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## Summer Food Service Program for Children Impact of Shelf Stable Meals





**Summer Food Service**

**Program for**

**Children**

**Impact of Shelf Stable Meals**

## **Background**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the impact of shelf stable meals on participation and satisfaction levels in the Summer Food Service Program for Children.

Despite the United State Department of Agriculture's many efforts to promote the program and streamline paperwork and administrative procedures, participation levels are lower today than they were in 1999. (Source: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/sfsummar.htm>)

The goals of this survey were two-fold:

1. To determine if vendors can effectively assist Summer Food Service sponsors by offering shelf stable meals as menu options.
2. To determine if the utilization of shelf stable meals results in participation increases and/or the number of sites offering the Summer Food Service Program for Children.

## **Methods**

More than 25 Summer Food Service Program sponsors were contacted by telephone, fax and e-mail and asked a variety of questions about the impact of offering shelf stable meals in the program during the summer of 2006. Questions included:

- Participation changes in breakfast, lunch and/or supper as a result of using shelf stable meals;
- Number of sites added to the program;
- Benefits experienced by using shelf stable meals; and,
- Children's reaction to shelf stable meals.

The following nine sponsors responded to the survey:

- Adams#14 School District (Colorado)
- Allentown School District (Pennsylvania)
- Appalachian Nutrition Network (Ohio)
- Elgin School District U-46 (Illinois)
- Gadsden Independent School District (New Mexico)
- Greater Chicago Food Depository (Illinois)
- Newark Public Schools (New Jersey)
- Okaloosa County School District (Florida)
- Worcester Public Schools (Massachusetts)

## Findings

The participants in this survey used shelf stable in a variety of ways. Some sponsors served them on a daily basis, either at breakfast, lunch or supper, or at all meals service times. Other sponsors used the shelf stable meals to supplement their traditional offerings in order to expand the number of choices available to children. Yet, one sponsor featured the shelf stable meals once per week.

Below is a summary of the positive findings:

Sponsor:	Participating changes:	Comments:
Appalachian Nutrition Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded program from 41 sites in 2005 to 80 in 2006</li> <li>Breakfast participation increased by 7,500 meals or 53.6%</li> <li>Lunch participation increased by 22,000 meals or 81.5%</li> </ul>	“By using the meals, we not only eliminated delivery and storage costs, it allowed us to expand the number of sites offering meals.” (Jim Coutts)
Adams #14 School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Though the number of sites offering the program decreased in 2006, breakfast participation increased 2.8%</li> </ul>	“Shelf stable meals are a great convenience, and the children loved them.” (Robyn Merkel)
Allentown School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation remained stable</li> </ul>	“Two positive outcomes of using shelf stable meals included reduced labor costs and the assurance that the foods we’re serving are safe.” (Joanne Kinsey)
Elgin School District #46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Started program in 12 sites, 12,328 breakfast served</li> </ul>	“Because of the shelf stable meals, we were able to start the Summer Food Service Program for Children in our community.” (Cherlyn Anders)
Gadsden Independent School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation remained stable</li> </ul>	“We love the convenience of shelf stable meals, and the children love the taste.” (Demetrious Giovas)
Great Chicago Food Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breakfast participation increased by 9,497 meals or 25.4%</li> </ul>	“We liked the convenience of the shelf stable breakfasts.” (Lesley Tweedie)
Newark Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation remained stable</li> </ul>	“The children were very excited and eager to eat breakfast. We were able to handle unexpected changes in counts and emergency situations.” (Tonya Riggins)

Okaloosa County School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakfast participation increased by 11.2%</li> </ul>	<p>“We were able to reduce deliveries to our 45 sites to once a week instead of daily, saving us a tremendous amount on transportation costs.” (Jean Turner)</p>
Worcester Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 new sites serving lunch and dinner 7 days a week for 49 days</li> <li>• Total of 5,093 lunch meals and 17,812 dinner meals</li> </ul>	<p>“A huge gap was filled by opening the new sites. The shelf stable meals made it possible for us to reach more children.” (Donna Lombardi)</p>

Unaided, the sponsors interviewed reported the following benefits of using shelf stable meals:

1. Labor savings (8 respondents)
2. Ease of transportation and delivery logistics (6 respondents)
3. Improved food safety (5 respondents)
4. Ability to better manage fluctuations in meal counts (3 respondents)
5. Use for emergency situations (6 respondents)

All sponsors reported the children like the shelf stable meals and are more excited about the Summer Food Service Program because shelf stable meals are being served.

All sponsors surveyed stated that they would recommend shelf stable meals to their peers.

## Conclusion

Vendors can positively assist Summer Food Service Program sponsors by providing shelf stable meals as menu options. As a result of offering shelf stable meals, sponsors reported:

1. The utilization of shelf stable meals resulted in participation increases and/or the number of sites offering the Summer Food Service Program for Children in a majority of the programs surveyed.
2. Many challenges were reduced or eliminated, such as labor costs, delivery logistics, and management of fluctuations in meal counts.

For more information, please contact:

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