

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CFHHS INTERIM COMMITTEE
From the Food Security Council of the Montana Food Bank Network and
the End Childhood Hunger Steering Committee
AUGUST 2011

1. Improve Economic Security of Montana Families

Improve the economic security of Montana families by providing more jobs with livable wages, benefits (including health care), and job security. Improve family economic security by increasing employment opportunities, job training, and worker recruitment for individuals who are unemployed so they do not spend two or more months finding employment.

2. Increase Community Outreach and Coordination Between Service Providers

Establish greater participation among local community members to support efforts by their school districts in starting new food programs, increasing participation in existing programs, and increasing awareness in the community about the School Nutrition Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Programs, WIC and SNAP.

Seek support from community members to increase access to nutritious food during out-of-school or out-of-child-care times by creating After School Programs, starting the Back-Pack Program and supporting Summer Food Service Programs. Community members include; faith-based groups, service organizations, businesses, city-councils and county commissioners. All of these community members should be asked to take a greater role in reducing child hunger in their areas.

3. Increase Participation in School Breakfast Programs

Increase participation in School Breakfast Programs by expanding the number of schools operating Universal Free Breakfast and Breakfast in the Classroom.

Expand universal breakfast programs in schools, especially those with 50% or more free/reduced priced eligibility levels, to increase participation and eliminate barriers. A universal breakfast program provides breakfast, free of charge, to all students enrolled at the school. With good participation (90%), schools have been able to run this program with a positive balance, school staff note improvements in children's readiness to learn and children benefit from a nutritious breakfast.

Promote Breakfast In the Classroom (BIC). This service option, implemented in the classroom at the beginning of the school day, has successful outcomes in Montana. BIC increases breakfast participation significantly, reduces tardiness, helps kids start the day ready to learn and improves children's health.

4. Appropriate funding to increase Participation in Summer Food Programs and Length the Days of Operation at Existing Summer Food Service Program Sites

Appropriate funding to increase and strengthen the Summer Food Service Programs in the state. Current federal meal reimbursement rates do not cover the sponsors' costs. Many sponsors make up the difference, yet losing money results in many sponsors discontinuing the program. The current rates can also be a deterrent for new sponsors to start the program. The state should supplement the reimbursement rate by adding ___(TBD) cents per meal. If the state could add to the meal cost, we could support the sponsor's expenses and success in sponsoring the program.

The State should also provide support to sponsors to enable them to provide activities and operate the program throughout the whole summer. It takes a lot of time and effort to get each program started, and many only last until the end of July resulting in several weeks before school starts that children miss needed lunches.

5. Increase Out of School Time Access to Public Food Programs

Expand the number of homeless and domestic violence shelters that use the Child and Adult Care Food Program to feed children. Provide outreach and technical assistance to increase enrollment, as well as simplification of the enrollment process.

6. Support Montana Farm to School Programs

Establish and appropriate a program to reimburse schools to start Farm to School Programs that would benefit Montana children and Montana farmers.

There is a need to improve access to healthy, locally grown food in rural Montana with schools with high levels of poverty and limited food access. This would connect Montana's food producers with local school food service markets with specific efforts geared toward beginning or transitioning farmers and ranchers. This would stimulate statewide and national investments in community-based food systems.

Some Montana schools, both urban and rural, have started Farm to School (FTS) programs to reach local food. Many other Montana schools would like to start a program but face serious barriers of funding. A bill in the Oregon legislature is an example of how states can support these programs. See link:

<http://gov.oregonlive.com/bill/2011/HB2800/>

7. Provide Funding for the Purchase of Emergency Food for Community Food Banks

The Montana Food Bank Network provides both purchased and donated food to food banks, food pantries and other agencies around the state to meet the emergency food needs of families and children. A growing number of adults and children who come for emergency food are dealing with chronic diseases, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and allergies. Agencies make their best efforts to meet the food and nutrition needs of their clients. However, due to high food demand, as well as donations of food that may or may not meet nutritional needs, these agencies struggle to meet critical

dietary needs of their clients. Funding for purchase of emergency food for food banks would make it possible to provide the right food to meet these nutritional needs.

8. Increase Access to Nutrition Education

Increase access to Nutrition Education by creating a coordinated resource among various agencies and groups; the Department of Agriculture, MSU Extension, Montana Team Nutrition, Office of Public Instruction Consumer Science, and others that currently provide nutrition education to children at school, children outside of school hours, parents, youth, etc. There are multiple groups providing nutrition education (including gardening) to children but better coordination is needed to maximize outreach efforts, increase impact and efficiency. Mobilize community members to work with this resource and make it more accessible in their areas. This would help to increase collaboration between public and private entities, including local community and faith groups.

Evaluate current parent education efforts and strengthen it.

Provide support to the Extension Services for professional agricultural service to the community for family gardens, local farms and community-based food production.

9. Assess the Impact of Food Deserts in Montana

Assess the impact of food deserts in Montana. Food deserts are defined as areas or communities in which distance and transportation limitations reduce access to healthy and affordable food. Food deserts mainly occur in rural areas and on the reservations. There is a critical need to reduce barriers and provide incentives to small, convenience stores to improve the quality of their food and keep prices affordable for poor families. Equally important is the need to work with small grocery store associations, and the Department of Commerce to develop tax and other incentives to improve the quality and prices of food at convenience stores in the state. This approach has brought successful outcomes in other states to benefit small businesses in rural areas, as well as improve nutrition.

10. Increase Access to Public Food Programs by Strengthening Interdepartmental Efficiency of Program Operations

Increase coordination between all public programs and streamline the application process. Seek opportunities to coordinate program rules, eligibility levels, application forms, ability to access program services and to create one application for all child food programs. Encourage local community members to help with promoting the programs to underserved population. Increase coordination and a system of referrals between all public and private food programs.