

Demonstration Projects to End Childhood Hunger 2016 Annual Report to Congress

I. BACKGROUND

Section 141 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010 added a new Section 23 to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. This section provided substantial, new, and mandatory funding to test innovative strategies for ending child hunger and food insecurity. Section 23 (b) authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to carryout and evaluate demonstration projects to end childhood hunger and provided \$40 million for this purpose, making the funds available from October 1, 2012 until September 30, 2017. The authorizing legislation required an independent evaluation of each demonstration project, using rigorous experimental designs and methodologies to produce scientifically valid evidence of project impacts on food security. It also required that at least one demonstration take place on a rural Indian reservation where the prevalence of diabetes is at least 15 percent.

HHFKA also directed the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report by the end of December each year to the House of Representatives Committees on Agriculture and Education and the Workforce, in addition to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The annual reports are to describe the status of each demonstration project and the results of any evaluations of the demonstration projects completed during the previous fiscal year (FY). This report describes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) progress during FY 2016 and plans for FYs 2017 and 2018.

II. FY 2016 PROGRESS

A. Overview of Demonstration Projects and Progress

USDA selected three States (Kentucky, Nevada, and Virginia) and two Indian tribal organizations (Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation) to receive cooperative agreements to operate demonstration projects. Both Indian tribal organizations are conducting projects in rural areas where the prevalence of diabetes is at least 15 percent. USDA sent award letters to grantees in February 2015 and made a public announcement in early March 2015. Below is a description of each grantee's project plans and progress during the past FY. Project plans are summarized in Table 1.

Chickasaw Nation

Chickasaw Nation Nutrition Services (CNNS) (awarded \$9,718,832) and its partner, Feed the Children, are providing eligible households with monthly home delivery of one food box per eligible child. The project is being offered to an estimated 2,100 households and 4,500 children ages 4 and older who are eligible for free school meals in their public elementary, middle, or high school or are attending a school where all children receive free school meals. It is operating for 24 months, from February 2016 through January 2018, in 12 rural counties within Chickasaw

Nation (located in Oklahoma). School districts were randomly selected to participate in the project, and all eligible households within the selected school districts are offered food boxes. Each food box contains shelf-stable foods selected by CNNS's Registered Dietitians (6 protein-rich items, 2 dairy items, 4 grain items, 4 cans of fruit, and 12 cans of vegetables), along with recipes and nutrition information. The food items are pre-assembled in five different food box packages from which participants choose each month. Households order their food box online through a website developed for the project, or by telephone with project staff. Additionally, each food box includes a \$15 cash voucher to purchase fresh and/or frozen fruits and vegetables from authorized retailers.

During FY 2016, CNNS contracted with a vendor to distribute and track the \$15 produce vouchers, hired staff, developed recipes and nutrition education handouts, and, with its partner (Feed the Children), launched the food box ordering website. In February 2016, enrolled households began ordering and receiving food boxes. Since that time, Feed the Children has continued to purchase and store food items, and pack and ship the packages. CNNS has monitored orders and shipments, and expanded the authorized retailers for the \$15 vouchers to include farmers' market vendors. To improve shipping efficiency, the grantee added an address validation system that identifies those addresses the shipping company does not recognize as valid. CNNS also identified a need to remind households to order their food box package every month and contracted with a vendor to institute blast emails and text or voice messages. Since April, the grantee has been sending automated messages to households that have not yet placed their monthly food order to remind them to do so. Staff also call households that are late in placing their orders and take their orders over the telephone. If staff cannot reach a household or a food box was undeliverable, they contact the children's schools to obtain updated household contact information. Between April and June 2016, the grantee and its partner shipped 3,300 to 3,600 food boxes each month to approximately 1,500 to 1,700 households, representing roughly 73 to 81 percent of the eligible children in enrolled households. To further improve participation, the grantee is considering simplifying the online ordering system and reaching out to nonparticipants to understand and address barriers to participation.

