Northeast Region  Fall 2014 V1

USDA nutrition assistance programs improve access to healthy foods; support the health of next generation

Farm to School programs invest nearly $800 million in local economies

Schools across the United States purchased $789 million in local foods from farmers, ranchers, fishermen, and food processors and manufacturers in school year 2013 – 2014, according to results from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm to School Census. That represents a 105 percent increase over the 2011-2012 school year when the first census was conducted, signifying the deepening commitment of schools nationwide to bring local food into the cafeteria and strengthen their local economies.

Schools report that farm to school programs can increase the number of students purchasing school breakfast and lunch, improve consumption of healthier foods at school, and reduce plate waste. The programs are often also heavily focused on nutrition education, helping teach children where their food comes from and exposing them to lessons about healthy eating. The census data show that school gardens, which can be both teaching tools and a sources of fresh produce, have nearly tripled over the past two years.

USDA Farm to School grantee: Milton Town School District
Milton, Vermont students participate in an outdoor classroom activity planting sunchookes in the school garden. (Photo Courtesy USDA Food and Nutrition Service)

USDA announces awardees of summer EBT grants

USDA Under Secretary Kevin Concannon announced $26.9 million in grant funds to be distributed among eight grantees to continue administering pilots of the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) programs, providing summertime nutrition assistance to children who receive free and reduced-price meals during the school year. In addition to funding existing pilots for summer 2016, these grants will extend benefits to new rural areas, Tribal Nations, and areas of extreme need including Flint, Michigan.

“While students from low-income households have consistent access to nutritious meals during the academic year through the school meals programs, they are more vulnerable to food insecurity when school is out for the summer,” said Concannon. “USDA’s Summer EBT pilots have shown that students who participate in Summer EBT are better nourished throughout the summer months.”

Summer EBT provides a monthly benefit on a debit-type card that can be used throughout the summer for food purchases at authorized stores. Summer EBT is a complement to traditional summer meals programs, which offer no cost summer meals at approved sites, and is especially valuable in areas with limited or no access to traditional summer meals programs.

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The United States has always prided itself on lending a helping hand to its citizens in trying times. Throughout our history, when Americans have fallen on hard times, our safety net has stepped in to provide temporary help to those who need it. When I walked into USDA on my first day in 2009, the United States was in the midst of one of the worst economic downturns in our history. Record numbers of people suddenly found themselves and their families in dire circumstances without enough income to make ends meet or put food on the table. At that time of great need, millions turned to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help them ease their hunger.

Since Secretary Vilsack invited me to join him at USDA as Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNCS) in 2009, not only have we helped to bring America back from the brink of a second economic depression, we have also worked to institutionalize more opportunities and pathways directed at helping states assist consumers and expand direct access to healthy and affordable food.

Seven years later, a stronger economy is helping slow and reverse the trend of rising participation in SNAP. From its peak rates during the Great Recession, as families and communities begin to rebuild, participation in SNAP has dropped by over 2 million participants—and that’s the way the program is designed.

With our tremendous reach, the federal government is charged with implementing laws in the most efficient and effective way possible while working with private, state and local entities to ensure we are addressing and responding to regional differences as needed. It truly does take a village to tackle child hunger—and the strong advocacy and voices of our partners have helped carry us as far as we’ve come.

Throughout my time as Under Secretary, I have always heard that the agencies within FNCS, the Food and Nutrition Service and the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, have a reputation among federal agencies of being good partners with states—I take great pride in that reputation. In particular, our staff across the country continues to work with schools and districts to ensure they have the tools, training and assistance they need to meet the updated healthier food standards implemented under the historic and bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. The statistics show it’s working.

Today, more than 97% of schools are meeting the standards and over 50 million children are benefiting from a healthier school food environment. We’re helping schools learn from one another in order to make positive strides toward providing financially sustainable healthy school environments with strong student participation.

And students are embracing the healthier meals. I keep a photo in my office of some young ladies I met in a New Orleans elementary school that had to be rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina. I had the pleasure of having lunch with these bright young students and I was so enthralled by the stories they were telling me that I wasn’t eating my lunch. Well, toward the end of the lunchtime one of the students turned to me and said “Sir, if you aren’t going to eat your broccoli, can I have it?” As I’ve visited schools across the country, I’ve seen time and time again that young people are choosing to eat healthy, whether it’s taking an extra apple from the sharing table or enthusiastically choosing locally grown kale from the salad bar.

Under this Administration, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), a program that serves about half of all babies born in the US, has undergone the first science-based food package changes in decades. Not only are these changes helping the program be more effective at preventing health-related illnesses in pregnant women, infants and children, but according to the Government Accountability Office, every dollar spent on prenatal WIC participation is also saving us $3.50 in health care costs.

And, at a time where government cutbacks were prevalent, USDA committed to investing in staff and resources in FNCS to make it the most effective agency it can be, ready to serve people who need it, in the ways they need it most. We’ve invested in progressive new efforts like SNAP Employment and Training programs that seek to help participants build comprehensive skill sets and match them with the well-paying jobs they need to move off the program. We’ve rolled out digital services like SuperTracker and ChooseMyPlate.gov to reach a larger audience of people with helpful nutrition information whenever they need it. And we’ve protected taxpayer dollars by continued on page 3
initiating aggressive new tactics to investigate illegal activity in SNAP and remove bad actors from the program, resulting in a significant reduction in trafficking.

As a state commissioner for nearly 30 years, the bulk of my career has been spent in state government. During this time, I have served as Director of State Health and Human Services departments in Maine, Oregon, and in Iowa – the latter under then-Governor Vilsack. People often ask me, now that you’re on the federal side, what’s the biggest thing you’ve learned? And to that question, my response is, “Where you live makes a difference.” The truth is, we can make laws at the federal level to protect the nutrition safety net and ensure access to healthy foods, but whether or not that law is embraced at the local level—whether it’s fully availed by the local leaders—makes all the difference in our ability to reach consumers with the assistance they need.

