

For Immediate Release
June 13, 2017

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Missouri Ranks 42nd on Annual Summer Meals Report

Improvements Noted Though in Number of Low-Income Students Who Received Summer Meals in July 2016

Jefferson City, MO.....2017 — Missouri ranks number 42 on a new report, ***Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation***, from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC, a national anti-hunger advocacy group). The report ranks all 50 states and the District of Columbia on participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs. While Missouri ranked higher than Kansas and Oklahoma, our state trailed Arkansas, Illinois and Iowa.

When school lets out, millions of low-income children lose access to the school meals and healthy afterschool snacks they receive during the regular school year. The Summer Nutrition Programs help fill this gap by providing free meals and snacks that meet federal nutrition standards to children who might otherwise go hungry.

At the national level, after four years of significant growth, the number of kids fed in the summer of 2016 slipped by 4.8% from the record total fed in 2015. Today's report from FRAC notes that 3 million kids, out of 20 million eligible kids, were fed in July 2016.

In Missouri 33,000 from a total of 363,000 eligible kids received summer meals in 2016. There was good news in that this represented an increase of 7.4% from 2015, but there is still room for much improvement. Ten of 11 students who access school meals did not get free summer meals.

"Summer meals help children, their families and the community," said Glenn Koenen, Hunger Task Force chair for Empower Missouri, a FRAC partner organization. "As the weather heats up, food pantries across the state struggle to replace the free food kids get at school. Empower Missouri has been a strong supporter of increasing the number of locations where kids can get free meals during the summer, and we are glad to see organizations stepping up to that challenge."

For example, in the St. Louis area Operation Food Search is using special vans to deliver the free meals to children in neighborhoods that do not have permanent meal sites. In the Springfield area the Ozarks Food Harvest has signed-up Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and other groups in nine counties to provide the free meals. In Kansas City many schools are opening their doors so students can stop-by for free breakfasts and lunches.

If Missouri reached FRAC's ambitious, but achievable, goal of 40 children receiving summer meals in July 2017 for every 100 receiving free or reduced-price lunch during the 2015–2016 school year, an additional 144,511 children would have been fed each day, and our state would have collected more than \$8 million additional federal dollars from child nutrition funding in July alone (assuming the programs operated 20 days).

Summer meals are provided at local sites in Missouri such as schools, recreation centers, libraries, YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, churches, and parks for children ages 18 and under. Not only do children stave off hunger as a result of free summer meals, they also benefit from the enrichment activities offered at the vast majority of sites — activities that keep them learning, engaged, and better prepared to return to the classroom in the fall.

To search by zip code for sites near you, go to:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks>

To read [*Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*](#) in full.

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Empower Missouri (www.EmpowerMissouri.org), founded in 1901, advocates for the well-being of Missourians living in poverty through civic leadership, education, and research.