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## **Summer Meals Closing the Hunger Gap For 32,776 Children in Missouri**

***But Number Dropped Nearly 13% in 2015***

(JEFFERSON CITY, MO) - Only one in nine children who needed summer meals received them in Missouri, according to a national report, ***Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation***, released today by the Food Research & Action Center. In July 2015, 32,776 low-income children received summer meals in Missouri, a significant decrease of 12.9 percent from the previous summer. To read the full report, including how Missouri ranks, go to: [http://frac.org/pdf/2016\\_summer\\_nutrition\\_report.pdf#15](http://frac.org/pdf/2016_summer_nutrition_report.pdf#15)

“It’s troubling to see that a growing number of children across our state are missing out on the benefits of summer nutrition programs,” said Jeanette Mott Oxford, executive director of Empower Missouri. “Missouri can reverse that trend this summer by engaging in aggressive outreach to raise awareness of summer food. Summer Nutrition programs can make a huge difference for the hundreds of thousands of children in our state whose families struggle to afford enough food.”

The report is an annual analysis of data that measures the success of Summer Nutrition Programs at the national and state levels. It does so by comparing the number of children receiving summer meals to the number children receiving free or reduced-price school lunches during the regular school year because of their families’ very low income levels. The school lunch data are a good proxy number for the extent of need in each state. By this measure, only nine low-income children in Missouri ate summer meals for every 100 who ate school lunch during the regular school year. Nationally, the ratio was 15.8:100, down from last year’s ratio of 16.2:100.

There is much room for improvement in Missouri given the state’s status as seventh in the nation in food insecurity. Low participation means missed meals for children and missed dollars for the state. If Missouri had reached 40 children with summer food for every 100 low-income children who get school lunch during the regular school year, Missouri would have fed an additional 112,357 low-income children every day in July 2015 and brought in \$8,867,812 more federal dollars to do so.

“Greater participation in summer food means more low-income children get the fuel they need to thrive over the summer months,” said FRAC President Jim Weill. “That reduces hunger, boosts health, reduces obesity, and keeps children primed to learn. Congress can better meet the need through the pending Child Nutrition Reauthorization by making strategic and thoughtful investments in the Summer Nutrition Programs that bolster their capacity to serve even more children.”

The Summer Nutrition Programs, which include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program in the summer months, should be filling the food gap for the thousands of low-income Missouri children who rely on school breakfast and lunch during the school year to help keep hunger at bay. These programs provide free meals at participating summer sites at schools, parks, other public agencies, and nonprofits for children under 18.

Oxford said, “Not only do children benefit from free meals through these programs, they also benefit from enrichment activities that keep them learning and engaged. It’s major help for working parents who cannot stretch their budgets far enough when schools are closed for summer if caring neighbors will step up to serve healthy meals in positive and safe environments.”

Many community and religious organizations have set up summer feeding sites to respond to need in their neighborhoods. Parents who are seeking a summer feeding program can type their zip code into the site look-up feature on the USDA Food and Nutrition website to receive a list of programs in close proximity: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/summerfoodrocks>

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**About the report:**

Data for Missouri come from the June 2016 version of the annual report released by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), the lead advocacy organization working to end hunger in America through stronger public policies. The FRAC report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation*, gives 2014 and 2015 data for every state and looks at national and state trends. FRAC measures summer participation during the month of July, when typically almost all children are out of school throughout the month and lose access to regular school year meals. The report is available online at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

**About Empower Missouri:**

Empower Missouri, founded in 1901, advocates for the well-being of all Missourians through civic leadership, education, and research. Empower Missouri organizes efforts to reduce hunger through a Hunger Task Force - <http://empowermissouri.org/task-forces/hunger/>