Feeding Ohio’s Children

An overview of supplemental child nutrition programs operated by Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks
The Ohio Association of Foodbanks is Ohio’s largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and their 3,300 member food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other hunger relief agencies which serve all of Ohio’s 88 counties.

The results in this report are from a survey of the 12 member foodbanks, conducted to capture a comprehensive picture of the supplemental child nutrition programs they operate (survey from 2014).

Solutions to Address Child Food Insecurity in Ohio

In Ohio, 44 percent of all students (over 800,000 children) qualify for free or reduced-price school meals during the school year, and one in four Ohio children live in food insecure households, meaning they do not always know where their next meal will come from.

In state fiscal year 2013, over 44 percent of all the households served by our network had children in them and over 35 percent of all pantry visits were for children.

Our primary mission is to provide food to Ohio’s emergency food assistance network. But in addition to our core work of ensuring that our pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters have enough food to feed children and families in emergency situations, foodbanks operate a number of supplemental nutrition programs, intended to provide a stable source of nutritious meals when other programs are not available. These programs include backpack programs, Kids Cafe programs, Summer Food Service Programs, mobile feeding programs, and the Governor’s Summer Meals programs.

Child Nutrition Programs: Definitions

**Backpack Programs:** These programs are designed to be a stable source of nutrition when school meals aren’t available, primarily over the weekend. The food is nonperishable and packaged so that a child can prepare and eat it. Meals are distributed on the last day before the weekend or holiday vacation so that children can take the meals home to eat. No stable federal funding source is currently available to support these programs.

**Kids Cafe:** These programs provide free meals and snacks through community locations where kids already gather, like churches and schools. In addition to providing meals, Kids Cafes offer educational and recreational activities. Federal funding for these programs is provided by the USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and is administered by the Ohio Department of Education.

**Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):** The SFSP was created to provide meals to children in low-income areas during the summer months when kids don’t have access to school meals. SFSP sponsors can receive payment for serving healthy meals and snacks to children at approved sites in low-income areas. It is a program of the USDA and administered by the Ohio Department of Education.

**Mobile Feeding/School Pantries:** Mobile feeding programs bring food to a central location, like a school, where families with children can pick it up as they would from a regular pantry. These programs most often distribute fresh produce.

**Governor’s Summer Meals Programs:** Since summer 2012, the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in Ohio has provided funding (through Executive Orders from Governor Kasich) to support the distribution of weekend meals to about 10,000 children each week for 10 weeks during the summer months. Beginning in summer 2013, the Governor’s Office has also supported mobile farmers market distributions and innovative meal delivery programs to children in highly rural areas.
Ohio Foodbank’s Child Nutrition Programs

Number of children served on an average program day

Foodbanks served over 35,000 Ohio children with these programs. In addition, over 3 million visits to Ohio food pantries in state fiscal year 2013 were for children. Two foodbanks operate backpack programs year-round and four foodbanks provide food on school holidays and winter breaks. The Governor’s Weekend Meals Program operates in the summer months with the Innovative Delivery program providing 11 meals for the week and weekend.

Identifying eligible children

Foodbanks work with schools with high percentages of children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals or in communities with high percentages of children and families living in poverty. Foodbanks also work with school personnel to make sure supplemental nutrition is going to children with the highest need.

There is no shortage of children who need and could benefit from the nutritional supplements available through privately funded weekend backpack programs. Unfortunately funding is not available to serve even a fraction of these children.
Maintaining programs at current participation level

Foodbanks reported that continued funding was the most needed item to maintain these programs at their current level of participation.

Expanding programs to meet need

Foodbanks are contacted frequently, many every week, to expand their programs—in particular their backpack programs. One foodbank reported: “Schools are begging for weekend and extended break food; however, funding is minimal to none [for expansion] currently.”

Foodbanks reported that the most needed item for expanding programs is stable funding. In addition to community partners, foodbanks need additional staff, volunteers, delivery trucks, and warehouse space.
How are these programs funded?

Supplemental child nutrition programs are funded in a variety of ways.

The backpack programs operated by foodbanks are privately funded. Federal funds that are used to support Kids Cafe (Child and Adult Care Food Program funds), the SFSP, and school meals and breakfasts are not available to backpack programs because meals purchased with these dollars cannot be taken off-site (or home) to eat. Currently the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and the Ohio Department of Education have an active request to USDA to waive on-site meal requirements and test the use of federal reimbursements for backpack meals.