In the last year of this Administration, I am committed to keeping up our work to ensure states and local partners have the tools they need to reach their constituents so that we can continue to see more of the positive changes that we’ve seen in the last seven years. We are also working to take stock of what’s working and how those programs can reach more people who really need them. I’m very proud of what we’ve accomplished in seven years, but our work here is far from done.

To read more about how these historic changes to our nation’s nutrition programs came to be and a blog from Secretary Vilsack reflecting on seven years of progress: https://medium.com/usda-results/growing-a-healthier-future-improving-nutrition-and-access-to-healthy-food-for-americans-74e35cd17b98#.i433kvp44

USDA selects 10 states for job-driven SNAP employment and training project

Massachusetts is one of 10 states selected to take part in SNAP to Skills, a first-of-its-kind, peer-to-peer effort to help state agencies design improved employment and training programs for adults participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in order to help them find employment and ultimately move off SNAP.

States selected are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina and Tennessee.

In October 2015, USDA announced the Seattle Jobs Initiative would create an intensive technical assistance program to help states to build better, stronger Employment and Training (E&T) programs. These 10 states were chosen to participate based on their existing level of commitment and interest in expanding the SNAP E&T program, their ability to build effective partnerships with local training providers, and the availability of strong, job-driven workforce development programs in the state. The project will last two years, ending in September 2017.

SNAP E&T is a critical tool in each state’s workforce development system that can provide employer-valued skills training to low-income, low-skilled Americans. SNAP E&T can help unemployed workers get back on their feet and can offer workers in low-wage jobs additional skills training to advance in their careers.

With two-third of jobs created over the next decade expected to require at least some education or training beyond high school, expanding access to education and training for SNAP participants who have limited skills or earn low wages is critical to helping participants transition into economic self-sufficiency.
Time to raise summer program awareness

Summer Food, Summer Moves is a fun, hands-on resource kit designed to get kids and families excited about healthy eating and physical activity during the summer months. The kit is designed for use by summer meal site operators and focuses on using music, games, art, and movement to motivate kids and families to choose more fruits and vegetables, choose water instead of sugary drinks, get enough physical activity every day, and to limit screen time.

The below materials are available in PDF. All are welcome to download these materials and make copies. Printed materials are expected to be available in June.

**Summer Food, Summer Moves Resource Kit**
- Operator Activity Guide [English] [Spanish]
- Activity Guides for Families
- Summer Meals, Summer Fun [English] [Spanish]
- Stay Cool with Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Movin’ with Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Summer Meals, Summer Friends [English] [Spanish]
- Let’s Celebrate Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Eat Smart to Play Hard [English] [Spanish]

**Posters**
- Four Healthy Moves/Eat Smart to Play Hard [English] [Spanish]
- Drink More Water This Summer [English] [Spanish]
- Quick and Easy Summertime Snacks/Eat Smart to Play Hard [English] [Spanish]
- Move More. Sit Less. [English] [Spanish]
- Movin’ With Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Eat Smart to Play Hard [English] [Spanish]
- My Plate/Mi Plato [English] [Spanish]

**Flyers**
- Fruits. Veggies. Friendships. [English] [Spanish]
- Stay Cool with Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Movin’ With Summer Meals [English] [Spanish]
- Friends Don’t Let Friends Sit Inside All Summer [English] [Spanish]
- Three Reasons to Celebrate Summer [English] [Spanish]
- Eat Smart to Play Hard [English] [Spanish]

**Placemat** [English] [Spanish]

**Recipes**
- Berry Jams Party Bites [English] [Spanish]
- Cool Cucumber Yogurt Dip [English] [Spanish]
- Fruity Fun Chicken Salad Cups [English] [Spanish]
- Garden Fiesta Tuna Pockets [English] [Spanish]
- Home Run Hummus Wrap [English] [Spanish]
- Summer Vegetable Salsa [English] [Spanish]

**Additional Resources for a Healthy Summer**
- Offering Healthy Summer Meals That Kids Enjoy
- Take a Healthy Summer Break Infographic
- This Summer, Eat Smart to Play Hard Parent Guide
- SFSP Summer Meals Toolkit
- SFSP: Raise Awareness


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**Raise summer meal awareness**

Promoting summer meal sites in your community is one of the most important things you can do to ensure no child goes hungry this summer. The more parents, children, and teenagers know about where sites are located, the more children will come to eat. Anyone can do outreach. Sites, sponsors, community advocates, and volunteers can use a variety of tools to draw attention to summer meals.

A wealth of materials including promotional materials, radio public service announcements, training videos, mapping tools, and information on how to connect to the 2-1-1 call center are available for your use. These resources may be found at [www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/raise-awareness](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/raise-awareness)

**How to find a meal site near you**

Call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-348-6479 or 1-877-842-6273

OR

Use the Summer Meal Site Finder at [www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks](http://www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks)

**Connecticut**
Text CTmeals to 877877

**Maine**
Call 211

**Massachusetts**
Text 4 Food 617-863-MEAL (6325)
Food Source Hotline: 1-800-645-8333

**New Hampshire**
Call National Hunger Hotline

**New York**
Text Food to 877877

**Rhode Island**
Rhode Island Department of Education
Call 211

**Vermont**
Call 211 or Text FOOD to 877877
Celebrating 50 years of school breakfast

USDA celebrates 50 years of school breakfast

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) commemorated the 50th anniversary of its School Breakfast Program by shining a light on the positive impacts of school breakfast. Over the course of this administration, participation in school breakfast programs has increased by almost 27 percent; over 14 million students are now eating school breakfast each day. To help support the ongoing success of the School Breakfast Program and other child nutrition programs, Agriculture Undersecretary Kevin Concannon announced that USDA will award up to $6.8 million in competitive Team Nutrition Training Grants to help schools and child care sites sustain the successful implementation of the healthier meals made possible by the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Research using USDA data found that students with access to school breakfast tend to have a better overall diet and a lower body mass index (BMI) than did nonparticipants. Other research has shown that students who consume breakfast make greater strides on standardized tests, pay attention and behave better in class, and are less frequently tardy, absent or visiting the nurse’s office. School breakfast is especially important for teens, who are less likely to eat breakfast than other age groups, and lower-income students who may be at risk of food insecurity.

