

Demonstration Projects to End Childhood Hunger 2018 Annual Report to Congress

I. BACKGROUND

Section 141 of the 2010 Child Nutrition reauthorization 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 carry out 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 was at least 15 percent.

The 2010 Child Nutrition reauthorization also directed the Secretary of Agriculture to submit a report by the end of December each year to the U.S. 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 available results of any evaluations of the demonstration projects completed during the previous fiscal year (FY). This final annual report describes the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) progress during FY 2018 and the first 2 months of FY 2019. Evaluation activities concluded in November 2018. Individual evaluation reports on the demonstration projects in Chickasaw Nation, Kentucky, Nevada, and Virginia, which will include results of the evaluation, are being finalized.

II. FY 2018 PROGRESS

A. Overview of Demonstration Projects and Progress

USDA selected three states (Kentucky, Nevada, and Virginia) and two Indian tribes (Chickasaw Nation and Navajo Nation) in February 2015 to receive cooperative agreements to operate demonstration projects. Both Indian tribes are conducting projects in rural areas where the prevalence of diabetes was at least 15 percent. Below is a description of each grantee's projects and progress during the past FY. Project elements are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of demonstration projects

Grantee	Location	Benefits and services	Target population	Timeframe and duration ^a
Chickasaw Nation	40 school districts (20 treatment, 20 control) in 12 rural counties in Oklahoma	Monthly home-delivered food boxes containing shelf-stable, nutritious foods and a \$15 voucher for fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables per eligible child	Children eligible for free school meals or attending a school where all children receive free school meals	February 2016 – February 2018 25 months No-cost extension granted through March 2019
Kentucky	17 rural counties in eastern Kentucky	A monthly increase in SNAP benefits, ^b calculated as a fixed income deduction based on the county's average distance to the grocery store plus a 10 percent earned income deduction, totaling approximately \$45 to \$55 per month for households eligible for both deductions, or \$9 to \$20 per month for households without earned income	SNAP households with children under age 18 and positive net income	January 2017 – March 2018 15 months No-cost extension granted through December 2019
Navajo Nation	3 rural regions in New Mexico and Arizona	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	September 2016 – June 2018 22 months No-cost extension granted through June 2019
Nevada	12 zip codes in Las Vegas	\$40 per month extra SNAP benefits ^b per eligible child (treatment group 1), or \$40 extra SNAP benefits plus case management and nutrition education (treatment group 2)	Households participating in SNAP with incomes below 75 percent of the Federal poverty level and at least one child under age 5	June 2016 – May 2017 12 months No-cost extension for case management and nutrition education granted through September 2019
Virginia	38 schools in rural southwest school districts (10 treatment and 10 control) and Richmond City school district (9 treatment, 9 control) ^c	(1) 3 meals during the school day, (2) food backpacks for weekends and school breaks, (3) monthly summer EBT benefits for each eligible child of \$60 in summer 2016 and \$30 in summer 2017, and (4) nutrition education for parents and guardians	All children in treatment schools were offered three school meals at school and food backpacks for weekends and school breaks; those eligible for free or reduced-price school meals were also offered summer EBT benefits	June 2016 – June 2018 24 months ^d No-cost extension for 3 free meals during the school day and nutrition education granted through June 2019

^a The evaluation covered the demonstration phase of each project and did not include the no-cost extension phase.

^b Kentucky and Nevada funded and tracked the demonstration grant benefits separately from regular SNAP benefits. Because project participants used the grant benefits as they would their regular SNAP benefits, however, they are referred to in this report as extra SNAP benefits for simplicity.

^c Forty schools were randomized, but school consolidations and drop-outs resulted in 38 schools in the evaluation.

^d The evaluation covered June 2016 through June 2017, including the first of 2 school years.

Chickasaw Nation

Chickasaw Nation Nutrition Services (CNNS) (awarded \$9,718,832) and its partner, Feed the Children, provided eligible households with monthly home delivery of one food box per eligible child. The project benefits were offered to children ages 4 and older who were eligible for free school meals in their public elementary, middle, or high school or attended a school where all children received free school meals. It operated in 40 school districts located in 12 rural counties within Chickasaw Nation (located in Oklahoma). Twenty school districts were randomly selected to participate in the treatment group, and all eligible households within the selected school districts were given an opportunity to enroll in the project. An estimated 2,100 households and 4,500 children from the treatment schools enrolled to receive food boxes. Each food box contained 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); a \$15 cash voucher to purchase fresh and/or frozen fruits and vegetables from authorized retailers; and recipes and nutrition information. The food items were pre-assembled in five different food box packages that participants could choose from each month. Households ordered their food box online through a Website developed for the project, or by telephone with project staff. The project operated for 25 months, from February 2016 through February 2018. CNNS received a no-cost extension to offer the project benefits to eligible households in the control schools and eligible Chickasaw Nation households from April 2018 through March 2019.

