

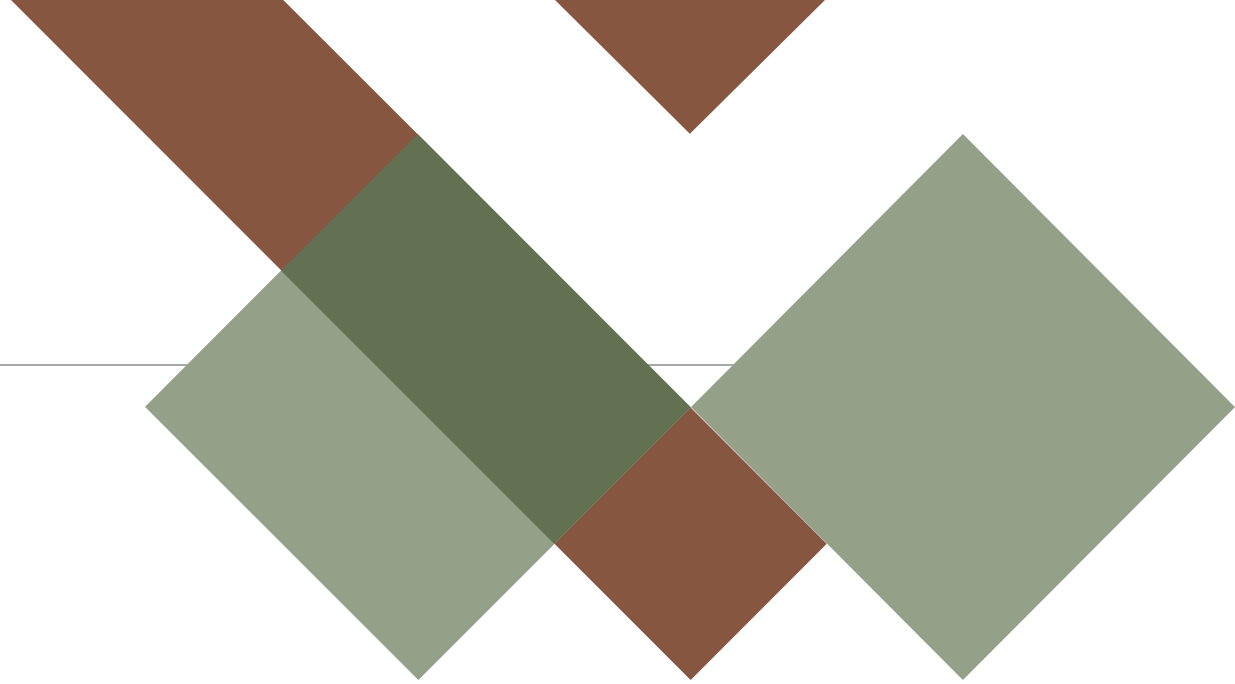


National School Lunch Program



NSLP

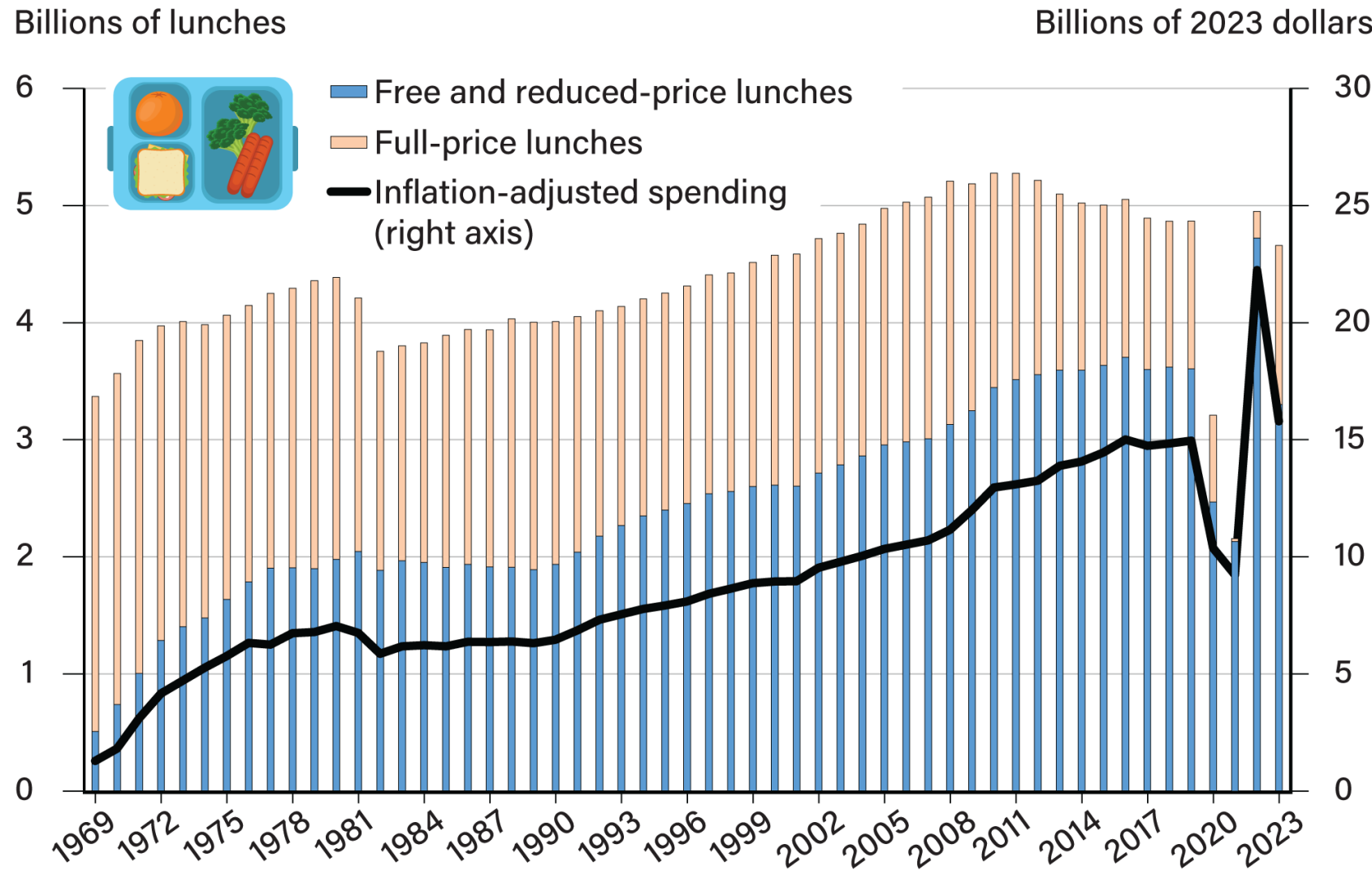
- History
- Purpose
- Nutrient standards
- Eligibility
- Why it works
- Limitations
- Solutions