USDA has been committed to ensuring that students around the country can enjoy the benefits of school breakfast by helping schools implement and enhance their school breakfast programs. USDA has also worked with schools to encourage the use of the Community Eligibility Provision, a cost-sharing agreement that allows high-poverty schools to serve both breakfast and lunch each school day at no cost to the student. Subsequently, the reach of the School Breakfast Program has rapidly increased over the past seven years. More than 14 million children participated in school breakfast during the last school year, an increase of nearly 3 million, since the beginning of the administration. In fact, last year more than 2.3 billion breakfasts were served by more than 90,000 schools and child care sites.

School Breakfast Week is celebrated in the midst of National Nutrition Month, commemorated each March.

The Team Nutrition grants aim to continue the advancement of the child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast Program. “The $6.8 million in grant funds USDA is offering to support school breakfast and other child nutrition programs demonstrates our commitment to providing schools and child care sites the resources and support they need to help kids start their day off right and continue strong all day long,” said Concannon.

USDA’s Team Nutrition initiative provides technical assistance, training, and nutrition education resources for schools and child care providers participating in USDA’s child nutrition programs. Grants through this program are intended to conduct and evaluate training, nutrition education and technical assistance activities to support the implementation of USDA nutrition standards for snacks and meals, like school breakfast.

For more information on the request for grant applications as well as summaries of activities conducted by previous grantees, visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition-training-grants.

Massachusetts schools commit to help more students eat school breakfast

During School Breakfast Week, Northeast Regional Administrator Kurt Messner, U.S. Congressman Jim McGovern, Massachusetts school leaders and members of the New England Patriots jump started a conversation with school nutrition professionals to actively support breakfast efforts at the local level.

The Breaking the Cycle of Poverty: One Meal at a Time Summit, held at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Mass., focused on how school breakfast can make an impact on kids’ ability to learn and can result in less tardiness and absenteeism, fewer visits to the nurse’s office and fewer behavior problems.

Sponsored by the New England Dairy & Food Council and Massachusetts Association of School Committees, attendees shared best practices, alternative breakfast service models, resources and financial support available to make school breakfast successful in schools across the Commonwealth. (Photo courtesy New England Dairy & Food Council)
Celebrating 50 years of school breakfast

**Hartford, Connecticut**

Federal, state, and local leaders gathered at Parkville School in Hartford, Conn., to mark the 50th anniversary of the National School Breakfast Program. Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman, Commissioner of Education Dianna R. Wentzell, and USDA Food and Nutrition Service Administrator Audrey Rowe (pictured) joined students and staff to talk about the importance of eating a healthy breakfast and its relationship to student performance. They were accompanied by representatives from End Hunger Connecticut.

A partnership formed in 2009 with the State Department of Education, the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, End Hunger Connecticut!, the New England Dairy & Food Council, and Action for Healthy Kids established the Connecticut School Breakfast Expansion Team to increase participation and spread the program to more schools. In 2015, 81 percent of schools in Connecticut participated, and 284 schools have added a breakfast program since the team was formed for a total of 885 schools statewide. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)

**Walpole, Massachusetts**

Northeast Regional Administrator Kurt Messner (r) visited Elm Street Elementary School to see menu items featuring USDA commodities. Messner joined Superintendent Lincoln Lynch, Rob Leshin from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Lisa Burnett from the New England Dairy & Food Council to mark the 50th anniversary of the School Breakfast Program. This year’s campaign theme, “Wake Up to School Breakfast” reminds the entire school community that school breakfast provides a healthy, energizing start to the day for students.

According to Maria Hall, Walpole Food Service Director, breakfast in all district schools was implemented in 2012. At Elm, “We have a grab and go cart that allows students to build their own breakfast,” said Hall. “They enjoy breakfast in the cafeteria with their friends, and if buses run late, they can take it to the classroom.”

Elm Street Elementary School won an NFL Play 60 Super School Award from the New England Dairy & Food Council for its fitness, health and wellness initiatives with students. (Photo by Jane Francis)

**Springfield, Massachusetts**

“I’m a nicer person now” said a student at Central High School in Springfield, Mass., when asked by FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe what impact eating school breakfast has on her day. Rowe’s visit was part of the USDA’s larger effort to promote the 50th anniversary of the National School Breakfast Program and the school’s breakfast in the classroom program.

Central is the only high school in Massachusetts that provides students with a free breakfast every day right in the classroom. The program has been in place since November 2015.

During her visit Rowe stopped in the ROTC and journalism classes, where she spoke with the students. She also had the opportunity to meet and talk with the cafeteria staff. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)
Celebrating 50 years of school breakfast

Manchester, New Hampshire
Student leaders from New Hampshire welcomed guests to Parkside Middle School in Manchester, N.H., for a Fueling Greatness breakfast roundtable discussion featuring special guest New England Patriot safety Duron Harmon.

The roundtable, hosted by the New England Dairy & Food Council, brought together school business officials and food service directors from across New Hampshire, NH Kids Count, USDA, a local dairy farmer and students. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)

Morristown, Vermont
Morrisville, Vermont celebrated success and opportunities realized through the Vermont Breakfast After the Bell Challenge. The event kicked off with a school-wide assembly in the gym featuring VIP speakers, a check presentation, an interactive student Q & A session with New England Patriot player Duron Harmon, Les Pike, VT Dairy Farmer of the Year and Parker Spaulding, the VT State Student Ambassador and closed with a smoothie toast.

The second half brought the VIPs into the school library for a roundtable discussion moderated by Hunger Free Vermont. (Photo by Ubon Mendie)

Hartford, Connecticut
FNS Northeast Regional Administrator Kurt Messner and Special Nutrition Programs Division Director Candice Stoiber made a breakfast visit to the Thirman Milner School in Hartford, Conn. The younger students at Milner do a grab and go breakfast and eat in the classroom.

