

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) is important to New York City

What is this Bill?

Later this year the federal government will reauthorize the Child Nutrition Act (CNA). This legislation sets rules and funding levels for all the federal child nutrition programs, including the School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Summer Food Service Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Why is this bill important?

This is an opportunity that comes only once in five years. Today, as rates of poverty, hunger and diet-related disease simultaneously increase, greater access to healthful foods through these programs is sorely needed. This year, the bill is particularly important, because Congress now has the opportunity to take very significant and concrete steps to advance President Obama's goal of ending U.S. child hunger by 2015. As food production and transportation increasingly contribute to negative environmental and health effects, attention must be paid to the origins and the processing of the food procured for our children through these programs. To maximize the use of our tax dollars, we should both feed children healthfully and support the sustainable development of our city and our region. The 2009 Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act can help us accomplish the following goals: dramatically reduce child hunger and food insecurity; ensure a generation of healthy, productive, nutritionally-aware children; reduce energy use and pollution; create jobs; and stimulate economic activity.

What are we doing to influence this bill?

Groups in New York City representing varying interests have formed an alliance to advocate for changes to the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR). We've established a consensus statement of priorities to share with policy makers, the public, and interested parties. The stakes are so high in obtaining a strong bill that this alliance has brought together various groups that haven't historically come together in order to advocate for changes and improvements to CNR.

Rationale for this Alliance

Nationwide, groups such as anti-hunger, nutrition and public health, food service and industry, community food security groups and others are advocating for specific policy changes in the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization. These groups have long recognized the importance of this legislation to their constituencies and have a history of advocacy in this arena. Today, as we recognize the systemic nature of our social problems and realize that they can better be addressed working together, groups are coalescing across boundaries of interest to shape how this legislation will affect us all. Diverse groups in other cities – including Seattle, Boston, Chicago, and LA – are organizing now to develop their collective priorities for CNR. With the largest school district in the nation and large numbers of WIC and CACFP participants, NYC can be a very strong and influential voice for positive change within the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Especially in this time of fiscal crisis, increased hunger, and concern for children's health, we must take this opportunity to ask for increased federal funding and improvements to programs that benefit New Yorkers.

Priorities for the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Specific goals

Overall, the Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act must:

- 1) Make significant progress towards the goal of ending child hunger and food insecurity in America by 2015;
- 2) Ensure that all children have access to high quality, nutritious foods, local and regional whenever possible, in their schools and through other child nutrition programs;
- 3) Reduce obesity and diet-related diseases and ensure productive, healthy generations; and
- 4) Support and expand regional farm and food economies, increasing jobs, enhancing infrastructure, and reducing unsustainable environmental impact.

Summary of the Three Key Strategies to Achieve Those Goals

1. Make federal child nutrition programs universal and more nutritious while reducing their administrative paperwork and bureaucracy.
2. Give programs more resources and technical assistance to serve all children with nutritious food, local and regional whenever possible, produced in an environmentally and economically sustainable manner.
3. Make nutrition education available to all children and caregivers through child nutrition programs.

Proposed strategies:

Goal #1: Make significant progress towards the goal of ending child hunger and food insecurity in America by 2015.

School meals, summer meals, and meals served in childcare and afterschool settings are a significant part of children's diets. The Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is an opportunity to increase access to federally funded and regulated meals for all children. This is especially important for the over 12% of children in the United States who live in "food-insecure" households; households that are unable to afford enough food¹. In NYC, 56% of households with children have said they worry about being able to afford enough food. Despite this need, many child nutrition programs are currently underfunded and underutilized. Children are often unable to access meals offered through the child nutrition programs due to the administrative obstacles described below.

Rationale:

By making eligibility guidelines for school meals programs consistent with other benefits programs, more low-income children will be able to have access to school meals. In addition, by eliminating unnecessary administrative requirements, agencies providing school meals will be better capable of meeting the demand. As the impact of the recession results in lost jobs, more children will fall into lower income categories in the coming years and the demand on child nutrition programs will increase. This Reauthorization is fortunately timed to ensure that vulnerable children have access to and receive the positive health benefits of these meals through the next 5 years.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. <http://www.census.gov/cps/>

- 1) In schools, districts, or municipalities² located in areas where at least 50%³ of persons have incomes that are equal to or less than 200%⁴ of the federal poverty threshold, the federal government should provide full reimbursements for breakfasts and lunches and CACFP meals to all students, eliminating the reduced-price and full-price categories entirely, and requiring no additional paperwork or documentation to the state and federal governments other than Census Data.
- 2) In all other schools, districts, or municipalities, eliminate the reduced-price category for school meals and CACFP meals by extending free meal eligibility to households with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level.
- 3) Allow districts to implement alternate counting mechanisms to provide more meals to students while minimizing administrative burden and making it easier for states or districts to pay the difference to provide “universal” meals, where free breakfast and lunch is provided to all students regardless of income.
- 4) Increase reimbursement rates for school meals by *at least* \$0.35 per meal, for the first year of the bill, to both meet the increased cost of healthy food and higher food prices overall. In subsequent years, reimbursement increases should reflect food and labor cost increases.
- 5) Allow the expansion of direct certification for school meal eligibility (currently available for families receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits) to additional federal human services benefits programs, such as WIC and Medicaid
- 6) Provide financial incentives for schools that offer breakfast in the classroom or grab-and-go breakfasts, which make it easier for students to access these meals. For example, schools or districts that increase breakfast participation by at least 10% from the start of the school year should receive an end-of-year financial bonus.
- 7) Extend the child certification period for WIC to one year. Fund nutrition services in the WIC Program at a level commensurate with the increased demands placed upon WIC in recent years. Provide funding for essential management information systems (MIS) to implement the WIC food package changes, as well as technical assistance and grants to WIC vendors to facilitate transitioning to offering fresh fruits and vegetables.