During FY 2018, CNNS delivered food boxes to enrolled households. Feed the Children continued to purchase and store food items, pack and ship the packages. CNNS continued to monitor orders and shipments. CNNS also continued to remind households to order their monthly food boxes. Because households had to proactively order food boxes each month, the reminders were an important way for CNNS to maintain participation in the project. Starting April 2016, CNNS sent automated reminder text messages or phone calls each month and staff called or emailed households that had not placed orders after the second automated reminder. Changes in household contact information posed a challenge to these outreach efforts. To help overcome this challenge, staff contacted the children's schools to obtain updated contact information; this helped to a degree, but schools did not always have more recent information. In FY 2018, CNNS also reduced the number of tomato-based products in all five food boxes based on participant feedback, and surveyed participants to gain additional feedback on their satisfaction with the project benefits.

Between October 2017 and February 2018, the grantee and its partner shipped 1,922 to 3,277 food boxes in a given month to eligible households, plus an additional 628 boxes in March for late-February or replacement orders.

Kentucky

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (awarded \$3,566,810) provided an extra benefit on Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards to enhance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for eligible households. Although demonstration benefits were funded and tracked separately from regular SNAP benefits, because project participants used the grant benefits as they would their regular SNAP benefits, they are referred to in this report as extra SNAP benefits for simplicity. Approximately 2,800 households from 17 rural counties in eastern Kentucky were randomly selected to receive the extra SNAP benefit from among those SNAP households in the designated counties that had at least one child born after March 31, 2000 and positive net income. The extra SNAP benefit was designed to target rural households with high transportation costs, including those residing approximately 4 to 10 miles from full-service grocery stores, on average. The extra SNAP benefits that treatment households were eligible to receive came from two new income deductions applied to the usual SNAP benefit formula: (1) a fixed deduction for transportation costs associated with six round trips to the grocery store, calculated for each county; and (2) an earnings deduction equal to 10 percent of earned income, applicable to households with at least one employed household member. Per the SNAP benefit formula, eligible households received \$0.30 more in SNAP benefits for every extra dollar deducted from their net income until the maximum SNAP benefit was reached. Kentucky estimated that the average extra SNAP benefit would be approximately \$45 to \$55 per eligible household that qualified for both deductions. Eligible households that did not qualify for the earned income deduction would receive \$9 to \$20 in extra SNAP benefits depending on their county of residence. It operated for 15 months, from January 2017 through March 2018.

During FY 2018, Kentucky successfully disbursed extra SNAP benefits to treatment group households and monitored EBT transactions through the project's completion. This process required that the state's SNAP eligibility system incorporate the two new deductions as applicable for participating households. By building the eligibility and extra SNAP benefit calculations into the state eligibility system, monthly allotments were automated and straightforward. Consequently, there were no operational challenges or reported disruptions during FY 2018. Kentucky received a no-cost extension to continue offering the project benefits to eligible households through December 2019.

Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Division of Health (NDOH) (awarded \$2,410,113) operated the Food Access Navigation Project. The project served households with children under age 18 who resided in three rural NDOH health districts (regions) located in New Mexico and Arizona (the Fort Defiance, Shiprock, and Crownpoint Agencies). To carry out this project, food access navigators (FANs) first assessed 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 needed intervention services and what those services should encompass. Through this process, they determined the project's main goal would be to reduce childhood food insecurity by increasing Federal child nutrition programming and expanding access to healthy meals for children. FANs then began working with school boards and administrators, leaders at chapter houses, and community members to implement the project. The initial

assessments and project implementation were conducted during 22 months, from September 2016 through June 2018. Navajo Nation received a no-cost extension to continue the project through June 2019.

