

Federal food assistance programs

Federal food assistance programs include the following:

- The food stamp program, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), is the largest federal food assistance program. An average of 88,000 children in Kansas were served by SNAP between July 2008 and March 2009.
- The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental foods, nutrition education and health care referrals to pregnant and post-partum women, infants and children up to age five. In April 2009, more than 77,000 women and children received WIC services in Kansas.
- The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program provide free and reduced price meals for school age children. Children living in families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible for free meals; those living below 185 percent of poverty are eligible for reduced price meals. In state fiscal year 2009, more than 151,000 Kansas students received reduced price lunches and more than 49,000 Kansas children received free lunches. The percent of Kansas children participating in the school lunch program has steadily increased, from 36 percent in 2003 to more than 42 percent in 2009.

A problem we can solve

Childhood hunger and poor nutrition undermine the future prosperity of our state and nation. Because hungry children are more likely to perform poorly in school and more likely to have long-term health problems, they are less likely to become productive and contributing adults.

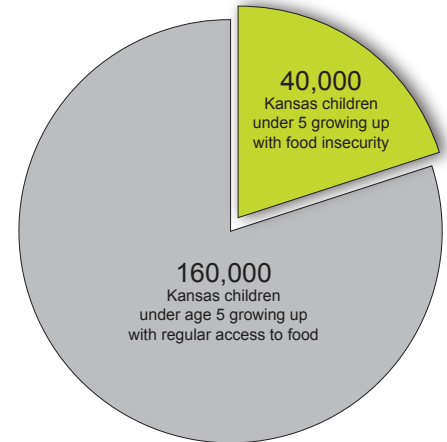
Recognizing the link between hunger and life-long productivity, the reduction of childhood hunger has been a bipartisan national priority for decades. One example is the National School Lunch program, which was established in the 1940s when Congress saw a connection between the young men being rejected in the World War II draft because of physical deficiencies and malnutrition during those men's childhood years. The program was essentially geared toward fattening up America's malnourished children "as a matter of national security," and it worked.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act — the federal legislation that now includes the School Lunch program — is set to expire this year. Its reauthorization is an opportunity to use the knowledge and latest scientific research we now have to improve the nutrition and diets of children. Improving nutrition, and ultimately the health of American children, will not only benefit our next generation, but it will benefit the future of our state and our nation.

A GROWING PROBLEM IN KANSAS

Right now, more than 120,000 children in Kansas are living with what is commonly referred to as "food insecurity." This means they do not have regular access to the

HUNGER AMONG KANSAS' YOUNGEST CHILDREN



Nearly 40,000 Kansas children under the age of five are growing up with the risk of hunger.

food they need to grow up healthy. Because of the recent economic downturn, experts believe that the number of Kansas children living with food insecurity will continue to rise.

While food insecurity has increased among Kansas children, it has decreased slightly among children on the national level. According to data collected between 2005 and 2007, the rate of food insecurity among Kansas households was two percent higher than food insecurity in the rest of the nation. And, we know that demand for both the food stamp program and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) are at historic highs in Kansas.

When it comes to children under the age of five, Kansas has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country.

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Founded in 1979, Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to shaping policy that improves the lives of Kansas children and their families.

CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Components of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act includes the following federal programs:

National School Lunch Program

School Breakfast Program

Child and Adult Care Food Program

Summer School Program

Afterschool Snack and Meal Program

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

In fact, almost 40,000 children — more than one in five kids — in this age group are at risk of hunger. Given the critical developmental needs and vulnerabilities of children during the first five years of life, the risk of hunger among children in this age group is of particular concern because of its long-term impact on health and learning.

A PROBLEM WITH FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

Food insecurity during childhood can result in a number of long-term consequences — including impaired development, poor performance in school and poor health — that impact children into adulthood and, ultimately, impact Kansas taxpayers.

- **Impact on education.** Studies show that young children who grow up with food insecurity are more likely to have impaired growth and development, which leads to cognitive delays during the early school years. The impact on development is compounded by poor health and physical impairments, which cause children to lag even further behind their peers. When children struggle with cognitive development and learning, taxpayers pay the price through increased special education costs in our schools.

- **Impact on health care.** Food insecurity during childhood results in increased deaths among infants, as well as increased medical costs because of hospitalization, iron deficiencies, infections and other illnesses. These treatments and emergency room visits weigh heavily on our already-strained health care system, increasing health insurance costs for all of us.

- **Impact on the economy.** When food insecurity contributes to academic underachievement and long-term health problems, children are positioned to earn lower wages and have poorer health throughout their adult years. For each child whose potential is not fully realized,

our economy suffers from the loss of talent and productivity in our workforce, and from the costs associated with public assistance and health care.

A PROBLEM WE CAN SOLVE

The U.S. began addressing food insecurity issues among children in the 1940s when President Truman signed the National School Lunch Act into law “as a measure of national security to safeguard the health and well-being of the nation’s children.” Today, a combination of federal food assistance programs work to mitigate the effects of food insecurity. But, as the number of children facing food insecurity continues to rise in Kansas, it’s critical that we look for new ways to safeguard our next generation.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act — which encompasses many of the programs that support child nutrition in our country — is set to expire this year. In order to maintain the results being achieved by these programs, Congress must act prior to October 1, 2009, to reauthorize the Act. Some of the areas that should be addressed in the reauthorization include:

- Improving access to nutritious foods in schools, child care facilities and afterschool programs; and addressing food insecurity issues during weekends and summer months when children may not be in these settings.

- Improving the nutritional content of meals and snacks, including more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat and reduced-fat dairy products.

- Streamlining operations in our food assistance programs to ensure integrity and efficiency.

As discussions begin on the federal level to reauthorize the Act, now is the time to start talking about effective ways to further reduce food insecurity, provide nutritious meals and promote the health of America’s children.