² NYC has data for various geographic subdivisions that can facilitate determination of eligibility.

³ This criteria is used to determine eligibility for the SNAPED (formerly Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP)). Using this same threshold for child nutrition programs would result in consistent benefits across programs serving the same population.

⁴ SNAP benefit eligibility in New York State was recently expanded to households with incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level (for those households that have child care expenses) in order to address the increasing need from diminishing incomes due to the recession. Since these are the same households whose children will benefit from school meals, free meal eligibility should be expanded to households at this same income level to maintain consistency across programs. In addition, it is widely recognized that the federal poverty level does not reflect the cost of living in certain areas, such as NYC (which has proposed a new poverty measure to reflect the higher cost of living).

8) Fund an additional meal through CACFP for center and home-based providers that have children in their care for more than 8 hours.

Goal #2: Ensure that all children have access to high quality, nutritious foods, local and regional whenever possible, in their schools and through other child nutrition programs.

Rationale: Diet-related disease is epidemic-- many children live in households with limited access to fresh, healthy, and high quality, nutrient-rich food options Child nutrition programs can provide all children, especially those vulnerable to hunger and diet-related disease, with access to healthful foods. Rules and regulations for child nutrition programs can be greatly improved in the ways outlined below to achieve this potential.

1) Require that federally funded meals are consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines to ensure dietary balance and to promote health. Specifically, promote increased amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lowfat/fat-free dairy products in weekly menus. Include healthful foods not traditionally offered and foods that meet special dietary needs, such as water, lactose-free milk and soy beverages, and vegetarian and vegan options, within the reimbursement structure for school meals and CACFP meals. Ensure that national nutrition standards set a minimum for healthfulness and do not restrict the ability of localities to implement stricter standards.

2) Update the national school nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold outside of school meals to conform to current nutrition science as called for in S. 934 bill introduced on April 30th to the Senate Agriculture Committee by Senators Harkin and Murkowski. Ensure that national nutrition standards for competitive foods set a minimum for healthfulness and do not restrict the ability of localities to implement stricter standards.

3) Reestablish funds for school kitchen infrastructure, including full cooking machinery, to ensure programs have the ability to prepare healthful foods. Establish funds for training for culinary and nutrition training for food service staff of school and CACFP meal programs to ensure a skilled workforce can prepare meals using healthful cooking techniques, and can promote positive diet behaviors among students.

4) Simplify the procurement system for school meal program administrators and provide incentives for district school meal administrators to decentralize food purchasing and food preparation, including procurement pilots and training for school food service districts and early childcare program settings.

5) Fully implement the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommended changes to the WIC food package to include yogurt, and the full amount of fruits and vegetables. Fund the development of materials and resources to help maximize the use of WIC fruit and vegetable checks and WIC FMNP coupons. Fund the development of a national campaign to encourage the use of fresh, seasonal produce.

Goal #3: Reduce obesity and diet-related diseases and ensure productive, healthy generations

Rationale: Obesity and diet-related disease are epidemic among children in NYC. Nutrition education and promotion offered through child nutrition programs can serve as a model for children to learn appropriate dietary habits. Widespread education will result in a generation of healthy adults to reverse the current trend of increasing disease prevalence.

1) Ensure that children and their caregivers receive comprehensive nutrition education and promotion that supports access to healthful food. Include funds for the development and distribution of educational materials and programs to inform parents and caretakers of why nutrition standards exist for federal meal programs and how they can support them in the home

2) Fund the development and/or adoption of elementary school curricula which include food and nutrition education and which includes money for teacher training. Include \$0.01 cent per meal reimbursement for nutrition education. Provide funding and technical assistance to schools to meet existing mandates for wellness councils and implementation of wellness policies.

3) Fund training on nutrition education for staff of CACFP programs, and provide reimbursements for meals of staff and volunteers to participate in family style meals to model positive dietary habits.

Goal #4: Support and expand regional farm and food economies, increasing jobs, enhancing infrastructure, and reducing unsustainable environmental impact.

Rationale: Federally funded food programs such as School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, and CACFP bring millions of federal dollars into New York City each year. These programs can serve as an important economic engine for NYC and the surrounding region, which includes a large farm sector that lacks access to adequate markets. These programs also provide jobs to the many New Yorkers employed in kitchens in schools, childcare and senior centers. Increased investment in the programs, especially institutional purchase of regional food, will have significant positive economic benefits throughout the supply chain.

1) Encourage USDA to interpret the Farm Bill ruling on geographic preference to allow for schools to purchase local and regional products in a usable form. USDA should offer technical assistance to schools and childcare institutions to purchase locally and regionally grown and processed foods, and provide financial incentives to school districts that demonstrate that a percentage of their food purchases over a year's time come from local growers.

2) Establish mandatory funding for farm to school programs

3) Encourage the procurement of local and regional produce through the Summer Food Program to take advantage of the wide supply of foods available locally during the summer months.

4) Encourage the purchase of local and regional produce through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and DOD Fresh program.