Support Nutritious Meals and Snacks in Family Child Care

In the 2010 reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, Congress acknowledged the role of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) for wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children in child care, Head Start and preK programs. The 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization provides an important opportunity to build on this progress, to increase program access, and to improve nutrition quality in CACFP.

CACFP in Action

CACFP, created in 1968, serves more than 800,000 children in family child care settings each day. A majority of NAFCC members participate in the program.

Mealtime in child care programs is a time for learning, and NAFCC members are proud of the good meals they serve. Meal service is a major part of program budgets and families are relying on meals served to their children in child care. For many children, the child care program they attend is their primary source of food – and CACFP is a lifeline for them.

CACFP provides reimbursement to participating child care providers for up to two meals and one snack (or one meal and two snacks) each day. In addition, through in-home visits, group classes, and ongoing assistance and support, CACFP-sponsoring organizations and state agencies work with child care providers on the importance of good nutrition, and offer training and guidance on serving healthy and nutritious food.

CACFP Makes a Difference

In family child care, CACFP matters not only for the financial support for healthy meals and snacks, but as a framework for quality, and a big part of NAFCC members’ commitment to quality. Research has shown CACFP to be effective at reaching family child care providers, enhancing quality, and supporting the needs of children and families.
Good nutrition in the first years of life is essential for early brain development, and research indicates that meals and snacks served in CACFP-participating child care programs are of higher quality than in non-CACFP programs.

**Strengthen CACFP through the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization**

Research and real-life experiences in family child care homes show links between child health, nutrition, and obesity, and about the devastating impacts of child hunger. NAFCC members know that every day, families are counting on them. Family child care providers are counting in the support of CACFP.

The reimbursement rates for food in CACFP do not meet the rising prices of nutritious foods.

The complex, two-tier system of payment to family child care providers, created in 1996, caused a one-third drop in participation in CACFP, meaning that young children are not reached by the benefits of the program standards and providers are not supported.

Family child care homes qualify for Tier I reimbursement in areas with 50 percent or more low-income children (as defined by local census data or the percentage of children in the local school eligible for free and reduced price meals).

The threshold is too high to reach many communities with struggling families, and should be expanded. The reimbursement rates in Tier II are too low to continue maintaining participation in the program. Given CACFP’s positive nutrition, health and quality impact, a drop in participation is a loss for children in care.

Labor-intensive paperwork that can also be duplicative is a barrier to participation especially in family child care settings where one staff person conducts all aspects of child care operations.

Many children are in child care for three meals per day, but in 1996 one meal service was eliminated for “budget savings.” Currently, CACFP reimburses for two meals and a snack. NAFCC members report offering food without CACFP support because children are hungry, but this is increasingly difficult on a program's limited budget.

“I have been in CACFP for over 10 years. The children I care for get well balanced and appropriate portions each day. And believe it or not these are the only balanced meals some children in my care get. I enjoy the information that I receive to improve the meals I prepare for the children in my care. Financially it is a great blessing to receive reimbursement for the foods that we purchase for the children, allowing us to purchase foods that maybe out of range if we didn't receive the reimbursements.”

– NAFCC member, Pennsylvania

“IF I know a child may not have food at home, I will serve more meals to that child than I am being reimbursed for.”

– NAFCC member, New York
NAFCC recommends the following improvements to CACFP in the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization:

- Reduce the CACFP area eligibility test from 50 percent to 40 percent eligible - making more family child care providers eligible for Tier I instead of Tier II - to streamline access to healthy meals for young children in child care;
- Allow child care centers and homes the option of serving a third meal service (typically this would be a supper or an afternoon snack) for children who are in care for 8 or more hours;
- Increase CACFP reimbursements by 10 cents per meal type per tier;
- Increase the Administrative Reimbursement Rate for CACFP sponsoring organizations by $5 per family child care home per month and protect rates from negative cost-of-living adjustments to sustain participation of family child care providers;
- Provide two year implementation funds ($100 million) for State CACFP agencies, as well as $20 million for USDA, to successfully implement CACFP and sustain CACFP participation; and
- Continue funding for the ongoing five year cycle of child care and CACFP nutrition and wellness study authorized in the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act.
- Authorize the continuation of the Congressionally-mandated CACFP paperwork reduction initiative including a focus on maximizing the effective use of technology.

NAFCC supports the Access to Healthy Food for Young Children Act of 2015.

“A lot of families are struggling to live each day, but they know that their children are going to eat very well at my program. I am grateful for CACFP aiding me to feed these children.”
– NAFCC member, Georgia

“Balanced meals are important to children when they are not getting it at home due to mom and dad working weird hours. We are that line of support for them.”
– NAFCC member, Ohio