

April 22, 2020

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Re: Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) (FNS-2019-0034)

Dear Ms. Farmer:

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the “Academy”) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the Food and Nutrition Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in response to the January 23, 2020 proposed rule, “Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program.” Representing more than 107,000 registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered (NDTRs) and advanced degree nutritionists, the Academy is the largest association of food and nutrition professionals in the world and is committed to improving the nation's health through food and nutrition. The Academy is dedicated to ensuring America's children are fed safe, nutritious and appealing meals.

In general, the Academy supports the provisions outlined in the proposed rule change and applauds USDA’s efforts to streamline the Summer Food Service Program to improve administrative efficiencies and promote greater participation in the program. The Academy suggests adjusting the ‘first week site visits’ and ‘offer vs. serve’ provisions of the proposed rule in order to expand efficiencies and reduce food waste.

A. Opportunities to Increase SFSP Participation and Improve Health

Children’s health requires that their food intake provides sufficient energy and nutrients to promote physical, cognitive, and social growth and development. Inadequate intake of food and nutrients that may result from lack of access has been associated with several health consequences and chronic conditions resulting in poorer quality of life.¹ Subsequently, children with food insecurity may experience behavioral problems such as depression, aggression, anxiety, hyperactivities, mood swings and bullying that may reduce their overall quality of life.^{2,3} Federally-funded nutrition assistance programs, such as the Summer Food Service Program,

¹ Ke J, Ford-Jones EL. Food insecurity and hunger: A review of the effects on children’s health and behaviour. *Paediatr Child Health*. 2015;20(2):89-91.

² Feeding America. Child hunger fact sheet. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/assets/pdfs/fact-sheets/child-hunger-fact-sheet.pdf>. Published September 2017. Accessed April 22, 2018. 3. Melchior M, Chastang JF, Falissard B, et al. Food insecurity and children’s mental health: A prospective birth cohort study. *PLoS One*. 2012;7(12):e52615.

³ Melchior M, Chastang JF, Falissard B, et al. Food insecurity and children’s mental health: A prospective birth cohort study. *PLoS One*. 2012;7(12):e52615.

provide foods that furnish adequate energy and nutrients for physical, cognitive, and social growth and development for children and adolescents who might otherwise experience food insecurity because of family financial constraints.

Yet participation in the summer meals programs is still low. During July 2018, the Summer Nutrition Programs (SFSP and the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option) served nearly three million children nationally, which is only about 14% of children who consumed a free or reduced priced meal through the NSLP during the 2017-18 school year.⁴ Participation has been consistently low for many years but has actually declined slightly over the last three summers.⁵ This can be contributed to a number of factors, including complaints that the program is too burdensome to administer. The Academy represents more than 900 members who comprise our School Nutrition Services (SNS) Dietetics Practice Group (DPG), many of whom are sponsors of the SFSP. The Academy conducted an online informal survey with this DPG and received 118 responses. When asked what the biggest challenge was with operating the SFSP, the most common response was that the program was burdensome to administer. For example, one operator suggested that much of the paperwork and audits were duplicative or excessive given the requirements associated with other nutrition programs she administers, such as the Child and Adult Care Food Program At-Risk Supper and the NSLP.

The Academy supports provisions in the proposed rule that will lessen the burden on operators, promote greater participation in the program, and decrease food waste including the ‘off-site consumption of food items’ and ‘eligibility for closed enrolled sites’ provisions.

B. First Week Site Visits and Reviews

The Academy appreciates the intent of the proposed rule that would require early site visits for all sites and create a tiered timeframe for completing the first visit. This approach improves current regulatory policy, but more could be done to support sponsors. USDA could reduce the burden of monitoring for existing sites and allow sponsors to focus energy on educating new sites in order to establish solid expectations for program integrity.

Previous policy guidance waived the requirement that SFSP site visits be conducted during the first week of service for returning sites and for CACFP and NSLP sponsors in good standing that are transitioning to SFSP. This waiver was in recognition of the challenges that many sponsors faced in meeting the first week site visit requirement, which was especially challenging for rural areas where sites are spread apart geographically.

The proposed rule also allows sponsors to combine the site review with the site visit, which is a positive step for program administration. Unfortunately, the timeframe for the first site visit likely will limit the amount of time that a monitor will be able to spend at a site, particularly for those sponsors that serve rural areas or that serve many sites.

The Academy recommends waiving the requirement that first week site visits be conducted at returning sites and for NSLP and CACFP sponsors transitioning to SFSP because sponsors will

⁴ <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-summer-nutrition-report-2019.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

be conducting a site review for those sites within the first four weeks of the program's operations.

C. Offer Versus Serve

The Academy agrees that food waste is “one of the most pressing challenges of our time and one that is solvable.”⁶ A recent report suggests that school food waste weighs an estimated 530,000 tons annually and costs \$1.7 billion.⁷ The Academy promotes Offer versus Serve as a tool to help reduce school food waste and believes it should remain available for all operators to implement during summer meal service.

Current regulations allow school food authorities that are program sponsors to utilize OVS. Regulations also require that an SFA using the OVS option must follow the requirements for the NSLP. This proposed rule would limit the use of OVS to only SFA sponsors. While the sponsors utilizing OVS have more experience from using it in the NSLP during the school year, there should not be a limit on the type of sponsor who wants to utilize this option, rather USDA should spend more time training non-SFA sponsors on how to properly utilize the OVS provision.

D. Conclusion

The Academy appreciates the opportunity to comment on FNS and the USDA's proposed rule: “Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)” and urges USDA to adjust the proposed rule in order to expand administrative efficiencies and reduce food waste. Please contact either Jeanne Blankenship by telephone at 312-899-1730 or by email at jblankenship@eatright.org or Liz Campbell by telephone at 202-775-8277 ext. 6021 or by email at ecampbell@eatright.org with any questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,



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⁶ Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. “Academy Applauds New Legislation to Prevent Food Waste in Schools” January 2020. <https://www.eatrightpro.org/news-center/on-the-pulse-of-public-policy/from-the-hill/academy-applauds-new-legislation-to-prevent-food-waste-in-schools>. Accessed on February 16, 2020.

⁷World Wildlife Fund. Food Waste Warriors: A Deep Dive into food waste in US Foods. https://c402277.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/publications/1271/files/original/FoodWasteWarriorR_CS_121819.pdf?1576689275. Accessed on February 16, 2020.