

RURAL RESEARCH NOTE

THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit corporation that helps build homes and communities across Rural America. For nearly 50 years, HAC has supported local efforts to improve rural housing conditions.

HAC is an equal opportunity lender.



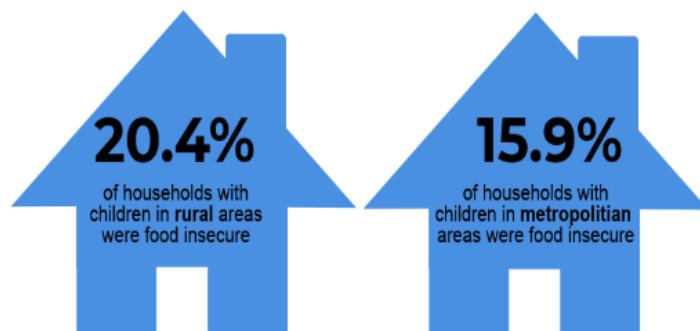
APRIL 2019

HOUSING AND HUNGER: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY

Childhood Hunger in Rural America

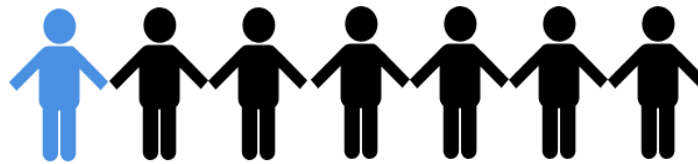
Food insecurity is not having access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is especially harmful to children. When a child is food insecure, they are more likely to experience impairments to language and motor skills, as well as have social and behavioral challenges.

In 2017, a USDA report on household food security found that 11.8 percent of U.S. households (15 million) were food insecure. Rates of food insecurity differ by geographic region and tend to be higher in rural areas. For example, in 2016, the rate of food insecurity for households with children was 20.4 percent in rural areas versus 15.9 percent in metropolitan areas.



Federal programs aim to eliminate these challenges and promote food security and health for children. These USDA programs include the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program. The programs provide free or reduced priced breakfast and lunches for students. During the summer, the federal government continues to provide low-income children with meals through the Summer Food Service Program. This program, also known as the Summer Meals Program, provides nutritious meals to rural children who might otherwise go hungry in the summer.

The scope of this program is limited. In 2017, the Food Research and Action Center published a report evaluating the current reach of the summer meals program. The national report found that for every 100 low-income students who received free and reduced-price school meals during the 2015-2016 school year, only 15 students continued to receive summer lunches. In other words, the summer program served 1 in 7 children who were eligible for subsidized meals during the school year.