Hartford Public Schools (HPS) participate in the National School Lunch, Breakfast, Afterschool Snack, and Summer Food Service Programs as well as the CACFP At-Risk Supper Program and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. HPS implemented CEP district-wide for 2015-2016 school year; expanding from 35 schools in the 2014-2015 school year. Currently the district meal program provides meals at 50 schools with a total student enrollment of approximately 23,000. On average, 18,000 lunches, 9,500 breakfasts, 1,200 at-risk suppers, and 1,200 afterschool snacks are served daily. During the summer approximately 4,700 lunches and 2,400 breakfasts are served daily. Breakfast is available in all school locations operating a variety of distribution options including cafeterias, grab and go carts, and second chance breakfast. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)
At the Table

Celebrating 50 years of school breakfast

What the students have to say...

Fuel Up to Play 60
National Student Ambassador
Abby Forrence

Hi. My name is Abby Forrence, an eighth grade student from Milford Middle School in Manchester, New Hampshire. I am also a National Ambassador for Fuel Up to Play 60, a youth run, in school health and wellness program sponsored by the NFL and the National Dairy Council. Our mission is to stop the childhood obesity epidemic in schools, while making the school environment have healthier food choices and more chances to increase daily physical activity.

One aspect of the school day that we have focused on is a healthy school breakfast. At the start of my middle school career, the school breakfast program was a tiny, little section of the cafeteria filled with students. Pretty much all that was offered was cereal and milk. This breakfast was lacking in popularity, nutritional value and efficiency. What our school needed was a boost. We applied for a grab and go refrigerator and ended up receiving one. The grab and go fridge helped increase the number of options we served. When I was in seventh grade we received a grant for a salad bar extension. Not only do we use the salad bar extension for lunches, but we also use it to hold different breakfast options like fruit and yogurt. The breakfast program has become extremely popular due to the changes we have made. We have also begun to witness a change in students’ behavior due to our school breakfast program. Students that participate in school breakfast have begun to pay attention more, participate in class more often, focus better and score better on tests.

These changes in behavior are helping the school function better and make our school a happier, healthier setting for students and faculty. In other words, school breakfast programs benefit the entire school community from many different perspectives. If our school can make a difference, any school can.

(Photograph courtesy of Nicole Forrence)

Malcolm Ealy, Class of 2018
Central High School
Springfield, Massachusetts

(Editor’s Note: FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe visited Central High School during National School Breakfast Week. She spoke with students in a journalism class and asked if a student would be willing to express his thoughts about the breakfast program.)

The Breakfast in Homeroom initiative at Central High School in Springfield, Massachusetts has been going strong for more than five months. This program is meant to improve the homeroom attendance of students throughout the school and to allow breakfast to be more of a given rather than a privilege for arriving to school before the bell rings to go to homeroom. Despite the good intentions of this program, there have been varied opinions from both the students and teachers at Central High. Even with these opinions, this initiative has been improving over time, and will only continue to do so as the school year ends and the coming school year approaches.

The expansion of the variety of foods being served would be one form of improvement on the school’s part. Foods such as parfait, yogurt, and muffins are being served for breakfast, and are among the fan favorites of students and teachers. These kinds of foods are quite healthy alternatives to other kinds of breakfasts that could be eaten in the morning, such as waffles or pancakes. Additionally, March was National Nutrition Month, creating an even larger focus on the health and nutritional value that new additions to the menu may present. This will most likely spur a great amount of new additions as well as improvements to the system, gaining more student supporters of the initiative.

However, it is impossible to please everyone, and as such there are multiple students who think the program could still use major improvements in order for them to enjoy the breakfast. One major dilemma is the inconsistency with the breakfasts, where one day there will be a fan favorite food, such as the cereal bars or muffins, but the next there will be some of the less liked ones such as the cheese sticks or Sun Butter.

The school has noticed this issue, and as such has lowered the amount of the less liked foods served and increased the fan favorites. This improvement, along with the new foods on the menu, are sure to get more children eating in the morning in order to have a productive and educational day at school. One student at Central High had stated that “It allows me to wake up in the morning without the fear of being hungry all day long. It keeps me content and full of energy until lunch time.”

Springfield Central High School’s Breakfast in Homeroom is sure to improve the performance of everybody within the school, including both students and teachers, as they are now nearly guaranteed a breakfast that is convenient and easy for them to obtain, allowing for productivity and education to improve throughout the building.
WIC profile: Yeled v’ Yalda

Yeled v’ Yalda (YvY)
A family focus

By Jane Francis, USDA FNS Northeast Region Communications Office

Often cited as one of the best WIC agencies in New York, one must ask what makes it so.

The answer, according to Yeled v’ Yalda’s (YvY) Founder and CEO Solomon Igel, is the family focused approach the greater organization has nurtured since its inception. YvY calls it the Power of Synergy, where all of its programs work together to help each YvY child and family reach its maximum potential.

“One person can do nothing, two can do something, three can do a lot,” said Igel. “We are all family here – titles don’t mean anything. Leaders of every department work together for one purpose— that all the programs should work hand in hand and help each other. Parents, staff, administrators and the board all have their voices heard.”

Yeled v Yalda (YvY), translated from Hebrew meaning boy and girl, started in 1981 with two Head Start classrooms in Brooklyn serving 78 children. Today, it serves 1,885 Head Start and Early HeadStart boys and girls until age 6 and offers additional related services to children and their families up to the age of 21. YvY has 22 family and child service centers in Brooklyn and Staten Island representing 13 different nationalities that while culturally diverse, share many commonalities.

About 90% of the children come from low-income homes with five or more children and 80% have two or more children under the age of 5. Many of the mothers are young and overwhelmed.

Providing nutrition services is a required component of the Head Start Performance Standards. That was the factor that drove YvY to add WIC to its cache of services in 2004. Today YvY WIC serves more than 10,000 low-income mothers and children at two sites in Brooklyn. Both sites are co-located with YvY Head Start.