Kentucky

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (awarded \$3,566,810) will provide an additional benefit on Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards to enhance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for eligible households. This additional benefit is designed to target rural households with high transportation costs, including those residing far from full-service grocery stores. The benefit will be determined through a fixed transportation deduction from income, based on each demonstration county's average distance to a grocery store and an additional earned-income deduction equal to 10 percent of earned income. Kentucky estimates that the average additional benefit will be approximately \$45 to \$55 per eligible household that qualifies for both deductions. In December 2016, approximately 2,800 households will be randomly selected to receive the additional benefit from among those SNAP households in designated counties that have at least one child born after March 31, 1999 and positive net income. It will operate for 15 months in 17 rural counties in eastern Kentucky. (These counties include the Kentucky Highlands Promise Zone,

a Federal designation that provides the local community with Federal support to implement its economic and community development goals.)

During FY 2016, Kentucky contracted with a new EBT vendor that could execute the systems adjustments necessary to disperse the additional benefits. The new vendor came on line in summer 2016, which delayed the timing of the intervention by several months. Kentucky also upgraded its SNAP eligibility system and subsequently modified it to administer the additional benefits. Project staff trained all eligibility supervisors statewide, who in turn trained eligibility workers so they would be aware of the demonstration project and the criteria for receiving the additional EBT benefits. Eligibility workers will not need to change their work processes to support the project. Additional EBT benefits will be calculated and distributed to eligible households from January 1, 2017 through March 31, 2018.

Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Division of Health (NDOH) (awarded \$2,410,113) will implement the Food Access Navigation Project for 12 or more months. The project will serve households with children under age 18 who reside in three rural NDOH health districts (regions) located in New Mexico and Arizona (the Fort Defiance, Northern, and Eastern Agencies). To carry out this project, food access navigators (FANs) are first assessing assets and gaps in the food access infrastructure (such as nutrition programs, local farms, and resources for food storage and transportation) to determine which communities or areas need intervention services and what those services should encompass. FANs will then work with school boards and administrators, leaders at chapter houses, and community members to address existing barriers and increase the availability of and enrollment in nutrition assistance programs. The grantee's initial plans also call for translating lessons from the three regions into policies that strengthen and support community-wide assets and access to nutrition assistance programs.

During FY 2016, the grantee procured office space; hired a project director, supervisors, and FANs; and updated its implementation plan and timeline. Its partner, New Mexico Appleseed, trained FANs on Federal nutrition programs and procedures for conducting the planned intervention; FANs subsequently began food access assessments across the three regions. FAN recruitment and retention has been a challenge, in part because some applicants and newly hired staff prefer a permanent position with benefits. The project has continued to recruit staff through radio and newspaper announcements, and has provided rental cars for conducting the assessments across the demonstration area.

Nevada

Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (awarded \$3,143,079) is implementing a demonstration with the Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services and its partners. One treatment group of approximately 2,500 eligible children in 1,900 SNAP households was randomly selected to receive an additional \$40 per month per eligible child to enhance their household SNAP benefits; a second treatment group of the same size was randomly selected to receive the same additional grant benefits, plus nutrition education and case management to

help them access nutrition assistance programs. Case management is primarily being delivered by telephone, and nutrition education generally consists of in-person nutrition classes; both services are available in English or Spanish. The project is serving SNAP-eligible households with children under age 5 and household incomes below 75 percent of the Federal poverty level. It is operating in 12 neighboring zip codes in Las Vegas (Clark County) over 12 months.

During FY 2016, Nevada contracted with a new EBT vendor to distribute SNAP benefits to all households statewide and grant benefits to eligible treatment group households. The grantee also established a system for loading grant benefits onto eligible households' existing EBT cards. Contracting with a new EBT vendor delayed the project's start date by several months but also facilitated the issuance of grant benefits because the new vendor could add the grant benefits onto participants' existing EBT cards. Nevada has been disseminating the monthly grant benefits to treatment group households since June 2016. During the past FY, Nevada also hired staff to oversee case management and nutrition education for households in the second treatment group, developed plans and materials for case management and nutrition education, arranged for and trained volunteer case managers, and developed a data system for tracking the delivery of case management and nutrition education. Grantee staff selected three topics for nutrition education classes: smart grocery shopping, healthy cooking, and picky eaters. Case management began in June 2016, and nutrition education classes began in September 2016. Since launching case management, Nevada has been strategizing ways to overcome the challenge of reaching households that do not answer telephones or whose telephone numbers are out of service.