During FY 2018, FANs continued community outreach, asset mapping, and technical assistance in the three targeted agencies. Within each chapter, FANs identified Federal child nutrition programs with promise for expansion or improvement. Examples of nutrition programs with promise for expansion include the Summer Food Service Program, At-risk After School Meals, and the School Breakfast Program's Breakfast After the Bell option. FANs also worked to strengthen ties between schools and organizations such as those sponsoring community gardens and food backpack programs for children. Finally, FANs received continuing education on community engaged project development and delivery, with a focus on expanding Federal nutrition assistance programs. In FY 2018, the grantee continued to face several challenges to project implementation that occurred in previous FYs, including recruiting and retaining FANs, identifying only a limited number of organizations with the readiness to become certified as child nutrition sponsors or sites, and encountering skepticism among some tribal members of the ability of the Federal nutrition assistance programs to effectively address the food security and nutrition needs of the tribe's children.

Despite these challenges, Navajo Nation made progress towards establishing summer feeding sites and Breakfast after the Bell programs at schools in participating chapters.

Nevada

The Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (awarded \$3,143,079) implemented a demonstration with the Nevada Division of Welfare and Supportive Services and its partners. The project served SNAP-eligible households with children under age 5 and household incomes below 75 percent of the Federal poverty level. One treatment group of approximately 2,500 eligible children in 1,900 SNAP households was randomly selected to receive an extra \$40 per month per eligible child on their EBT cards to enhance their household SNAP benefits. A second treatment group of the same size was randomly selected to receive the same extra SNAP benefits, plus nutrition education and case management to help them access nutrition and other assistance programs. (As with Kentucky, Nevada's project benefits are referred to as extra SNAP benefits for simplicity because, to participants, they functioned as SNAP benefits). Project staff primarily provided case management by telephone and nutrition education through in-person nutrition classes. Both services were available in English or Spanish. The project operated in 12 neighboring zip codes in Clark County (Las Vegas) during 12 months from June 2016 through May 2017.

There are no updates to report for FY 2018 because demonstration project activities concluded in FY 2017. A summary of project activities from earlier FYs is as follows: the grantee and its partners successfully delivered the extra \$40 per child monthly SNAP benefits for the full project year without disruption. They attempted to call nearly all eligible households assigned to the second treatment group to offer information on and application assistance for nutrition or other assistance programs (such as WIC or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) and invite them to attend a nutrition class. Project staff held a total of 29 nutrition education classes. Difficulty reaching clients for case management and nutrition education was a key challenge

and resulted in low participation for those services. The grantee received a no-cost extension to continue providing case management and nutrition education through September 2019.

Virginia

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) (awarded \$8,803,902) provided: (1) three no-cost meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and supper) during the school day and packages of food (food backpacks) 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 served an estimated 7,700 children living in 3,700 households who attended the participating treatment schools. It operated in 10 randomly selected treatment schools in rural southwest Virginia and 9 randomly selected treatment schools in Richmond City (totaling 14 elementary, 4 middle, and 1 high school), plus 19 control schools. In addition to nine participating school divisions, 11 partners supported the project: the Virginia Departments of Health and Social Services, the Office of the Governor, the EBT vendor, two regional food banks, a grocery store chain, the Virginia Cooperative Extension Family Nutrition Program (which provided nutrition education), two advocacy organizations, and a food industry association. The demonstration project operated for 24 months—2 school years and 2 summers—and concluded at the end of school year 2017–2018; the evaluation covered the first 12 months, including school year 2016–2017.

During FY 2018, schools continued to offer all treatment school students free breakfast, lunch, and supper during school hours and food backpacks for weekends and school breaks. Partners continued to meet bi-monthly with the VDOE project team for information and technical assistance. Schools reliably administered the benefits and made no major modifications to the supper and backpack programs in FY 2018. Successfully operating the supper and backpack programs was a particular achievement for the grantee and its partners. It required overcoming complicated logistics and instituting course corrections during the first school year (FY 2017) around feeding children at the end of the school day (such as maintaining foodservice staff and reducing instruction time), and/or regularly monitoring usage and developing strategies to prevent food waste (such as reducing the number of food backpacks to match the number of students regularly taking one home, and re-serving or donating certain leftovers). The grantee received a no-cost extension to continue providing three free meals per day and nutrition education through June 2019.

B. Overview of Evaluation and Progress

1. Evaluation overview

USDA contracted with Mathematica Policy Research, along with subcontractor Gabor Associates, to conduct the independent evaluations. The comprehensive evaluations of the demonstration projects included: (1) providing evaluation technical assistance to grantees and (2) conducting an impact study, a process study, and a cost study. The evaluation team evaluated the demonstration projects individually using a random assignment methodology appropriate to the project. In early 2017, the Navajo Nation demonstration focused its efforts on capacity building and community outreach. Although important, this focus made it difficult to conduct a

rigorous evaluation because there was no control group. Therefore, the evaluation covered four of the five demonstration projects.

