



Proposed 2007 Farm Bill's Domestic Food And Nutrition Programs Vital To Rural America

Rural Families Rely On Programs More Than Their Urban Neighbors

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DURHAM, N.H. — The national Food Stamp and School Lunch programs are vital to alleviating food insecurity in rural America where residents rely on the programs more than their urban neighbors, according to new research from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

According to the new report, "Food Stamp and School Lunch Programs Alleviate Food Insecurity in Rural America," rural Americans disproportionately rely on the Food Stamp Program to help purchase food for a healthy diet. Although 16 percent of the nation's population lived in a rural area in 2006, 21 percent of Food Stamp beneficiaries lived in a rural area. Overall, 10 percent of America's rural population relied on Food Stamps, compared with 7 percent of urban residents.

Congress is currently debating the 2007 Farm Bill. One provision in the bill addresses domestic food and nutrition assistance and includes reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program and the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program, the latter of which is administered by each state's National School Lunch and Breakfast programs.

"The Food Stamp and School Lunch programs are vital parts of the safety net in rural America, helping a large number of children and others combat hunger and food insecurity. A Farm Bill that strengthens and expands the Food Stamp and Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Programs will help alleviate food insecurity and hunger in rural America and contribute to healthier lives," according to Carsey Institute researchers Kristin Smith and Sarah Savage.

Children make up a large proportion of rural Food Stamp recipients. In 2006, children accounted for about one quarter of the rural population, but they made up 40 percent of the rural population that depended on Food Stamps. Fifty percent of the rural Food Stamp recipients were adults age 18 to 59, and 10 percent were 60 and older.

In comparing rural Food Stamp recipients to their urban counterparts, the researchers also found that rural Food Stamp recipients are:

- More likely to be non-Hispanic white (61 percent of rural versus 35 percent of urban residents).
- Less likely to be non-Hispanic black (33 percent versus 22 percent of rural recipients) or Hispanic (26 percent versus 9 percent).
- More likely to be married (34 percent versus 26 percent).
- More likely to live in the South (55 percent versus 39 percent).

Currently, the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program operates in a limited number of states under the administration of each state's National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, and participating schools are eager to continue the program. Expanding the program nationwide could increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables for millions of grade-school children because the School Lunch Program reaches a large proportion of American children of grade-school age (5 to 18 years old), according to the researchers.

Nationally in 2006, 40.3 million (70 percent) American grade-school children either purchased their lunch from the program or received it for free or at a reduced price. Larger shares of rural (79 percent) than urban children (68 percent) received a school lunch in 2006.

In rural areas, 31 percent of America's rural grade-schoolers received a free or reduced-price school lunch in 2006, compared with 25 percent of urban grade-schoolers. Based on their share of the population, rural grade-school children are disproportionately in need of a free or reduced-price lunch. Although just 15 percent of grade-school children lived in rural areas in 2006, 19 percent received a free or reduced-price lunch.

In comparing rural school lunch recipients to their urban counterparts, the researchers also found that:

- Rural grade-school children are more likely to receive free or reduced-price school lunch than their urban counterparts, regardless of race or ethnic group.
- Nearly three of five rural non-Hispanic black grade-school children received a free or reduced-price lunch, while fewer than one-half of urban non-Hispanic black children did.
- Larger shares of Hispanic grade-school children (51 percent) in rural areas received a free or reduced-price lunch than those living in urban areas (46 percent).
- Rural grade-school children living in the South are more likely to receive free or reduced-price lunch compared with rural children living in the other regions (41 percent versus approximately 25 percent in the other regions).

"Understanding the characteristics of children who participate in the School Lunch Program provides insight to those children who would likely benefit from a nationwide Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program," the researchers said.