Through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), participants receive supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education. Specifically, WIC serves pregnant, nursing and postpartum women and their infants and children up until 5 years of age who are found to be at nutritional risk.

“We are the only Head Start Program in the State that also has our own official WIC Center,” said Igel, “the others have to refer parents to WIC. Parents are busy and overworked, so when multiple appointments can be tackled at the same time at a one-stop shop it is much easier for the families to access all of the services available, including WIC.”

“Our co-location with other YvY related services sets us apart,” said YvY WIC Administrator Nechama Stolzenberg. “We are able to offer participants a wide array of high tech services— such as Head Start, Early Head Start, Special Education, Expectant Moms Program and health insurance enrollment. We pride ourselves on our role as an adjunct to social services.”

YvY’s WIC offices are designed with both adults and children in mind. Colorful and welcoming play areas promote New York State’s “Fit WIC” and “Eat Well Play Hard” initiatives. Large and airy offices are built to maintain participant privacy and accommodate children and strollers.

WIC strives to provide services in a timely and efficient manner, with waiting times kept to a minimum. To ensure customer satisfaction, staff continually seek and assess client feedback and biannual surveys are conducted.

“YvY is all part of a strong family that allows us to provide enhanced WIC services,” said Stolzenberg. “For example, the YvY IT department customized a WIC appointment log in system in-kind that has improved the caliber of our services by monitoring participant flow and enabling our team to manage appointments more efficiently.”

There are two wait boards in each waiting room and clients are assigned a number when they arrive to ensure confidentiality. The wait board allows them the opportunity to assess their wait time and see how many people are ahead of them. They also are given the option of getting a text message reminding them of the documents they need to have with them.

And customer feedback indicates it’s working, with comments like “We love the kid friendly environment,” “You have the fastest quickest service for your customers,” and “I enjoy my visit. I like the number board where I can see where I’m holding.”

“Another thing that sets us apart and makes YvY unique,” according to Igel, “is shared governance and decision making between the Board, parents and staff. As a requirement of the Head Start Performance Standards, YvY must have an elected Policy Council who are involved in the decision making process including fiscal and programmatic decisions. Being that the Policy Council is comprised of parents of children being serviced by our organization, they are the perfect candidates to make decisions that benefit the recipients of the services and cater to their needs and preferences.”

According to YvY Executive Director Naomi Auerbach, “We recently built a fitness center and that was from the desire of the parents. The neighborhood is a congested area, and families were looking for a place where they could exercise. We’ve built a place where everyone in the community is welcome.”

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Promoting healthy lifestyles

Eat Well Play Hard (EWP) is a key childhood obesity prevention initiative of the New York State Department of Health. In turn, New York’s’ Fit WIC initiative seeks to revitalize WIC nutrition education by training WIC staff to incorporate physical activity and other healthy lifestyle messages into counseling sessions and other aspects of their WIC clinics.

YvY has been providing Eat Well Play Hard and Fit WIC education to participants through licensed nutritionists, lactation specialists and peer counselors. With their knowledge, expertise and care, they empower participants to keep themselves and their families healthy. An extensive multilingual nutrition resource library supplies participants with informational materials on a wide range of nutrition and health related topics, such as aerobic activity, immunizations and zinc. Facilitated discussion nutrition classes, one-on-one counseling sessions, and healthy lifestyle initiatives are a regular part of the YvY program.

“We have our own resource library,” said Igel. “An in-house full library for parents for whatever program-WIC, Head Start, Special Education, pregnant mothers, prenatal care—we have books they can pick and we have a librarian. Everything is in-house.”

“All participants are made to feel welcome,” said Stolzenberg, “and are assisted and serviced in a respectful manner. Handouts are culturally sensitive and meet the individual needs of the multiple cultures, ethnicities and educational backgrounds of participants serviced. The development team includes our enthusiastic team of nutritionists and support staff.”

Materials are peer reviewed and comply with all WIC nutrition education criteria set by the state and federal government. Certified nutritionists and other staff use the resources as tools both in facilitated discussion classes and during one on one nutrition education counseling sessions.

“Our materials from a to z address a wide variety of nutrition and health related issues that cater to all members of the household from the youngest to the oldest participants,” said Stolzenberg. “They’ve been very well received with families. We also have other available resources that YvY families can access such as the Yeled website, YvY library, YvY Parent Newsletters, resource centers in waiting areas—these are all examples of different means of communication we use to get the information out to YvY households.”

The goal is to inspire participants to set healthy lifestyles for themselves and their families and to incorporate healthy habits into their daily routine.

One of YvY’s most successful health education campaigns is its Fit Family, introduced about eight years ago through Mr. Fit’s Farm waiting room display. The display encourages children waiting at the site to imitate activities of the Fit Family and their animals on the farm, such as running and jumping. Family members include Mr. and Mrs. Fit, Grandma and Grandpa Fit, and Sister and Brother Fit, as well as Dr. Fit. The display was expanded into placemats, puppets, beach balls, t-shirts and other healthy lifestyle resources.

“The Fit Family, YvY’s own characters, was conceived as a way of informing our youngest participants of healthy lifestyle habits, proper nutrition, physical activity and safety,” explained Stolzenberg. “Dr. Fit was created to make youngsters feel more at ease with the whole healthcare experience and Doctor’s office environment.”

Expansion plans of the Fit Family to include Officer Fit and Firefighter Fit is due to the popularity of the Fit Family among YvY participants. During the holiday season, Stolzenberg says she’s heard of participants dressing up as the Fit Family.

Looking ahead

“NY State WIC makes a real difference in the lives of thousands of New Yorkers,” said Stolzenberg, “and I’m proud to be part of it. The culture of YvY is planted in different ways between opportunities for development, the backing of our sponsoring agency, assistance from our human resources department as well as trying to make sure staff find fulfillment—all those ingredients help plant seeds for a motivated staff.”

