

Child & Adult Care Food Program: Participation Trends 2010



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About FRAC

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

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Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Many low-income working parents rely on child care and afterschool programs to provide a safe and healthy place for their children while they commute and work. By paying for nutritious meals and snacks for eligible children who are enrolled at participating child care centers, day care homes and Head Start programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) plays an important role in improving the quality of those programs and in making them more affordable for low-income parents.

CACFP is a well-documented success. Young children can receive up to two meals and a snack that meet USDA nutritional standards. Studies have shown that children in CACFP receive meals that are nutritionally superior to those served to children in child care settings without CACFP. Children in participating institutions have higher intakes of key nutrients, fewer servings of fats and sweets, than children in non-participating care. Research cites participation in CACFP as one of the major factors influencing quality care, reporting that 87 percent of the family child care homes considered to be providing quality child care participated in CACFP.

While the Child and Adult Care Food Program has several segments, the majority of CACFP participants are preschool-aged children attending participating family child homes, child care centers or Head Start programs. Depending on the type of program, eligibility is based either on the poverty status of the area or on the income of the enrolled children.

Each year the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) analyzes CACFP participation data for child care centers and family child care homes provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the United States as a whole and for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Key findings for fiscal year 2008 include:

Child Care Centers

- Over 2.3 million children enrolled in child care centers benefited daily from CACFP in fiscal year 2009, a 3.5 percent increase from fiscal year 2008.
- Nationally the number of child care centers participating in CACFP grew to 51,225 in fiscal year 2009, a 3.2 percent increase from the previous year.

Family Child Care Homes

- In fiscal year 2009, 846,352 low-income children attending family child care home relied on CACFP to provide healthy meals each day, a 0.5 percent increase from fiscal year 2008.
- Nationally 140,599 family child care homes participated in CACFP in fiscal year 2009, a 0.7 percent decrease from the previous year.

The Impact of the CACFP Means Test

As part of the reform of welfare undertaken in 1996, major changes in the way family child care homes are reimbursed in the Child and Adult Care Food Program were mandated. A means test was instituted which effectively cut in half the federal reimbursement for meals and snacks for providers serving moderate-income children.

These changes have had negative consequences that continue to affect the program. Between 1996 and 2009 the number of family child care homes participating in CACFP dropped by 27.8 percent, while the number of children served fell by 129,864. This is in contrast to the growth of child care centers (and Head Start programs) using CACFP over that time. During the same 12 year period, the participation of centers in CACFP grew by 52.3 percent and the number of children served by those centers grew by 979,057.

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