

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Program Title

Rural Summer Feeding Program

Fund Use (250 Chars)

The Food Bank of North Alabama, in partnership with the Alabama Association of Food Banks, proposes to locate sites and recruit and train providers for the expansion of a successful summer feeding pilot program for schoolchildren in Northwest Alabama.

Problem Statement (2500 chars)

For more than half of North Alabama's schoolchildren, summer vacation can be a period of uncertainty and anxiety. The Alabama Department of Education reports that over 50% of schoolchildren in the Food Bank of North Alabama's 11-county service corridor are enrolled in the state's free and reduced-price meal program. But in the summer, when school is not in session, that source of meals disappears. Some families have the means to stretch their food dollars to cover the loss of those meals, but for more than 26% of the region's neediest children, food insecurity becomes a haunting, daily threat.

For a few communities, summer feeding programs have alleviated that food insecurity, but in North Alabama's more rural counties, where free and reduced-price meal program enrollment in schools can soar into the 70th percentile, summer meal sites can be difficult or impossible to find. According to the Alabama Department of Human Resources, summer feeding programs in North Alabama are minimal outside of Madison County. In 2015, DeKalb and Lawrence Counties reported zero summer meals. Cullman County served fewer than 165. Marshall and Jackson counties reported fewer than 5,000, and Colbert fewer than 10,000. These statistics corroborate a recent report from the Food Research Action Committee indicating that Alabama's summer feeding program is among the ten lowest performing in the nation.

The absence of these summer feeding programs has serious implications. Even a few weeks of food insecurity can have severe effects on children's physical and cognitive development. It exposes them to the risk of stunted growth and diet-related disease. More significant is the effect on cognitive development: nutritional deficit accrued during the summer puts children at a significant disadvantage in the classroom compared to their food secure classmates. It accelerates learning loss when school is not in session, and it has a tremendous impact on the first weeks of school—critical weeks that are an accurate predictor of performance for the rest of the instructional year.

Our plan to address the problem is to expand a summer feeding program in underserved counties in Northwest Alabama—especially those with large Latino populations—to bridge the nutritional gap that children from low income families face during the summer.

Program Description (2000 chars)

The proposed program is designed to build on a successful summer feeding program that the Food Bank of North Alabama piloted in 2015 in Lauderdale County. That pilot program established 9 meal sites and served a total of 7,294 meals.

By using the momentum created by that pilot program, we propose to use the funds from this grant to achieve the following:

- Conduct community outreach to locate meal sites in underserved communities with large Latino populations.
- Recruit community partners and food service vendors to conduct operations.
- Train site administrators and food service vendors in the specific regulations regarding summer feeding programs.
- Inspect sites for compliance with all state and federal food safety regulations.
- Launch a target goal of 18 additional summer feeding sites.

Primary Target Population (2000 chars)

Summer feeding programs typically target elementary school-aged children. This latest initiative to expand summer feeding programs in North Alabama is designed to target communities with large Latino populations. They will not be the sole beneficiaries of the program, but our statistics indicate that Latino schoolchildren in Northwest Alabama fall into an exceptionally high risk category for food insecurity.

Area Served

Northwest Alabama

Desired Results (2000 chars)

The effects of year-round nutrition extend well beyond the classroom. Providing healthy meals to food insecure children during the summer confers numerous benefits to them, their families, and their communities. An analysis of the social impact of summer feeding programs published in 2015 by the hunger advocacy organization Share Our Strength found that consistent access to healthy food through the summer helps stem the learning loss of concepts and skills from the previous school year, while preparing children's developing

brains for the coming school year. It also mitigates the risk of disease related to reliance on cheap and easily attainable, but nutritionally deficient, processed foods from convenience stores and fast food restaurants that are often the last resort of families looking to stretch their food budgets.

If successful, our proposed program will launch 18 new summer feeding sites and serve a total of 13,500 meals during the summer of 2016—representing more than a 60% increase in the number of meals currently served in Northwest Alabama’s rural counties.

Program Sustainability (2000 chars)

If granted, the funds will enable us to plan, site, and administer an expansion program similar to our successful Lauderdale County pilot program. After the initial phase of the expansion program is over, the program partners will seek reimbursement of costs from the Alabama State Department of Human Resources via the federal Summer Food Service Program. Any ancillary costs associated with the continued operation of the sites will be shared by the principal partners.