**IN 2016, THE SUMMER MEALS PROGRAM ONLY REACHED
1 IN 7 CHILDREN**

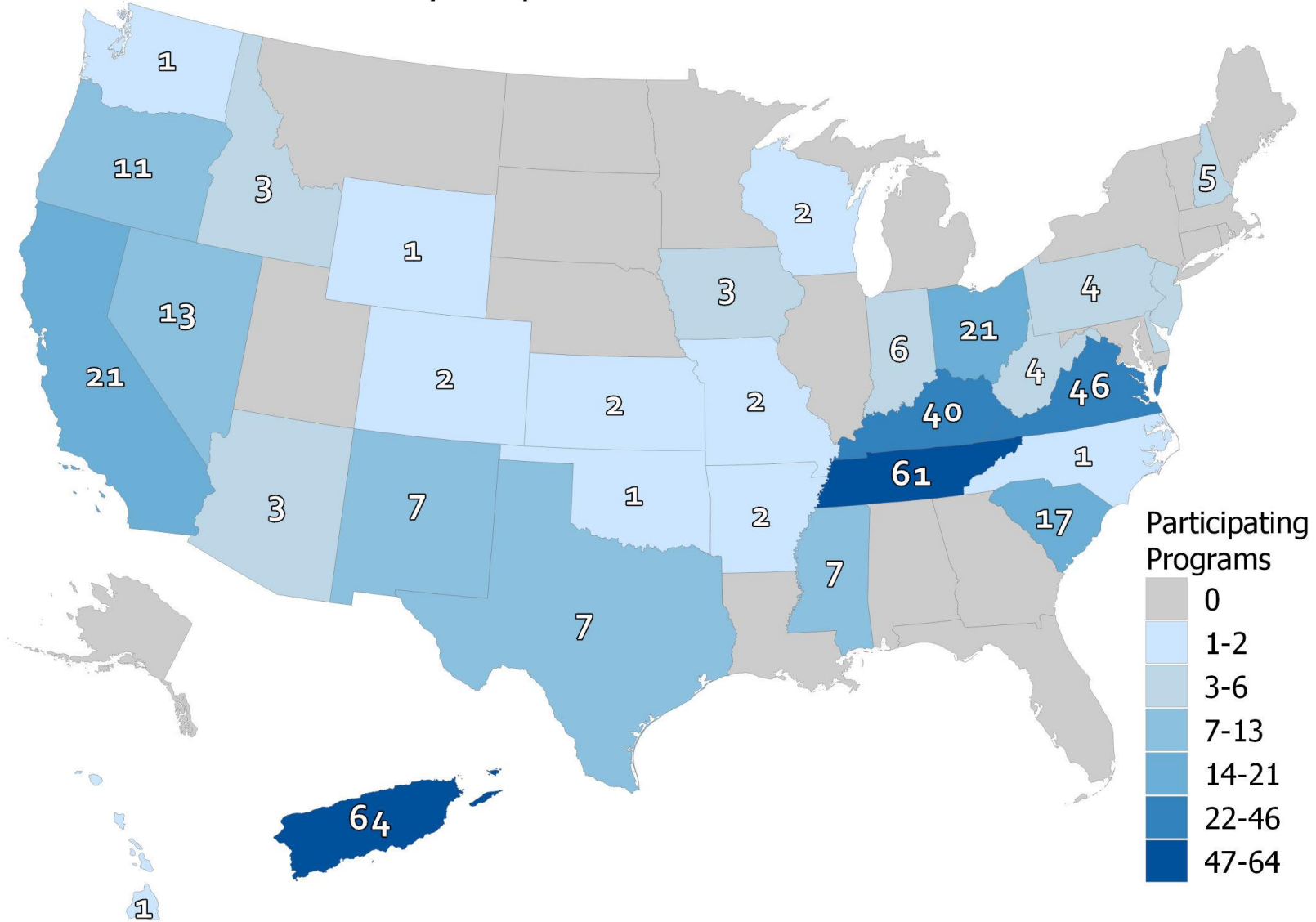
WHO RELY ON FREE AND REDUCED PRICED MEALS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

Multi-Family Housing and Summer Meals

One strategy to address this gap in services is to utilize housing facilities as host sites of the summer meals program. This strategy is an efficient way to use a home-base in rural America to provide critical services to children. When a housing facility serves as a meal site, meals are directly delivered to where children live. Rural Housing Services (RHS), an agency within USDA Rural Development, has recently gotten involved. RHS, which offers various programs to improve housing in rural areas, including offering loan guarantees for multi-family housing, has actively recruited Multi-Family Housing (MFH) properties to serve as meal sites. In 2017, RHS enrolled 384 MFH properties as meal sites. This was an all-time high. This number is 79 more properties than were able to serve in 2016 and triple the number from 2015. The top five areas with the greatest number of participating MFH properties are Puerto Rico, Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky, and California.

As RHS continues to strengthen participation in Summer Meals, they aim to boost program outreach and program tracking. This includes collaborating between state partners, Rural Development Community Economic Development leads, and employees at Food and Nutrition Services to continuously increase the number of housing properties participating. Stronger and continued collaboration between housing facilities and child nutrition programs will decrease rural childhood hunger during the summer months.

Multi-Family Properties with Summer Meal Sites



Summer is almost here!

If your community is interested in applying to be a site for the Summer Meals Program, please contact your USDA RD state agency. Application deadlines for summer 2019 are approaching.

Resources

- Find out everything you need to know about the Summer Food Service Program.
- Learn how to increase participation in summer nutrition programs.
- Watch a webinar to learn how your rural housing organizations and communities can be involved in the Summer Meals Program.



HAC

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