An impact study was conducted for the four demonstration projects in the evaluation. The impact studies used a random assignment research design to estimate each project's impact on children's food security and other outcomes based on household surveys. The evaluation's main outcome was food insecurity among children measured during the past 30 days. A child was considered to be living in a food-insecure household if the household faced food access limitations due to not having enough income or other resources for food. The evaluation documented food security among adults and the household as a whole, food spending, and, where applicable, participation in nutrition assistance programs as secondary outcomes. The evaluation of Chickasaw Nation's project also focused on children's food consumption and diet quality because this project was designed to improve household access to healthy food.

Within the four projects with an impact study, the contractor fielded one household survey at baseline (that is, just before their demonstration project was implemented) and one follow-up survey in 2017 (approximately 12 months after the baseline survey). Chickasaw Nation, which implemented its project for 25 months, fielded a second follow-up survey in fall 2017. Surveys were administered to a sample of the treatment and control group households; these households comprised the evaluation sample.

The process study described each demonstration project's plans and operations based on information collected during two or three rounds of site visits, data on service provision and participation in the project, and written project documentation. The first site visit occurred toward the end of the planning stage, with the goal of capturing project plans and the planning process. The second visit occurred during the implementation stage, with the goal of capturing operational processes, successes, and challenges. All site visits included interviews with grantee staff and their partners, and the second (and third) round of site visits additionally included focus groups with project participants. In FY 2018, Chickasaw Nation was visited a third time due to its lengthier demonstration period.

The evaluation also collected project-specific data to describe service provision and participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs (where applicable). The cost study described each project's total cost, cost per household, and cost experiences based on information from cost forms that grantees systematically completed.

2. FY 2018 evaluation progress

a. Data collection activities

Most of the data collection activities were completed in past FYs, including all baseline household surveys, random assignments, and most of the follow-up surveys and site visits. The remaining data were collected in FY 2018. Because the timing of data collection activities was based on each grantee's timeline for project implementation, completion of data collection activities varied by grantee. The major FY 2018 data collection activities were:

- Obtained annual renewal of study approval from the New England Internal Review Board (IRB) and the IRB in Chickasaw Nation. IRB approval is required for research involving human subjects to ensure that it is conducted in accordance with Federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines.
- Completed the administration of the follow-up household survey in Kentucky (November 2017) and the second follow-up survey in Chickasaw Nation (November 2017). In total, approximately 1,600 and 2,800 respondents completed the surveys in Kentucky and Chickasaw Nation, respectively.
- Conducted the operational period site visit in Kentucky (October 2017) and the second operational period visit in Chickasaw Nation (October 2017).
- Assisted grantees in collecting remaining data on implementation costs, project services provided, and administrative data on participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs. Technical assistance, a key evaluation activity, involved instruction, support, and collaboration with grantees to prepare administrative data systems and accurately track project-specific cost and service use data.

b. Analysis and reporting activities

Analysis and reporting began in FY 2017 and concluded in November 2018. The major analysis and reporting activities undertaken to close-out the evaluation during FY 2018 and into November 2018 were as follows:

- Analyzed follow-up survey data from all four projects.
- Analyzed site visit data following each site visit. Reviewed grantee documents collected as part of site visits. Findings from the visits and documentation were described in site visit reports.
- Analyzed data on costs, services provided, and participation in Federal nutrition assistance programs. Requested additional data or clarification from grantees as necessary.
- Wrote evaluation reports for the four grantees included in the evaluation. These reports included descriptive findings and impact results from available data sources and covered the impact, process, and cost studies. Separate evaluation reports were written for each grantee's project, and each report underwent two rounds of review and revision. Reports were prepared after each project's demonstration period concluded.
- Prepared restricted use and public use data files with documentation to support future data analysis and research on food security.
- Presented findings in a briefing for USDA policy and research staff.

Baseline findings were analyzed in FY 2017 and reported in an interim evaluation report that was available to the public in FY 2018. The interim report analyzed baseline data from surveys and site visits, and highlighted children's food insecurity rates, household poverty levels, and other characteristics of treatment and control households before the interventions started. The final interim evaluation report is available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/evaluation-demonstration-projects-end-childhood-hunger-edech-final-interim-evaluation-report>.