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**Summer food programs help ensure kids don’t go hungry**

*Communities operate more than 700 meal sites around Wisconsin*

Contact Nancy Schultz, nancy.schultz@co.shawano.wi.us

Madison, Wis.— During the school year, hundreds of thousands of state children benefit from nutrition-boosting school breakfast, lunch and afterschool snack programs. But access to the programs ends along with the school year--leaving many students at risk for hunger over the summer months.

Approximately 40 percent of the 855,000 children enrolled in Wisconsin schools last year were eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals. During the 2012-2013 school year, children living in a household of four could receive free meals if household income was at or below $29,965 per year, and reduced-price meals if household income was at or below $42,643 yearly.

“As families continue to struggle financially, and the need for food assistance increases, making sure that children have access to the healthy food they need during the summer months, and ensuring that families of low-income children know about summer programs and how to access them is imperative,” says Amber Canto, poverty and food security specialist with the University of Wisconsin-Extension.

The United States Department of Agriculture funds two federal summer nutrition programs: the National School Lunch Program and the Summer Food Service Program. At the state level, both programs are administered by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction in conjunction with USDA.

“The Summer Food Service Program is designed to provide those children dependent on school meals access to nutritious food, and to decrease child hunger and malnutrition, and avoid delayed development during the summer months,” explains Canto.

Canto and her UW-Extension colleagues work to promote awareness of hunger and resources for food insecure households and to provide nutrition education to low-income children and families.

Many state organizations support the Summer Food Service Program in Wisconsin, including public and private school food authorities; summer camps; local, municipal, county, tribal and state governments; colleges and universities participating in the National Youth Sports Program; and private nonprofit organizations. All sponsors must apply to participate with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

The summer meal site sponsors are reimbursed for serving meals that meet specific nutritional guidelines. Meals are served free to children under the age of 18 and to disabled individuals over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs. Canto notes that many summer feeding sites also include child activities and other enrichment opportunities.

Last summer, Wisconsin served more than 2.4 million meals at over 700 sites operated by 177 sponsoring organizations.

To find out if your community is already participating in the Summer Food Service Program, visit the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Child Nutrition Programs website (<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/fns/>) or call the National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY to find meals for children. You can also text “food” to 877-877 to find out about summer meal sites near you.