



## Child Nutrition and the Child and Adult Care Food Program

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*These stories were collected from child care providers and parents in 2009. For more information about priorities for CACFP and the upcoming reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, please visit [www.ececonsortium.org](http://www.ececonsortium.org)*

The CACFP program has enabled our center to provide plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables to our children at the center. Fresh foods are more expensive than canned foods. For many of our children, CACFP enables us to offer what is probably the healthiest meal of their day.

*–Child care center director, Ohio*

Our company, while a for-profit company, serves an economically diverse group of children. The reimbursement that the centers receive monthly, while not covering all food/non-food costs, helps tremendously all of our enrolled children. In our centers, we serve two meals and two snacks that are not only nutritious but multicultural. This program enables our centers to not only bring wonderful, fresh fruits and vegetables to our children, but also educate our parents on the importance of family style meals, whole grains and lower fat choices.

*–Child care subsidy specialist for multi-site provider, Pennsylvania*

I have been a part of CACFP since 2003. Because I am a family child care provider, any support from the state and government is welcome. The parents appreciate the well-balanced meals and snacks that I am able to serve. There are foods that I could not provide without reimbursement – costs are high. I have always served breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack to my children. Because of my participation in CACFP I have never felt the need to charge parents for food.

*–Family child care provider, Nebraska*

The economy has certainly demanded more services for parents, not only with tuition subsidies, but all eligibility for CACFP enrollments. About 90 percent of our 170 children are eligible and participate, most on the free level. Food costs for our center have increased steadily and have impacted our ability to provide freshly prepared breakfasts, lunches and snacks rather than frozen, canned or preserved/packaged foods. Our board of directors adds \$10,000 to our annual budget to pay for enhanced nutritious meals for our children. Their commitment continues during these hard times.

*–Child care center director, Florida*

My center has participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program for over nine years. I've noticed an increase in calls from parents daily asking me to put breakfast or lunch for their child aside because they cannot provide the meal themselves. Providing formula for infants has been a great staple for parents during this economic crisis. I am proud to say that we participate in such a wonderful program. The staff and I make sure that we are following the guidelines to keep this much needed program.

*–Child care center director, Wisconsin*

The Child and Adult Care Food Program helps us keep tuition costs down for parents by providing partial reimbursement for food costs each month, as well as help provide opportunities to serve healthy and nutritious meals for the children in our program.

*–Child care center director, Washington*

Food prices have increased, but CACFP reimbursement rates have not. Our expenses, not including administrative labor, exceed our reimbursement by at least 25% – 30%. We work hard to serve healthy unprocessed foods to the children which are more expensive than processed food.

*–Child care center director, Indiana*

Our center has participated in the CACFP meal program for the last 40 years. The increased costs of food and milk are not covered by our reimbursement, forcing us to increase our food budget and put us more in debt. Between this, our state's budget cuts, and increases in food costs, this may be our last year in existence. We are an inner-city center serving very low-income families.

*–Child care center director, Ohio*

My daughter loves learning about and trying new nutritious food at daycare. Whether it's baking banana bread or eating apples they bought at the farmers market, she loves eating with her classmates and discovering new flavors, and I love the fact that she is eating healthy food that will give her the fuel necessary to make the most of her day!

*–Parent, New York*

With 50 children enrolled in the center we have become an important piece in the families' lives. The parents all know that their child will be given a hot breakfast and lunch and a balanced snack in the morning and in the afternoon. School children need a snack when they get off the bus in the afternoon and they also need to know that they can eat until they are full. Without the food program I will have a difficult time to pay for the meals I serve. I will not change my menu, but I will have to cut back on other parts of the program.

*–Child care center director, Michigan*

Since joining the Child and Adult Care Food Program, we have been able to improve the menu served and the quantity served to all children. The reimbursement has brought in resources to reduce costs to our most needy families, but more are still in need. Participation has made a huge difference: improved and better meals to children, enhanced offerings, expanded to include full breakfast for all including school-age children, much more nutritious and full snack every afternoon for all children including school-age. Parents have appreciated the increased variety and nutrition level. CACFP is a win-win for the program, the parents, and the children.

*–Child care center director, Illinois*

CACFP is a great program. Without the assistance of this program, we would not be able to purchase the nutritious items that our children enjoy. We serve preschool children and school-age children at this center. The funding from this program is a godsend and I do not mind site visits. I want to know that I am doing right by the children we serve.

*–Child care center director, Ohio*

My daughter attends a family child care program that participates in CACFP. We love the fact that healthy, nutritious meals are provided for her and she gets the opportunity to try foods that we don't eat at home or we never thought she would like. Sometimes she comes home and tells us what she ate and I wonder why I never thought to feed her that. I think it is great that the children get to experience a variety of foods. Our provider just recently told us that due to changes in the CACFP program, she may need to stop providing food and/or have parents pay an additional cost. Funding for this program is so important. It's not only about the fact that some parents can't afford healthy, nutritious food. It's about the fact that many of us don't necessarily know what to feed a child. I've learned a lot from my provider just by seeing what and how she feeds my child.

*–Parent, Virginia*

CACFP is vital for many of the families we serve. We have a large number of low-income families and providing meals for the children throughout the day gives parents the comfort of knowing their children have nutritious meals served. The importance of these healthy meals not only provides nutrition but it also gives the children a jump start to learning, allowing them to focus on their needed developmental skills.

*–Child care center director, Indiana*

We have been involved since CACFP's inception in the state of Nevada. And in this economy, more families are applying for the meal program.

