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**SUMMER IS NO PICNIC FOR HUNGRY CHILDREN
MISSING SCHOOL MEALS**

**MARYLAND SHOWS IMPROVEMENT IN SERVING LOW-INCOME
CHILDREN SUMMER MEALS—BUT STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO**

FIVE YEAR NUMBERS (2000-2005) STILL INDICATE PROGRAM DECLINE

About 2.8 million children received meals at parks, schools, religious congregations, recreational programs, and other community sites through U.S. Department of Agriculture summer meals programs on an average day in July 2005. Unfortunately, that represented only 18 children for every 100 who receive a free or reduced-price school lunch in the regular school year, according to the new report “Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation” from the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). The summer of 2005 was the seventh straight year in which participation in the program declined.

The State of Maryland’s statistics show recent improvement but there is still a long way to go. The number of children who participated in the Summer Food Service Program in Maryland rose by 25.9% from 2004 to 2005. Combined participation in Summer Food and the National School Lunch Program (“Summer Nutrition”) rose by 22.9%. However, five year trends from 2000 to 2005 indicate that the program has not rebounded from years of decline. Only 20.8 low-income children received meals through Summer Nutrition (18.8 through the Summer Food Service Program) in 2005 out of every 100 receiving free and reduced price meals during the 2004-2005 school year. In July 2000, that number had climbed to 23.2. If Maryland raised its efficiency to 40 out of every 100 children who receive lunch during the school-year, it could feed an additional 39,952 hungry children during the summer.

In addition, if Maryland reached 40 students served in summer for every 100 served free or reduced-price meals during the school year, FRAC estimates

conservatively that an additional \$2.15 million would be available to the state in federal reimbursements.

Amy Gabala, executive director of Manna Food Center in Rockville, Maryland, said, “The people that come to Manna for emergency food are increasingly from working poor families with children -- people doing the best they can. One of our goals at Manna is to make sure school children from these families succeed in school by participating in programs like the summer feeding program to ensure that their nutritional needs are met year round.” Gabala said, “In addition to the nutritious meals and snacks served at the sites, the children enjoy a wide range of activities that promote educational opportunities and physical exercise-- so essential to their growth and development.”

“At a time that millions of American working families are grappling with stagnant wages and rising energy, housing and health costs, far too little is being done to make sure their children aren’t going hungry,” said FRAC President Jim Weill. “The federal government’s summer meals programs are supposed to serve all children who need the meals. It is time for Congress to make it simpler for groups to offer the meals and time for states to do more to pull down the unused federal funds.”

Weill pointed out that Congress could restart summer meal program growth just by expanding to all states the successful Simplified Summer Food Program (formerly the “Lugar pilot” program). This proven strategy simplifies the federal program’s cost accounting and paperwork rules and thereby allows for modestly higher meal reimbursement rates. “Less red tape means more children are fed,” says Weill. The 13 states originally included in the simplified program increased participation over the last five summers by 41.3 percent, while participation in non-pilot states fell by 11.9 percent. Maryland is not included in the 26-state program. FRAC’s report ranks states by assessing their performance in reaching needy youngsters with either Summer Food Service Program or National School Lunch Program summer meals, compared to regular school year meals. If all states performed just at the level achieved by the jurisdictions that achieved the best records (40 students served in the summer for every 100 served during the regular school year), FRAC estimates the federal programs would feed another 3.5 million children and provide a total of \$188.8 million in additional federal funds.

FRAC released its report on Summer Learning Day 2006, celebrated by the Center for Summer Learning (www.summerlearning.org). “Summer meals and summer learning go hand in hand. Summer meals draw children into programs that are critical for development, health and well-being while their parents are working,” said FRAC Senior Policy Analyst Crystal Fitzsimons, principal author of the FRAC report. “We applaud the many groups that make summer learning a reality.”

“Summer meals programs are effective weapons in the fight against obesity as well,” said FRAC Director of Child Nutrition Policy Lynn Parker. “The summer meals meet USDA guidelines and help children get the nutrients they need. And because they draw children to programs that often also offer physical activities, like basketball or swimming, summer meals promote fitness.” Parker urged more school districts to include plans for summer food programs in their new school wellness policies.

The Summer Food Service Program is operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture which provides funds for eligible sponsoring organizations (schools, public agencies and non-profits) to serve nutritious meals in summer to children 18 or younger at approved sites that are in low-income areas, or that serve a group of children most of whom are low-income. The National School Lunch Program, also operated by USDA, provides per meal cash reimbursements to serve nutritious school meals to low-income children in school during the summer.

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Manna Food Center, (www.mannafood.org) a not-for-profit organization, strives to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County through food distribution, education, and advocacy.

The Food Research and Action Center (www.frac.org) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.