History

- National School Lunch Act (1946) signed by President Harry S. Truman
 - Created to provide low-cost/free school lunches to students
- Child Nutrition Act (1966) - qualification guidelines based on federal poverty levels
 - Summer Food Service Program (1968)
- Healthy Meals for Americans Act (1994)
 - Special Milk Program (1954): pilot breakfast program
 - School Breakfast Program (1966)

NSLP meals served and program spending (1969-2023)



Note: Spending adjusted for inflation to 2023 dollars using the Personal Consumption Expenditures price index. Spending includes Federal cash payments for lunches and snacks served through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and excludes commodities, bonus commodities, cash-in-lieu of commodities, and administrative costs. The decline in total meals and increase in the share served for free or at reduced price beginning in fiscal year 2020 is attributable to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the Federal response. Meals served in fiscal years 2021 and 2022 include meals served through the National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option. All numbers are subject to revision.

Purpose

The NSLP was established to provide nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children in schools.

- Federally assisted meal program
- Public and nonprofit private schools
- Alleviate hunger and food insecurity
- Improve children's food habits

The NSLP is more than just feeding children.

- Social + emotional support
- Support learning process
- Ease financial burdens on families
- Reduce economic disparities

Nutrient Standards

School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children (1994) set nutrition standards for school meals, requiring them to comply with the DGA.

National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern

USDA Food and Nutrition Service


Amount of Food ¹ per Week (minimum per day)			
Meal Components	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Fruits (cups) ²	2 1/2 (1/2)	2 1/2 (1/2)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) ²	3 3/4 (3/4)	3 3/4 (3/4)	5 (1)
Dark green subgroup ³	1/2	1/2	1/2
Red/orange subgroup ³	3/4	3/4	1 1/4
Beans, peas, and lentils subgroup ³	1/2	1/2	1/2
Starchy subgroup ³	1/2	1/2	1/2
Other vegetables subgroup ^{3,4}	1/2	1/2	3/4
Additional vegetables from any subgroup to reach total	1	1	1 1/2
Grains (oz. eq.) ⁵	8–9 (1)	8–10 (1)	10–12 (2)
Meats/meat alternates (oz. eq.) ⁶	8–10 (1)	9–10 (1)	10–12 (2)
Fluid milk (cups) ⁷	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)

Eligibility



Children may be determined “categorically eligible” for free meals through participation in certain Federal Assistance Programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or based on their status as a homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster child.

Children can also qualify for free or reduced price school meals based on household income and family size. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals. Schools may not charge children more than 40 cents for a reduced price lunch.



After School Snack Program

What is it?

