated in a separate report.

**Food Security**

Exploratory analyses considered the relationship between the Meal Delivery and Backpack demonstrations and levels of adult, child, and

household food security during the summer and the fall.

Results for 2012 show that, similar to 2011, there was no difference in food security between summer and fall across the three groups. This finding indicates that the demonstrations may have helped decrease summer food insecurity, when one would have expected lower food security. However, the absence of a difference may reflect the limitation of the small sample size. Other limitations are that the evaluation had no traditional baseline data or control group.

### **Implementation**

The two types of demonstration projects differed in most aspects of implementation – recruitment and outreach, the types of food delivered, training, and technical assistance. However, key informant interviews indicated that, as they did in 2011, successful sites shared common characteristics, including previous experience operating an SFSP site or with other nutrition assistance programs; good use of partnerships, volunteers, and activities to make the projects family friendly (e.g., provision of menus so families could prepare meals together); a focus on healthful eating; and careful use of resources for efficiency. Interviews also revealed that many sites across both demonstrations hired consultants who focused exclusively on outreach, monitoring, and oversight.

Sponsors for both demonstrations experienced challenges with finding adequate transportation and staffing, similar to the challenges faced in 2011. Travel was a problem in the Meal Delivery demonstration, where the original intent of these demonstrations was to overcome this barrier. The large majority of Meal Delivery meals were delivered to a drop-off site, which posed problems for participants who lacked access to transportation. Meal Delivery sponsors also reported that because their demonstrations were only open to school-age children who were

eligible for free or reduced-price meals, non-school-age children in the same household who also may have needed nutrition assistance were not able to receive meals. However, key informants across both demonstrations consistently reported that they used their experience from 2011, and with traditional SFSP, to provide meals more efficiently to children and again expressed the belief that children were getting food to which they would not otherwise have access.

### **Summary**

The 2012 evaluation of the eSFSP demonstrations showed promising results similar to the findings from the 2011 evaluation. The analyses indicate that the demonstrations reached targeted children and that both types of demonstrations may have had a positive impact on summer food security.

The demonstrations differed in methods of implementation. Despite these differences, many experienced sponsors reported making good use of partnerships, volunteers, consultants, and various outreach efforts and activities to implement the demonstrations successfully and reach low-income children during the summer.

### **For More Information**

Elinson, L., Bethel, J., Deak, M. A., Li, S., Koenig, T., Caperna, K., Palan, M. (2013). *Evaluation of the Summer Food Service Program Enhancement Demonstrations. 2012 Demonstration Evaluation Report*. Prepared by Westat. Project Officer: Chan Chanhataasilpa. Alexandria VA: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Available online at:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/DemoProjects/SummerFood](http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/DemoProjects/SummerFood)