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USDA Calls on Communities to Help Fill the Summer Meal Gap; Ensure Children Have Access to Healthy Food Year Round

WASHINGTON, April 12, 2013 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today called on communities across the country to partner with USDA's summer meals program to ensure that no child goes hungry when school is out. During a roundtable with Josh Wachs, Chief Strategy Officer for [Share Our Strength](#), Kathy Underhill, Executive Director of [Hunger Free Colorado](#), and Harriett Phillips, Liaison to the [Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign](#) for Governor Mike Beebe. Vilsack reiterated the vital role of partners in reaching eligible children and their families and challenged them to help USDA serve 5 million more meals this summer.

"Children need healthy food all year long to grow and achieve to their highest ambitions. We know that when school lets out, millions of low-income children no longer get a healthy breakfast or lunch. USDA's summer meals program helps to fill that gap and is an invaluable investment in the future of America's children," said Vilsack. "Today, I challenge our partners and communities across the nation to work with us to ensure that all children have access to healthy food during the summer months."

In order to reach more eligible children, USDA is providing intensive technical assistance to expand the reach of the program in five states with high levels of rural or urban food insecurity or historically low program participation rates, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Rhode Island and Virginia. Arkansas, Colorado and Virginia are also states targeted by USDA's [StrikeForce](#), an initiative designed to improve the quality of life and boost economic growth in high poverty rural areas.

"Poor nutrition during summer months sets up a cycle of poor performance once school begins again and makes children – especially those who experience poverty or food insecurity – more prone to illness and other health issues," said Vilsack. "I am proud to say that our Nation's communities are working hard to make sure every child has the food they need all year long."

USDA's summer meals programs operate through partnerships between USDA, state agencies and local organizations. Local sponsors, such as schools, local government agencies, faith-based and nonprofit community organizations, and residential and non-residential camps provide free meals and activities to eligible low-income children during the summer months. In 2012, USDA's partners served 144 million summer meals at 38,800 sites, feeding approximately 2.3 million children on a typical summer day. For more information on becoming a SFSP sponsor or site, visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/>. To find a site in your

community, call 1-866-3-Hungry or 1-877-8-Hambre.

USDA is focused on improving childhood nutrition and empowering families to make healthier food choices by providing science-based information and advice, while expanding the availability of healthy food.

- America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals due to improved nutrition standards implemented as a result of the historic [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#).
- USDA is making fresh fruits and vegetables more accessible for low-income families. More than 3,200 farmers markets and farm stands are now authorized to accept payment through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), an increase of nearly 100 percent since 2010.
- USDA's *MyPlate* symbol and the resources at [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#) provide quick, easy reference tools for parents, teachers, healthcare professionals and communities.
- USDA also created [SuperTracker](#), a free online planning and tracking tool used by over two million Americans daily to help them improve food choices, maintain a healthy weight, and track physical activity.
- USDA provides shopping strategies and meal planning advice to help families serve more nutritious meals affordably through its [10-Tips Nutrition Series](#) and the [Thrifty Food Plan](#).
- Through USDA's [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food](#) initiative, the Department has worked to increase access to nutritious food through the development of strong local and regional food systems. The number of farmers markets increased by more than 67 percent in the last four years and there are now more than 220 regional food hubs in operation around the country.
- USDA launched a new \$5 million [Farm to School](#) grant program in 2012 to increase the amount of healthy, local food in schools.

USDA continues working with First Lady Michelle Obama on the [Let's Move!](#) initiative, which is helping to promote healthy eating and physical activity while supporting the health of American families. Through the combined efforts of USDA and its partners, the United States is beginning to see progress and improvements in the health of our Nation's children.

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