“When you have so many different programs for parents and children you can have a bigger IT department, HR, property management and fiscal department,” explained Igel. “YvY WIC can focus on WIC services, unlike setting up a standalone program where there is only so much that they can do.”

Igel’s plans for the future include opening YvY’s first women’s health center with hopes to open more. His dream is that at every Head Start site, parents should be able to go in and enroll in WIC services, but he said, “It’s only a dream. It can’t happen due to a variety of factors, but it would be the ideal thing.” Igel points to Staten Island where YvY has 500 immigrant families in Head Start, but can’t provide WIC services that are easily accessible at the YvY sites.

One thing about the future, you never know what it holds. Could Igel’s dream be granted? Time will tell.

(Graphics courtesy of Yeled v’ Yalda)

Client impact story

“WIC is not only improving nutrition, it’s saving children’s lives” -- Nechama Stolzenberg, YvY WIC Administrator

“A mom came into YvY WIC site at 1312 38th Street; Brooklyn NY 11218 with her newborn seeking breastfeeding help. She was first seen by a dedicated and caring YvY WIC Peer Counselor and then referred to the very knowledgeable and skilled YvY WIC Breast Feeding Coordinator. The baby’s lethargy, jaundice, and inability to transfer milk were alarming. The Breastfeeding Coordinator advised the mom to see the infant’s Pediatrician immediately. The Peer Counselor helped the participant develop a plan to protect her milk supply and to use supplementation as needed. Tests revealed that the baby was born without a thyroid gland and needed immediate treatment. Appropriate referrals from WIC resulted in treatment beginning before irreversible damage to the infant’s health took place. The infant thrived and is now an active and happy toddler.”
USDA makes funds available to state agencies to help keep young children in WIC

The USDA recently announced approximately $2 million in grants is available to help state agencies retain young children in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program through age 5. Young children are vulnerable to a wide variety of nutrition-related problems that can impair their development and growth, making WIC a crucial part of ensuring young children have a foundation for nutritional success.

Based on 2012 national and state level estimates, approximately 85 percent of income-eligible infants participate in WIC in their first year of life, totaling approximately half of all infants born in the U.S. However, the percent of eligible children between the ages of 1 and 4 who participate in WIC is just 53 percent.

Applications proposing innovative strategies to improve child retention in the program are due June 15, and grants will be awarded later this year. The grants are divided into two classes: full and mini. Three full grants are anticipated to be awarded for up to $500,000 each over a 3-year period, and grantees are required to present project findings to FNS in the spring of 2020. Recipients of up to six mini grants will be awarded up to $100,000 and each must present their findings by summer 2018.

The 90 WIC state agencies responsible for administering WIC in the states, territories and Indian Tribal Organizations are eligible for the grants. When applying, lead state agencies can collaborate and partner with their local WIC offices, local colleges or universities, public health organizations, Head Start programs or other similar programs that serve low-income families with children under 5 years of age to encourage holistic, community-based solutions.

For more information on how to apply and contact information, visit grants.gov at: www.grants.gov/custom/viewOppDetails.jsp?oppId=283081

Framingham WIC Good Food Project
Julie Mason, a nutritionist in the Framingham, Mass., WIC Program demonstrates a recipe for the Good Food Project, a series of classes and workshops at WIC to teach women and children how to prepare healthy food safely and on a budget. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)

WIC Mobile RV visits Rochester Public Market
Kevin Concannon, USDA Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services Under Secretary views the information display in front of a WIC Mobile Clinic at the Rochester Public Market. The market has the highest SNAP redemptions in the country and serves as a great location to provide information to citizens who qualify and are most impacted by FNS programs. The WIC Mobile Clinic is a 30 foot retrofitted motorhome that travels to hard-to-reach areas providing easy access to nutrition services. (Photo by Ubon Mendie)

Foodlink groundbreaking ceremony
Kevin Concannon, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services joins New York State Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul and Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren for a ceremonial apple cutting to commemorate the groundbreaking of the $4.6 million Foodlink Community Kitchen. The kitchen will enable expanded food processing for the local community and culinary workforce training. The kitchen will be located at the Foodlink headquarters facility in Rochester. (Photo by Ubon Mendie)
USDA announces effort to strengthen nutrition among young children, create healthy habits early

The USDA recently announced strengthened nutrition standards for food and beverages served to young children and others in day care settings. Young children and adults in day care will now receive meals with more whole grains, a greater variety of vegetables and fruits, and less added sugars and solid fats. The science-based standards introduced in this final rule will elevate the nutritional quality of meals and snacks provided under the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to better align with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and to be consistent with the meals children receive as part of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Research indicates that America’s obesity problem starts young, with obesity rates in preschoolers more than doubling over the last three decades and one in eight preschoolers classified as obese. Since taste preference and eating habits develop early in life, CACFP could play a crucial role in the solution. This final rule marks another important step toward ensuring young children have access to the nutrition they need and develop healthy habits that will contribute to their well-being over the long term.

The new meal patterns will improve access to healthy beverages, including low-fat and fat-free milk and water, and encourage breastfeeding for the youngest program participants. These standards reflect the nutritional improvements seen in children across the country since the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

CACFP provides aid to child and adult care institutions and family or group day care homes for the provision of nutritious foods that contribute to the growth and development of children and the health and wellness of older adults and chronically impaired disabled persons. Through the CACFP, more than 4 million children and nearly 120,000 adults receive nutritious meals and snacks each day as part of the care they receive.

This is the first major revision of the CACFP meal patterns since the program’s inception in 1968 and will require meals and snacks served through CACFP. USDA focused on incremental changes that balance the science behind the nutritional needs of the diverse CACFP participants and the practical abilities of participating centers and day care homes to implement these changes.

By setting an implementation date of October 1, 2017, the final rule provides ample lead time for centers and day care homes to learn and understand the new meal pattern standards before they are required to be in full compliance. USDA will provide in-person and online trainings and is developing new resources and training materials, such as menu planning tools, new and updated recipes, and tip sheets, to ensure successful implementation of the new nutrition standards.