Virginia

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) (awarded \$8,803,902) is providing (1) three meals a day during the school day and packages of food for weekends and school breaks to all children in participating treatment schools, (2) \$60 monthly EBT benefits during the summer for each child eligible for free/reduced-price school meals, and (3) nutrition education for parents and guardians. The project is serving an estimated 7,700 children living in 3,700 households who attend the participating treatment schools. It is operating for 24 months in 10 randomly selected schools in rural southwest Virginia and 9 randomly selected schools in Richmond City (one is a high school and the others are middle or elementary schools). In addition to the nine participating school divisions, nine partners support the project: the Virginia Departments of Health and Social Services, the Office of the Governor, two regional food banks, a nutrition education organization, two advocacy organizations, and a food industry association.

During FY 2016, VDOE hired project staff, established regular communication with school divisions and partners, and began delivering the demonstration in treatment schools. VDOE and its partners finalized implementation plans, a timeline, school-level budgets and operational plans, the nutrition education curriculum (*Eat Smart, Be Active*, which is used in SNAP-ED programs), and EBT data tracking systems. Eligible households received the \$60 EBT benefits per eligible child in June, July, and August. Treatment schools began schoolwide distribution of school meals and food packages in August and September. Finalizing school-

level operational plans, which align with each school's resources and needs, was a challenge to overcome during the planning period. For example, schools had to consider the consequences for class and bus schedules when determining whether to serve supper meals before or after the end of the school day, or as supper to go. Identifying food storage areas that met food safety and security requirements also required creative solutions for schools with little available storage space. To overcome this challenge, food banks visited each school to discuss delivery and storage options. The grantee raised awareness of the project through marketing materials and launch events.

Table 1. Summary of demonstration projects

Grantee	Location	Services	Target population	Duration	Start month
Chickasaw Nation	12 rural counties in OK	Monthly home-delivered food boxes containing shelf-stable, nutritious foods and a \$15 voucher for fresh fruits and vegetables	Children eligible for free school meals or attending a school where all children receive free school meals	24 months	February 2016
Kentucky	17 rural counties in eastern KY	Approximately \$45 to \$55 average increase in SNAP benefits, calculated as a fixed income deduction based on the county's average distance to the grocery store plus a 10 percent earned income deduction	SNAP households residing far from grocery stores, with children under age 16 and positive net and/or earned income	15 months	January 2017
Navajo Nation	3 rural regions in NM and AZ	Collaboration with schools and communities to increase the availability of and enrollment in nutrition assistance programs based on asset and gap assessments	Children under age 18	12 or more months	September 2016: asset/gap assessments; summer/fall 2017: new resources available
Nevada	12 zip codes in Las Vegas	\$40 per month EBT benefits per eligible child (treatment group 1), or \$40 EBT benefits plus case management and nutrition education (treatment group 2)	SNAP-eligible children under age 5 whose household incomes are below 75 percent of the Federal poverty level	12 months	June 2016
Virginia	10 rural southwest schools and 9 Richmond City schools	(1) 3 meals during the school day and food packages for weekends and school breaks, (2) \$60 monthly summer EBT benefits per eligible child (2016 only), and (3) nutrition education for parents/guardians	All children are offered school meals and food packages for weekends and school breaks; those eligible for free/reduced-price school meals are also offered summer EBT benefits in 2016	24 months	June 2016

B. Overview of Evaluation and Progress

1. Evaluation overview

USDA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, along with subcontractor Gabor Associates, to conduct the independent evaluation. The comprehensive evaluation of the demonstration projects includes (1) providing evaluation technical assistance to grantees and (2) conducting an implementation study, a cost study, and an impact study. The evaluation team is evaluating each demonstration project individually using the most rigorous design methodology appropriate for the demonstration project.

An impact study is underway for all demonstration projects, with one exception (Navajo Nation). The impact studies are using a random assignment study design to estimate each project's impact on food security and other outcomes based on household surveys. The main outcome of interest is food insecurity among children over the past 30 days. Where applicable, the evaluation is documenting participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs as a secondary outcome. The evaluation of Chickasaw Nation's project also focuses on children's food consumption and diet quality because this project is designed to improve household access to healthy food. The four projects with an impact study are participating in one household survey at baseline (that is, just before their demonstration project is implemented) and one at followup (approximately 12 months after the baseline survey). Chickasaw Nation, which is implementing its project for 24 months, will participate in a second followup survey. Surveys are administered to households in the treatment groups that receive project benefits and control groups of households not selected for benefits. As of the close of FY 2016, the evaluation team had administered baseline surveys to households in the three projects that began implementation in FY 2016 (Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia). (See Section B.2 for more information on completed evaluation activities.)