*–Child care center director, Nevada*

We serve dinner to our school-age children because a snack doesn't cut it. More than half of the families at our center are 'free' so we really depend on the reimbursement rate. We never meet our costs but the Child and Adult Care Food Program is just too valuable to eliminate. We also know that for many of our families, what the children have at the center is really the main meal of the day.

*–Child care center director, Pennsylvania*

We used to participate in CACFP in our centers. Through much work by our directors and staff, we were very successful in creating a system of communicating with parents and obtaining the appropriate paperwork. We were also successful in working with our menu committee in establishing a USDA compliant menu that also addressed developing healthy eating habits for children. Unfortunately, the challenges were many. We often faced challenges relating to paperwork and human errors as any turnover created a situation requiring extensive training and often on the job training became a component of that process. We found the process to be too complicated with onerous paperwork requirements that discourage our programs from participating if we'll only intermittently qualify. It simply required too much manpower with not enough reimbursement. The paperwork should be streamlined and simplified so that its requirements don't limit participation.

*–Multi-site child care program, Virginia*

I serve 137 children in two child care centers. Twenty percent of my enrollment comes from low-income families that are in the child care subsidized program. I do not qualify for the Child and Adult Care Food Program due to the fact that I do not have enough children meeting income requirements. However, food is a very important part of our services since children spend 8 to 10 hours of their day with us and therefore eat at least two meals with us. We need help to provide really nutritious food for our children.

*–Child care center director, Ohio*

As food costs continue to rise and fewer parents are able to obtain or renew their child care vouchers, the monthly cash reimbursements that the CACFP provides to family child care providers are extremely necessary to ensure that all children in their programs continue to receive nutritious, well-balanced meals each day. Many children arrive at their provider's home without eating breakfast, and it makes a huge difference for them to be able to start their day with a healthy breakfast. Our providers consider it their personal responsibility to make sure the children in their care have enough good food to eat. Many children eat ALL of their daily meals at the home of their provider (breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) and the CACFP makes that possible for these children. Providers participating in the CACFP also receive mandatory nutrition training each year to help them to make nutritious choices for their programs and to help keep their food safe from bacteria – information that they may not have had access to without the CACFP. As the recession deepens and newspaper headlines announce more and more budget cuts, many of our providers have expressed concern about whether CACFP funds will be cut. From my experience I have found the CACFP to be integral to the quality of family child care programs, and to meeting the nutritional needs of the children and families they serve in the Boston area.

*–CACFP sponsor, Massachusetts*

Our provider is absolutely wonderful and has always provided meals and snacks for the children. This is such a huge relief for me as I don't have to worry about packing meals and know she is providing healthy balanced meals for my child. Due to recent changes in the CACFP program, she is only eligible to receive the lower tier reimbursement and has informed parents that we will have to apply to the program for her to receive the higher level reimbursement or we will have to pay extra for meals. We don't qualify for the program and cannot afford any more money on top of already high day care costs. I understand my provider cannot afford it either as her business has dropped significantly. The little bit of difference between the two tiers of reimbursements is significant and is of great assistance to all. Please provide more funding for this program so all providers can continue to provide healthy, nutritious food to the children.

*–Parent, Virginia*

I think the food program is great – every little bit helps. I do think the tiers for family child care are unfair. Every child has to eat and it doesn't matter if you are on assistance or not. All the cost falls back on me. Every child is important. Even though all families aren't on assistance they may be just making it. I would appreciate it if we could treat everyone equal.

*–Family child care provider, North Carolina*

I have participated in the Child and Adult Care Food Program for many years. It has helped me to make sure that the children in my care get the foods that they need to stay healthy. I spend between \$450 and \$500 a month on food for my program. I get a little less than half of that back. Without that I would not be able to provide the foods that the children need. I have very little grocery money allowed in my budget for me. I work a second job where I get my meals. Thank you for providing this very important program for our children. I know the economy is bad and costs keep going up but that is why it is very important for you to continue providing this very important program for our children.

*–Family child care provider, North Carolina*

The Child and Adult Care Food Program allows our centers to provide a high-quality and nutritious menu for our children. If we did not get a reimbursement one of our centers would not be able to operate. The general budget alone would not be able to cover this cost. The food program also allows us to receive training on menu planning, new ways to introduce foods, and healthy options for children and families at home. Without the CACFP, we would not be able to continue providing healthy menus due to the increasing cost of food.

*–Multi-site child care program, Washington*

We consider mealtime to be an important part of life skills, have our teachers sit down for family style meals with our students, expose them to a wide variety of healthy foods, and teach them to try new foods.

*–Child care center director, Nebraska*

We operate two centers serving 435 children. As participants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, we are able to provide two healthy snacks and lunch to our daytime families as well as dinner and an evening snack to our families requiring care until midnight, often those working in the hospital, emergency service positions and evening class students. Without support from CACFP, our food costs would be considerably higher, which would undoubtedly have an impact on our families, staff, and classroom environments due to possible increases in tuition costs and less funds available for staff salaries, equipment and supplies. We depend on this vital support to continue to offer nutritious food to our children and to provide a program of excellence to the community.

*–Child care center director, Ohio*

*The Early Care and Education Consortium is a non-profit alliance of America's leading providers of quality early learning programs. Consortium members operate more than 8,000 licensed centers caring for and educating nearly 800,000 children every day across the country. The Early Care and Education Consortium is an advocacy voice for child care providers as policies for child care and early learning develop and change across the country. For more information, please go to [www.ececonsortium.org](http://www.ececonsortium.org)*