USDA Food and Nutrition Service national administrator visits Boston child care program

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Administrator Audrey Rowe visited the Nurtury at Tremont Child Care Center in Boston. Above: She applauds after hearing preschool children recite a song.

Below: She laughs with children during their Breakfast in the Classroom meal. (Photos: Ubon Mendie)
Wellness in the New York City Schools
FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe, visited PS145/West Prep Academy in New York City to see the Wellness in the Schools (WITS) program in action. WITS inspires healthy eating, environmental awareness and physical fitness as a way of life for kids in public schools.

PS 145/West Prep Academy is a co-located public school with more than 580 students in a high-poverty area where all of the students qualify for free lunches. With training and support from WITS Chef Katie, the kitchen staff is now empowered to execute the “Alternative Menu,” a menu which eliminates highly processed items and emphasizes healthy, scratch-cooked recipes. The Alternative Menu, developed in partnership between WITS and the NYC Office of School Food, conforms to the USDA’s updated meal standards without increased cost. The Alternative Menu currently serves 60 schools and 30,000 children in New York City.

While Chef Katie gets students excited about healthy menu items, WITS is also active on the playground. WITS coaches provide structured play opportunities for students that use up lots of surplus energy, helping kids return to the classroom calmer and more focused. The kids know that to participate in the fun they must also behave in the classroom and lunchroom.

PS 145/West Prep Academy is a model WITS school. According to Principal Dr. Natalia Garcia as long as she is the principal, WITS will be there. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)

Three New Hampshire schools earn HealthierUS School Challenge Awards

Above: Mark Johnson of the FNS Regional Office joined Manchester Superintendent Livingston, Mayor Gatsos, students and school officials to celebrate the McLaughlin Middle School’s bronze award.

Below: Candice Stoiber, the Northeast Special Nutrition Programs Division Director presented the silver award to the Beech Street School. Beech Street is one of only three schools in New Hampshire to earn silver.

The McLaughlin Middle School and Hillside Middle School bronze awards bring New Hampshire’s total to 31 HealthierUS schools.

Congratulations Manchester!

A favorite lunch at Hillside Middle School is the homemade pizza. Creative options like garlic; cauliflower, butternut squash; cilantro, pineapple; hummus, veggie; and turkey taco pizza are among the offerings. High school students have been known to return to Hillside for lunch.

Below: Dr. Julie Obbagy (l) of the FNS Regional Office recognized the food service staff at Hillside Middle School during the school’s bronze award celebration. (Photos by Cynthia Tackett)
Responded to the census are operating farm to school programs as of the 2014-2015 school year, and another 16 percent — more than 2,000 districts — have plans to start in the future. The census results show that farm to school programs exist in every state in large and small, rural and urban schools alike. These schools are incorporating local foods throughout the day including school lunch, school breakfast, supper programs and/or snacks.

The newly updated Farm to School Census website allows users to find information about farm to school programs in their state and in their particular school or district. The site also names three top school districts in each state that boast higher than average investment in local food purchasing.

In order to establish realistic goals with regard to increasing the availability of local foods in schools, USDA conducted the first nationwide Farm to School Census in 2013. USDA conducted a second Farm to School Census in 2015 to measure progress toward reaching this goal. In 2015, USDA surveyed over 18,000 public, private and charter school districts and 12,585 school districts responded for a response rate of approximately 70 percent. Data were collected through an online survey and through a printable mail-in questionnaire. To view the full results, visit https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov.

Farm to School is part of the Office of Community Food Systems and is one of many initiatives of USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) aimed at improving the health of our next generation. FNS administers America’s fifteen nutrition assistance programs, including, but not limited to, the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Together these programs make up the federal nutrition safety net.

The Farm to School program is a core element of the USDA’s Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative, which coordinates USDA’s work to support local and regional food systems.

Wrapping up

Farm to School continued from page 1

for items as needed rather than requiring them to purchase all items in one trip or lose the remaining benefits. Implementing EBT will also reduce checkout times and potential stigma associated with using food benefits. Additionally, WIC participants will no longer need to separate their WIC foods from their other grocery items.

Switching to statewide EBT will also strengthen the management and integrity of the WIC program by providing USDA and state agencies with previously unavailable data on the type, amount and cost of foods purchased with WIC benefits. In addition, this final rule will significantly decrease the time and cost of processing payments for both vendors and the program.

Approximately half of all infants in the U.S. participate in WIC. The program provides nutritious foods to supplement diets, nutrition education (including breastfeeding promotion and support) and referrals to health and other social services to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children up to age five. Services are made available through approximately 1,900 local agencies and 10,000 clinic sites. Forty-five thousand authorized stores offer healthy WIC foods to participants. More information about the WIC program can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/WIC.

The WIC EBT announcement is just one way that USDA is helping Americans access healthy foods. In addition, USDA is conducting a pilot to explore home delivery of groceries to homebound elderly and disabled SNAP participants.

WIC continued from page 1

Summer EBT continued from page 1

Summer EBT, which is currently operating as a demonstration project, was first funded by Congress in 2010. Rigorous evaluations of these pilots found that Summer EBT can significantly reduce very low food security among children, the most severe form of food insecurity, by one-third. Studies also showed that these additional resources enabled families to eat more healthfully, eating significantly more fruits and vegetables and whole grains — key building blocks to better health. Based on these proven successes, the President’s proposed plan would allow Summer EBT to reach nearly 20 million children once fully implemented.

This year’s grantees include Cherokee Nation, Chickasaw Nation, Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, and Oregon. All eight grantees participated in Summer EBT in 2015; however, their 2016 projects are aiming to serve more than 250,000 children total, nearly 90 percent more, or more than 120,000 additional children, than in 2015.

During the academic year, free and reduced-price school meals help ensure nearly 22 million low-income children have consistent access to nutritious food through the National School Lunch Program. However, only approximately one-fifth of those children currently participate in summer meal programs. USDA’s efforts to expand and enhance both the traditional summer meals programs and Summer EBT are working to fill that gap. Since this administration took office, USDA has served more than 1.2 billion summer meals to kids in need.