- A component of the NSLP that fills the hunger gap for students after school

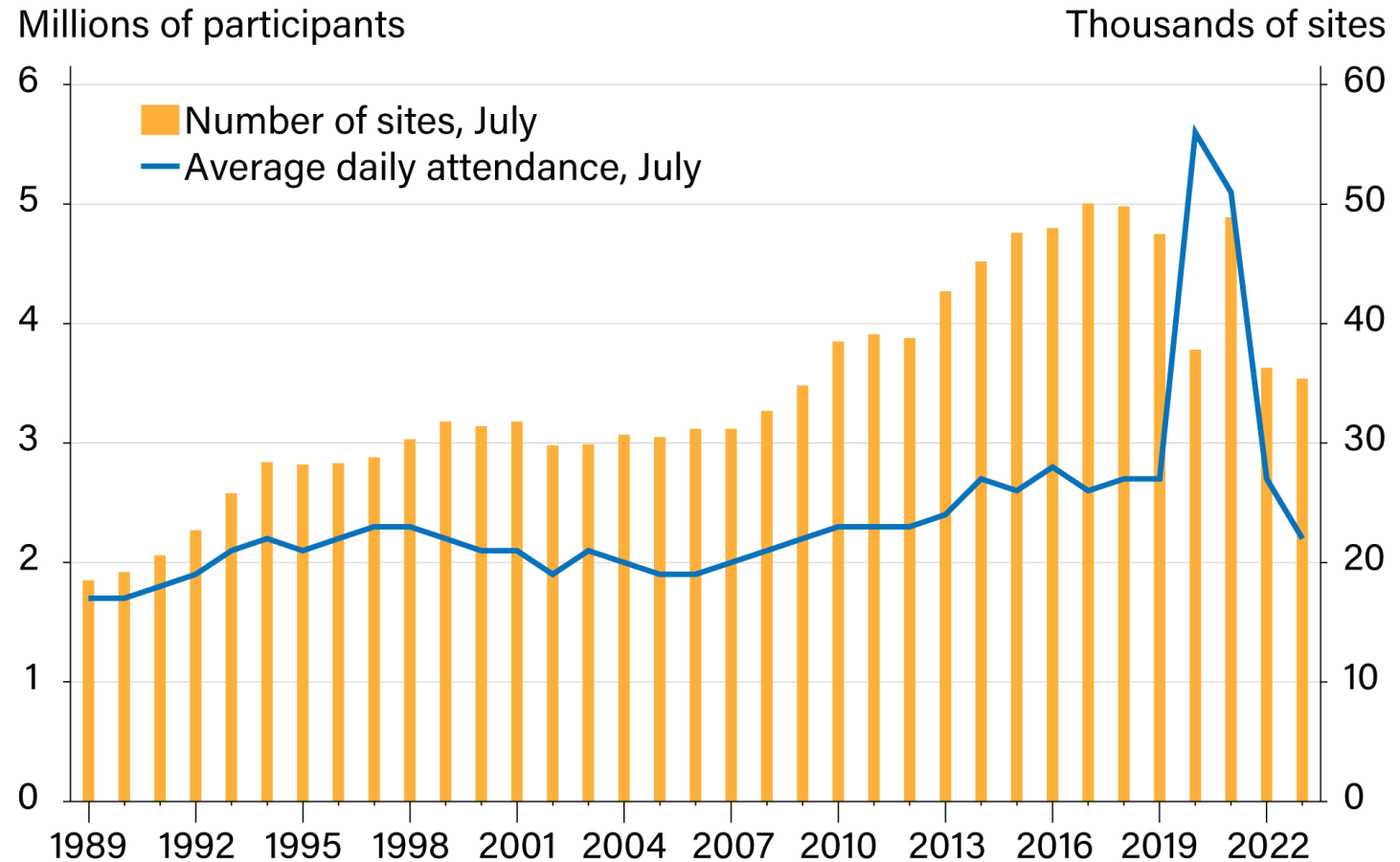
How does it work

- State agencies collaborate with local school food authorities (SFAs) to provide snacks. Participating SFAs receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each reimbursable snack served.

Summer Food Services Program

- Provides free meals to children in low-income areas primarily during the summer
- SUN Meals are available to any child aged 18 and under, no application or other information needed

Summer Food Service Program distribution sites and average daily attendance in July, fiscal years 1989-2023



Note: Changes in the number of sites and attendance beginning in fiscal year 2020 attributable to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the Federal response. All numbers are subject to revision.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, using data from USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Data are as of December 2023 and are subject to revision.

Why NSLP Works

- Access to a healthy meal during the school day addresses food insecurity and promotes better health
- Specific standards provide children with necessary energy and nutrients
- Hunger is not a distraction, enabling students to focus and actively participate
- Helps maintain a healthy weight, boosting self-esteem/confidence
- School meal participation is linked to improved academic performance and school attendance
- Eating with peers builds community
- Reduces fatigue, irritability, and increased susceptibility to illness

Limitations

- NSLP struggles to provide high-quality, nutritious meals due to funding constraints
- Stigma around food assistance may discourage participation
- Vending machines and other competitive foods in schools can undermine the nutritional integrity of the program.
- Some schools may struggle to accommodate the large number of students participating.

Potential Solutions

Partner with local businesses

- USDA Farm to School Grants
- State-level funding
- Community / regional food producers
- Support local business
- Help minimize food supply challenges

Increase funding

- o Reallocate school budgets
- o Higher meal quality and variety
- o Easier compliance with nutrition standards
- o Greater participation

References

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