The evaluation design for Navajo Nation is best suited to a case study design rather than an impact study because the demonstration uses community outreach and capacity building to increase participation in nutrition assistance programs. The evaluation is descriptive in nature, characterizing household food insecurity in up to three communities, and includes an indepth implementation study (described below) along with a cost study. After implementation begins, a sample of households in the three demonstration communities selected for the case studies will participate in a post-implementation survey. The evaluation will not survey comparison households in nonparticipating communities. The post-implementation survey instrument used for Navajo Nation households will be the same as the followup survey instrument used for the other grantees; similarly, the main descriptive outcome will be food insecurity among children over the past 30 days.

For all five project evaluations, the implementation study describes each demonstration project's plans and operations based on information collected during two or three rounds of site visits, indepth interviews with participants, data on service provision and participation, and written project documentation. The first site visit occurs toward the end of the planning stage,

aimed at capturing project plans and the planning process. The second visit occurs during the implementation stage, aimed at capturing operational processes, successes, and challenges. In FY 2016, the evaluation team conducted first round (planning period) site visits to Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia, and will complete the remaining first round site visits in early FY 2017. (See Section B.2 for more information on evaluation progress.) Chickasaw Nation will receive an additional site visit during its 24-month implementation period. Site visits include interviews with grantee staff and their partners, and focus groups with project participants. In depth, one-on-one interviews with participants will focus on how families meet their food security needs. The implementation study will also collect project-specific data to describe service provision and participation. The cost study will describe each project's total cost, cost per household, and cost experiences based on information from cost forms that grantees systematically complete.

2. FY 2016 evaluation progress

In FY 2016, the evaluation team completed many of the steps for planning and executing data collection. Because the timing of data collection activities is based on each grantee's timeline for implementation, completion of data collection activities varied by grantee.

- Obtained annual reauthorization of study approval from the New England Internal Review Board (IRB) and IRBs in Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation, including approval for the projects' recruitment materials, consent forms, and data collection plans. IRB approval is required for research involving human subjects to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with Federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines.
- Established memoranda of understanding with grantees to collect project-specific data. Agreements with Chickasaw Nation and Kentucky were finalized in FY 2015; those with Nevada and Virginia were finalized in FY 2016; and the agreement with Navajo Nation is in progress.
- Prepared for the administration of the baseline household survey by obtaining household contact information from grantees, preparing survey information systems, and training survey telephone interviewers.
- Completed baseline survey data collection in Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia. Approximately 2,500 to 3,000 households in each demonstration project completed the survey. The administration of the baseline survey in Kentucky began in August 2016 and will continue through November 2016.
- Randomly assigned households (Nevada) and schools (Chickasaw Nation, Virginia) to treatment or control groups following the baseline survey.
- Conducted the first round of site visits to Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia to gather information for the implementation study. The evaluation team began planning for the first-round site visits to Kentucky and Navajo Nation.
- Prepared for the second round of site visits, which will gather information about project operations and include focus groups with project participants.
- Collected data on startup and operational costs, participation in federal nutrition programs (where applicable), and test data on service provision (where applicable, to check the quality of the service provision data collection systems).

A key component of this HHFKA-funded initiative is the provision of evaluation technical assistance to grantees and data collection monitoring to ensure that each demonstration can be evaluated as rigorously as possible. Technical assistance and data collection monitoring occurred via regular, individual telephone calls with grantees and ongoing email communications. Major achievements during FY 2016 included supporting grantees as they notified participants about the project and evaluation; maintaining separation between treatment and control groups, which is necessary for the integrity of random assignment; collaborating with grantees to prepare administrative data systems to collect service receipt and outcome data specific to each project's design, and providing instruction and support on cost data collection.

III. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR FYs 2017 AND 2018

A. Anticipated Timeline for Project Implementation

During FY 2017, two grantees (Kentucky and Navajo Nation) will launch their demonstration projects. For demonstration projects that began in FY 2016 (Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia), grantees will continue to monitor and refine their plans and operations. Project implementation will continue into FY 2018 for all grantees except Nevada. The anticipated timelines are as follows:

- **Chickasaw Nation:** Households will continue receiving food boxes through January 2018. Project staff will continue to place reminder text messages and telephone calls, package and ship orders, and monitor orders and client feedback.
- **Kentucky:** The grantee will begin disbursing additional SNAP benefits in January 2017 and continue for 15 months through March 2018. Leading up to the project launch, the grantee will continue to prepare the SNAP and EBT data systems that will be used to distribute benefits, and will notify households of their treatment or control group status. Following the launch, the grantee will routinely transmit funds to the EBT vendor and monitor EBT transactions.
- **Navajo Nation:** In early FY 2017, the grantee will complete assessments of assets and gaps in the food access infrastructure in three regions, and will select areas in which to focus intervention efforts. Staff will work with school and community officials to increase the availability of and access to nutrition assistance programs based on the results of the assessments.
- **Nevada:** The grantee will continue to disburse and monitor additional EBT benefits through May 2017. The grantee will continue to offer and refine case management and nutrition education throughout the demonstration period.
- **Virginia:** The grantee will distribute school meals during school years 2016–2017 and 2017–2018, and food packages in school year 2016–2017 and fall 2017. It will offer nutrition education throughout the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years to the parents or caregivers of students in schools that receive project benefits. (The evaluation of the Virginia project will cover school year 2016–2017 but not school year 2017–2018.)

B. Anticipated Evaluation Activities, FY 2017

In FY 2017, the evaluation team will continue all data collection activities and begin most of the evaluation analysis and reporting. The team will finish administering all baseline household surveys and most of the followup household surveys, and will conduct site visits to hear from grantees, their partners, and participants about their experiences with the demonstration projects. The team will analyze the impact findings and incorporate them into grantee-specific evaluation reports after the completion of a grantee's followup survey. In FY 2017, the evaluation team will do the following:

- Complete the administration of the baseline household survey in Kentucky and randomly assign households to the treatment or control group.
- Administer the followup household survey in Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia. The survey will be administered approximately 12 months after the baseline survey was administered and before the intervention ends.
- Complete the planning period (first round) site visits for the implementation study in Kentucky and Navajo Nation, and conduct the operational period (second round) site visits in Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia. Chickasaw Nation will receive a second operational period site visit because of the grantee's lengthier demonstration period.
- Conduct indepth interviews with a subset of participants who received benefits in each project and participated in a survey. These interviews will occur after the followup survey (or post-implementation survey in Navajo Nation) and before the intervention concludes, and will take place in Chickasaw Nation, Nevada, and Virginia during FY 2017.
- Continue collecting project-specific data on costs, services provided, and participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs.
- Monitor and assist grantees in tracking and submitting data on demonstration project services and costs, Federal nutrition assistance programs, and household contact information for the surveys.
- Analyze all sources of data.
- Write evaluation reports. These reports will encompass descriptive findings and impact results from the baseline and followup surveys, site visits, indepth participant interviews, cost data, and project-specific administrative data. They will be available in grantee-specific evaluation reports beginning in FY 2017.

C. Anticipated Evaluation Activities, FY 2018

Most of the evaluation work will be completed in FY 2018; the timing will depend on when grantees submit project-specific data on services, participation, and costs to the independent evaluator. Activities in FY 2018 will include the conclusion of the remaining followup and post-implementation household surveys, indepth interviews with participants, site visits, and collection of cost and other project-specific data. The evaluation team will accomplish the following:

- Administer the followup household survey in Kentucky and the post-implementation survey in Navajo Nation.
- Conduct indepth interviews with a subset of participants in Kentucky and Navajo Nation who received project benefits and completed the surveys.
- Conduct the operational period (second round) site visits in Kentucky and Navajo Nation.
- Monitor and assist grantees in collecting remaining data on costs, services provided, and participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs.
- Analyze all sources of data.
- Write an integrated evaluation report and a summary report for nontechnical audiences.
- Present findings in a briefing for USDA policy and research staff.
- Prepare restricted use and public use data files with documentation to support future data analysis.