

OHIO ASSOCIATION OF SECOND HARVEST FOODBANKS

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STATEWIDE CONVERSATION HEATS UP AROUND SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM *Best Practices and Participation in Summer Food Service Program the Focus of Statewide Summit*

COLUMBUS – The days may still be short and the air may be cold, but groups from across Ohio are not letting the winter blues dampen their ability to ensure Ohio children have access to nutritious food this summer. The Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks (OASHF), the Ohio Department of Education, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), The Wendy's Company, the Mid-Ohio Foodbank and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) welcomed sites, sponsors and interested community organizations from across the state to the Mid-Ohio Foodbank today for the 2012 statewide Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Summit.

Although thousands of children depend on nutritious free and reduced-price meals and snacks at school for nine months out of the year, only a fraction of eligible children in Ohio last year participated in SFSP, a program that helps children get the nutrition they need throughout the summer months when they are out of school. A lack of adequate nutrition at any time can be extraordinarily damaging to a child's health, growth, development and their ability to succeed during the school year.

"I am proud to stand here with nearly 200 organizations today, representing such a wide array of communities committed to the nutritional well-being of Ohio's children," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, OASHF executive director. "Last year, our National Service members were able to increase participation at SFSP sites by more than 43 percent compared to 2010 and meals served by more than 25 percent during that same time. In partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service, OASHF Summer Associates worked tirelessly to support SFSP sites and sponsors, increase outreach, activities and community partnerships for this critical program. We are committed to ensuring every eligible child in Ohio is connected to healthy, nutritious meals during the summer and we know this group will strive to obtain that goal in 2012."

At the Summit, participants shared best practices for increasing outreach, activities and access to healthy meals. In addition, a new map, created in partnership by the Ohio Department of Education and The Cleveland Foodbank, Inc., was also unveiled. The map provides the opportunity to better understand participation rates within communities and those that are currently underserved. The map will allow for time and attention to be focused on areas of the state where new sites may be needed and where more outreach could ensure eligible children and their families know about the availability of the program.

Joining Summit organizers was USDA Food and Nutrition Services Under Secretary Kevin Concannon. During the Summit, Concannon energized participating sites and attendees, and discussed the importance of SFSP. "Low-income children are at a heightened risk for food insecurity in the summer months, when schools are closed and many find it difficult to get the healthy nutrition they need," Concannon said. "This Summit offers a wonderful opportunity to educate, energize and inspire our partners to help the Summer Food Service Program reach more Ohio children." Concannon also spoke about the new school meal patterns released by the USDA.

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A representative from Senator Sherrod Brown’s office also provided remarks encouraging attendees in their efforts: “For many Ohio children, summer isn’t just a break from school – it’s a lapse in basic nutrition. Every school day, more than 840,000 Ohio children receive free or reduced-priced meals at their schools. These meals provide them with the nutrition they need to excel inside the classroom and outside during afterschool activities. But when school doors close for summer, the majority of eligible children no longer receive nutrition assistance available to them. That’s why today’s summit is so important. Working together, we have already increased participation in the vital Summer Food Service Program. Our continued efforts will ensure that fewer Ohio children go hungry during the summer months.”

Summit organizers encourage interested individuals to visit the SFSP participation map [hyperlink to map] to view participation and how they can be involved in their communities. To learn more about SFSP or become involved in the program, visit the [Ohio Department of Education website](#) or call 877.644.6338 for more information.

About the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks

OASHF is Ohio’s largest charitable response to hunger, representing Ohio’s 12 Feeding America foodbanks and 3,300 member charities including food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters. In SFY 2011, OASHF and its member foodbanks were able to acquire and distribute more than 150 million pounds of food and grocery items. www.oashf.org or follow @OASHF on Twitter and stay connected on Facebook at www.facebook.com/oashf.

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