Foodbanks do supplement the food available through backpack programs, Kids Cafe programs, and SFSPs when available. Most of the food distributed through mobile feeding programs is donated.

The largest source of funding for supplemental child nutrition programs is from grants and foundation support, followed by corporate donations. Many foodbanks partner with their United Way or use general foodbank funds to operate these programs.

The Governor’s Summer Meals Programs were funded by Executive Order of Governor John R. Kasich. Partnerships and in-kind support from the Governor’s Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Department of Education, the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, and community organizations throughout Ohio made the programs possible.
How often are you contacted to expand these programs?

Nearly all foodbanks have been contacted to expand their backpack programs; a little more than half keep a waiting list of sites or communities that are interested in participating. Only one foodbank has had to reduce the number of children served through their backpack program.

Three of the four foodbanks that operate Kids Cafe programs have been contacted to expand their program and two foodbanks keep a waiting list of communities and sites that are interested in partnering. Of the foodbanks who do not operate a Kids Cafe but desire to operate one, more funding, community partners, volunteers, infrastructure, and donated food is needed.

Two of the four foodbanks that operate SFSP have been contacted to expand and keep waiting lists of the sites and communities who are interested in partnering. Additional funding and community partners were needed by all foodbanks participating to be able to expand their program. Of foodbanks who do not operate a SFSP but desire to operate one, more funding, volunteers, community partners, and infrastructure are needed.

Measuring Impact

Foodbanks measure the success or impact of their programs with: surveys to partners, including children; direct meetings with school personnel; and information about child attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

Including a stable source of weekend food with supportive services provided by the Butler County Success Program resulted in improvement in every key element: increased classroom attendance; increased reading proficiency; and meeting basic needs as well as building bridges between home, school, and community, as measured by Miami University Hamilton.

Teachers report the necessity of backpack programs: “The students who receive food in my classroom have made the following comments: ‘Hey, it’s like Christmas!’ ‘How did I get so lucky to get food again?’ and ‘I won the lottery!’ Wonderful, wonderful program! Mondays are much better now.”
What would happen if these programs were to cease operating?

All foodbanks reported that the children served by these programs would go hungry. Improvements in behavior, health, classroom participation, and school attendance and performance would be lost. Families would struggle to make up that loss in their food budgets.

“The health and well-being of the children and their ability to succeed in school would suffer. We just approved a program for a center that has mostly 3, 4, and 5-year-old children in attendance. The woman who runs the center has been doing this work for 28 years and she said to me that she “had to start this program because these kids are coming in HUNGRY and the way they eat breakfast on Monday morning, I don't know what they are getting to eat on the weekends.” I hear virtually the same sentiment from teachers, principals, superintendents, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc. The teachers and principals particularly remark at how the children are better behaved, more focused, and more prepared to learn when they have this food on the weekends. A program that started this year at one of our school systems got their start-up grant from the foundation of a hospital. I met with school officials, hospital personnel, and community partners and they all saw the correlation between getting enough nutritious food, and a child’s capacity to be healthy and excel at school. Our children need to be well-fed to be productive, healthy citizens when they grow up. This program is benefiting many very low-income children that would not get enough to eat on the weekends. The outcome would be more healthcare costs and an ill-equipped future workforce.”

National Service: AmeriCorps VISTAs and AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates

The support of national service members has been critical to the operations of many foodbanks in building capacity for their child nutrition programs. In addition, AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates have worked to support SFSP sites in Ohio since 2009. Those members work on a variety of projects focused on reducing childhood hunger during the summer months, including enhancing the Summer Food Service Program and implementing the Governor’s Summer Meals Programs at the community sites where they serve. Through strategic marketing, engaging activities, fundraising, and volunteer recruitment, Summer VISTA Associates have increased the number of children participating and the number of meals served at their SFSP sites each year since the program began.
The Ohio Association of Foodbanks and 12 member Feeding America foodbanks work hard every day to make sure that children, families, seniors, the working poor and the unemployed have stable access to one of our most basic needs: food.

**More than one in four Ohio children don’t always know where their next meal will come from.** We can do better than this. We have real opportunities, right now, to ensure that all federal, state, and private partnerships are maximized in a comprehensive effort to end childhood hunger in Ohio.

We look forward to working with you and our partners to make sure that child nutrition programs are working to meet the needs of children, not making children and their families meet the needs of programs.

For more information about child nutrition programs in Ohio, visit [www.ohiofoodbanks.org](http://www.ohiofoodbanks.org) today.