

2026 SUMMER IMPACT REPORT

Transforming Summer Hunger for Kids Across America

Summertime should be carefree and fun for kids, but for millions of children across the United States, summer isn't just a break from the classroom—it's a break from the meal programs that many of them participate in.

Historically, 87% of kids who received free or reduced-price school meals haven't accessed meals during the summer. For families living on low incomes in rural communities, the need is especially acute.

Children may live far away from free meals served at schools, libraries, and community centers, or parents may be at work and unable to bring them to the distribution sites.

New Opportunities to Expand Summer Meals

Closing the summer meals gap for kids is essential for ending childhood hunger in America. The national summer meals program alleviates some of the worries that families often face at the end of the academic year. Thanks to game-changing bipartisan legislation, more families can now access food when school is out over the summer. **Together, two new programs—Summer EBT and SUN Meals To-Go—could help more than 30 million children in the U.S.**

Existing Challenges

No Kid Hungry is closing the summer hunger gap, but barriers at the state, community and family levels are preventing summer meals from reaching as many kids as possible.

- At the **state level**, lack of political buy-in, state budget constraints, and administrative hurdles may prevent states from participating in these programs.

- At the **community level**, program sponsors may lack resources to effectively operate a program, from marketing materials to communicate vital information to essential equipment like vehicles and coolers to deliver summer meals to families in rural areas.
- At the **family level**, overall awareness of program eligibility, fear and stigma may limit participation in both Summer EBT and SUN Meals To-Go. And transportation barriers can keep families from accessing programs.

Families Are Struggling

Today, **1 in 5 kids** in America lives with hunger. Parents and caregivers face financial hardships that force them to choose between buying groceries or paying their bills.

Research from the No Kid Hungry campaign shows that families especially struggle to feed their kids during the summer. It's even harder for kids from families living on low incomes in rural communities.

89% of rural families living on low incomes report experiencing food hardship.

82% of rural caregivers say healthy foods are too expensive.

75% of (or 3 in 4) rural caregivers say that summer meals help families:

- stretch their food budgets
- get enough to eat during the summer, and
- provide needed support during times of rising food costs.

Grocery Benefit

Summer EBT, or SUN Bucks, is a grocery benefit program states can choose to operate that enables income-eligible families to receive an extra \$120 per child for groceries during the summer. During summer 2025, a total of 48 entities operated Summer EBT programs—this included 37 states, the District of Columbia, all five U.S. territories and five Tribal Nations. Of those, we directly supported efforts in 40 entities by providing grant funds, advocacy help, communications tools, and opportunities to convene and share solutions.

RELIEVING STRETCHED FOOD BUDGETS

Marlena Hanson is the epitome of a hardworking mom. A proud member of the White Earth Ojibwe community in Minnesota, she works two jobs helping indigenous parents become advocates in the community and developing activity boxes to teach Ojibwe culture to indigenous children. She does all of this while raising her kids and being a full-time student.

Even working two jobs, it can be challenging to make it to the end of the month. Hanson and her family live in a rural community, where groceries are expensive. The situation is harder in the summer when her kids are not in school and she has to provide for all of their meals.

For Hanson, the additional support of Summer EBT came just at the right time. “It honestly was really, really helpful,” Hanson explained. “It came at a time when we had to think about back-to-school clothes and things like that. So, when that money came in, it was able to provide meals, so I could use the money that we did have towards getting [my kids] school clothes to be able to start school. So, it definitely helped out a lot. I would like to see it continue.”

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“Summer EBT is absolutely a lifeline, especially for the families that are right on the brink. As expensive as food has gotten, it is absolutely vital at this point. \$120 can mean the difference between getting groceries for the week or not, or getting gas to be able to get back and forth to work. It can be the difference between your kids eating healthy and not.”

– CHRISTINA MARRUFO, PARENT
HURON, SOUTH DAKOTA

HERE'S WHAT WE'RE DOING NOW

- We're deeply investing in data, technology, outreach and communications solutions to address challenges standing in the way of families accessing Summer EBT.
- We're advocating for additional states to participate in Summer EBT by engaging grassroots supporters, governors' offices, mayors, child nutrition agencies, and legislative leaders.
- We're working with our longtime partners - Code for America and the American Public Human Services Association - to support state agencies with implementation, develop resources, and share best practices across states.





Free Meals in Rural Communities

In addition to the grocery benefit, flexible, free meals in rural communities are available through SUN Meals To-Go. Schools and local nonprofits can now offer meal delivery and grab-and-go services, instead of requiring children to eat their meals at the distribution site.

No Kid Hungry provided grants to support rural expansion of SUN Meals To-Go during summer 2025.

We also provided no-cost webinars, resources and toolkits, and one-on-one guidance to assist SUN Meals To-Go meal sponsors implement new program requirements.

GAME-CHANGING FLEXIBILITIES

Kentucky native John Cain has been passionate about improving health equity in his community during his two-decade career in health sciences. He has also spent a decade working toward ending the complex issue of summer hunger in his state.

About 1 in 5 children in Kentucky lack reliable access to enough food, with summer being the hardest period when school meals stop. As a largely rural state, staffing and logistics challenges can limit summer meal sites. But John feels hopeful, thanks to the flexible, free summer meals program.

Through his role as the Kentucky Kids Eat Program Director for Feeding Kentucky and the No Kid Hungry partnership, making sure kids have food when school is out of session, has been a top priority.

“We went from 3.3 million summer meals served in 2022 to almost 11 million summer meals served in 2025,” shared Cain. “And this past summer, we really achieved a milestone that I’ve heard few other states have accomplished—that every single county in Kentucky had access to summer meals.”

HERE’S WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW

- We’re providing grants to meal providers to help them launch programs in new communities. We’re also helping them grow existing programs by operating more sites and increasing access to meal services.
- We’re elevating successful innovations that help children get healthy summer meals, such as improving mobile or home delivery meal models.
- We’re helping meal providers and program administrators understand how to comply with new regulations and use the best service models for their communities.

Summer Meals Resources

No Kid Hungry helps families navigate the various summer food and grocery benefit programs available to them, ensuring that children have the nutrition they need to thrive. Families can find resources during the summer months by visiting NoKidHungry.org/Help.



Your Support Is Making a Big Difference

In 2025, your support enabled us to:

- award more than **\$3.1 million in grant funding** to 184 school districts and community organizations working across 28 states and Puerto Rico to support flexible meal operations in rural communities.
- help our grantees provide more than **15.8 million flexible summer meals** in rural communities. This was 9.7 million more summer meals served than what these same grantees served in summer 2024.
- assist more than **130,000 families** with accessing our benefits resources.
- fund eight agencies developing innovative Summer EBT technology and systems and partner with six states on effective outreach strategies to connect more families with benefits.
- support staffing, program outreach, and the purchase of equipment such as coolers, carts and other supplies to get more meals to kids.
- convene **500 hunger champions** during our Summer Nutrition Summit to explore effective strategies for implementing flexible rural summer meals and Summer EBT.



To all the donors that support No Kid Hungry, I greatly appreciate everything that you guys do. It helps all the communities and all the school districts that it impacts. It helped us here in Troup County with our refrigerated truck and the insulated totes. It made our process of feeding the community easier and more seamless, and now we're able to nourish more bodies and help these kids."

– PHYLLIS PLATT, CHEF
TROUP COUNTY, GEORGIA



Your support matters.
Learn how you can help at NoKidHungry.org.