In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act with bipartisan support to help ensure all American children have the nutritious food they need to perform well in school and grow into healthy adults. The law is working and we are already beginning to see signs of changing diets among children with more than 97 percent of schools reporting that they are successfully meeting the updated nutrition standards.

This announcement is part of USDA’s continued commitment to ensuring children and families have access to a healthy diet.

Rhode Island grown corn is a huge hit for students at Hamilton Elementary School. (Photo courtesy of USDA Food and Nutrition Service)
Q&A with Kurt Messner - continued

Q: What outside interest do you have completely unrelated to FNS that brings something to your management style?

“I have a lot of different interests. If I had to pick one I would say I am a very hands on type of person. I think if I were not doing this I would be an engineer or doing something in that field. I think looking for resources, putting them together, and making opportunities is like having parts in a toolbox. An opportunity comes up and you have the right tool at the time. I’m constantly trying to see what do we have; where is the potential? At the same time you are balancing that with new opportunities that come up where you may not have the tool; so you are constantly looking for resources. It is a give and take but I think for me it kind of gets back to being an engineer. If you are trying to build something you have to have all the right parts.”

Q: Do you have a motto or words that you live by?

“I think there are two things that are important to me and these are very general. Number one is the golden rule. I try to treat people the way that I want to be treated. To me that is the bar. I try not to treat people in a way that is disrespectful or uncivil. I don’t want it done to me so I don’t want to do it to others. And I expect the same from other people.

I think the other thing is to really do the right thing. You have to weigh the pros and cons in any decision but eventually you have to rely on your instinct as to what is right and what isn’t right.

I think in my remarks I mentioned Mark Twain and one of his famous quotes - ‘Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest.’ It really is true. There are some people who will do the right thing consistently and there are other people who don’t necessarily do that.”

Q: This is the Food and Nutrition Service. What are your healthy lifestyle habits?

“I try to get exercise. I do a lot of landscaping and gardening. I try to do a lot of walking. I try to stay active. As far as healthy eating, I don’t always practice it but I try to have a salad; try to limit the portion size that I have and I just try to have balance.”

Q: Of the 15 nutrition assistance programs which one do you think has the biggest impact?

“I think the WIC program does and I say that because it is the beginning of everything. We talk about a continuum of our programs across the lifespan. The WIC program starts with expectant mothers and infants and that is the starting point for them to have a healthy lifestyle. It then carries over to the school programs and beyond but WIC is the starting point.”

Q: Anything else from your remarks that you want to share?

“Some of my personal thoughts.

Collaboration, which I think is critical. Involving people that are smarter and more skilled than you always works.

Resources and opportunities - You need both. Even if you don’t have a use for a resource put it in the toolbox because down the road there will be a need for it.

Continuous improvement - It is about adjusting and readjusting. The world changes around us and we need to adjust. Interestingly, most people are resistant to change because it is the unknown and they don’t know how it is going to impact them. But you can be part of the process.

Life balance - Celebrate your successes and learn from your mistakes. It is ok to make a mistake. Some of the best inventions went through a number of different mistakes before they got there. But if we are constantly looking for a victory I think you miss out on a lot.

The last piece is your values. I think the way you interact with people, what you expect out of people what they expect from you is important. Do the right thing.”

Kurt Messner was appointed the Regional Administrator for the Northeast Region of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service on March 6, 2016. Conducting his Installation Ceremony were FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe (l) and Yvette Jackson, Associate Administrator, Regional Operations & Support. (Photo by Cynthia Tackett)
An interview with Kurt Messner
Northeast Regional Administrator

Kurt Messner was installed as the Northeast Regional Administrator for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service on March 11, 2016. The following Q&A builds on remarks from his Installation Ceremony.

Q: During the time you were the Acting Regional Administrator what were your biggest takeaways?

“We well first and foremost it really allowed me to learn a lot more about the programs. Going into it I had a strong administrative experience here in the Agency. We have 15 major programs and there are a lot of different complexities and nuances. This gave me an opportunity to quickly learn a lot about these programs.”

Q: Going forward now that you are the permanent Regional Administrator how do you want to build on those takeaways?

“I think it is really important to build as many partnerships as we can. I say that because we don’t have all of the resources that we need to do all of the things that we want to do. Many of our partners don’t either, but by bringing people to the table and getting people engaged and involved through sheer numbers we can do a lot more. We’ve seen that in our summer program; we’re starting to see it in our placed-based initiatives and some of our other critical priorities that we are working on.”

Q: Building on that what do you think are NERO’s greatest strengths and challenges?

“We have some very talented, experienced, knowledgeable program staff and managers here. We have people who really know the programs and have developed very good relationships with our states and industry partners. I think some of the challenges are the unknown. It is a transitional year. We want to keep the momentum and focus on our programs going. A year from now we don’t know what that is going to look like. I’m sure there will be a shift in priorities. So trying to position ourselves so that we can continue doing what we are doing but be in a position down the road to pivot when we need to is going to be critical.”

Q: What is the best professional advice you ever received?

“Somebody told me not too long ago that I need to get out of my comfort zone. And for me that wasn’t necessarily an eye opener but it was good advice. I think by nature I am more of an introvert than extrovert. I like operational things. I like putting things together and fixing them and making them work. This particular position, like most of our leadership positions in the Region, requires that you are engaging with people and helping them put the pieces together to work. It is not about you doing it on your own; it is about working with others to engage them to do it. And for me that does require me getting out of my comfort zone.”

Q: What would be the best professional advice you would pass on?

“There are a few. I think the first is to continue on the path that we are on to meet and exceed our objectives here in the Region. I think we also need to make sure we are in a good position to be flexible for whatever changes are coming up in the next year for the Agency and the direction the Agency will be going in. To do that we need to have the right resources; the right staff in place; and training for that staff is critical.”

Q: What are your goals for the Region?

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