

Background

The Simplified Summer Food Program (“Simplified Summer”) is a modified version of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The modifications allow reimbursements at a fixed rate rather than limiting reimbursement to administrative and operating costs documented by the individual provider.

Simplified Summer was based on the Lugar Pilot Project (“Pilot”) which was in place from FY 2001 to FY 2004. Simplified Summer began operating in FY 2005 and extends the summer food program benefits, first established in the Pilot, to additional States. Meals served are reimbursed at the allowable rates under SFSP without regard to actual or budgeted costs. Sponsoring organizations in Simplified Summer do not have to report costs in order to receive reimbursement, nor are they limited to using administrative funds strictly for administration.

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 required that the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) evaluate the impact of Simplified Summer which now operates in 26 States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Method

The evaluation is based on both discussion interviews with 16 States participating in Simplified Summer and quantitative analyses of program outcome measures (calculated from the regular monthly State administrative reports required by FNS).

Findings

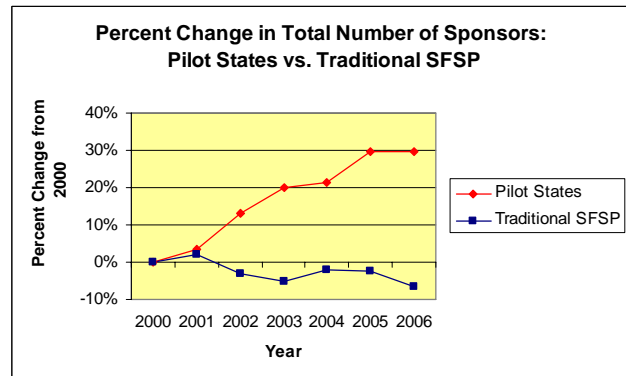
In discussion interviews, States range from enthusiastic for Simplified Summer’s potential to assist in recruiting and retaining sponsors to the perception that it is a bookkeeping change with minimal program impact.

The quantitative analyses in this report show that many positive changes in key outcome measures of summer food programs have been taking place in the States that have participated in Simplified Summer.

The Number of Sponsoring Organizations Has Increased in the Simplified Summer States.

The States that have been operating under Simplified Summer procedures since 2001 have maintained about a 30-percent increase in sponsors while States that have never been eligible to operate under Simplified Summer rules (Traditional SFSP) show a small decline (Chart 1).

Chart 1



Note: Louisiana not included due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
Source: Report to Congress: USDA’s Simplified Summer Food Program.

Among the States that entered the program in 2005, the number of sponsors also increased by over 27 percent in 2 years, compared to a slight decline in the number of sponsors in the traditional SFSP States.

Aspects of the program that are perceived as strong points that aid States in maintaining and growing their summer food programs for children include:

- Reduced paperwork in requesting reimbursements,
- Simplified rules in not having to report on administrative and operational costs,
- Higher reimbursement levels, and
- More predictability and ease in calculating the expected level of reimbursement.

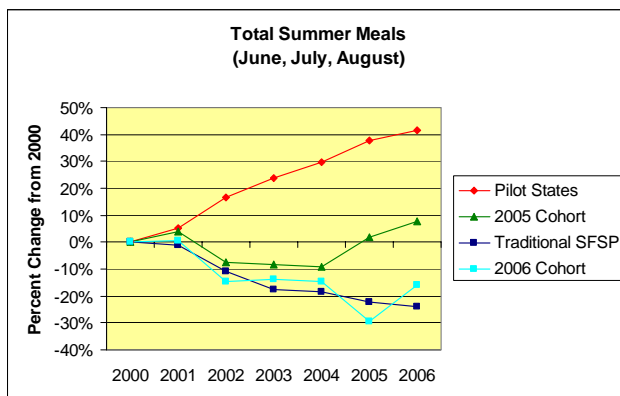
The Number of Food Service Sites per Sponsor Is Improving in the Simplified Summer States.

In the Pilot States, the number of food service sites per sponsor rose from 5 in 2000 to almost 7 in 2006, narrowing the gap with the Traditional SFSP States which average around 10.

Total SFSP Meals Served Have Increased in the Simplified Summer States.

States of the Pilot experienced over a 40-percent increase in total SFSP meals served from 2000 to 2006 (Chart 2).

Chart 2



Note: Louisiana not included due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
Source: Report to Congress: USDA's Simplified Summer Food Program.

The total SFSP meals served in the States that became eligible for Simplified Summer in 2005 and 2006 were declining but reversed this trend in the year they began operating under Simplified Summer procedures. In contrast, States operating under traditional SFSP rules experienced a 24-percent decline between 2000 and 2006.

State Perceptions

With only a few exceptions, States in the telephone discussions perceive that the quality of sponsors' meals is being maintained. Only 1 State out of 16 believes that Simplified Summer's reimbursement of meals at a fixed rate will enable sponsors to improve the quality of their meals.

Private nonprofit sponsors became eligible for Simplified Summer in 2005. The States interviewed did not perceive private nonprofit sponsors to be of any greater source of concern than other sponsors when monitoring expenditures and reimbursements.

Almost all of the States (15 out of 16) reported in the telephone discussions that sponsors find the claims process, which does not require the submission of cost data when seeking reimbursement, easier and simpler under Simplified Summer. Simplification of the claims process has also eased the States' job of training sponsors, freeing up time for marketing the program and performing other tasks in running the program.

Conclusion

States participating in the Simplified Summer Food Program have shown positive changes in key outcome measures of summer food programs, such as number of sponsors, number of food service sites per sponsor, total SFSP meals served, and average daily attendance. While suggestive, changes in the number of sponsors and other outcome measures cannot be attributed to Simplified Summer with certainty based on the available data.

Download full report at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/>

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