



**MISSION:
READINESS**
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

NUTRITION ROADMAP

OUR BATTLE PLAN TO
FIGHT CHILD MALNUTRITION
& STRENGTHEN AMERICA'S
NATIONAL SECURITY



INTRODUCTION

Mission: Readiness advocates for national policy change that results in sustaining, strengthening, and improving nutrition programs throughout all stages of a child's development.

Not only are these programs critical to ensuring that more young Americans are prepared to serve their nation in any way that they choose, but they are also deeply rooted in efforts to ensure America's military readiness and national security.

In the early half of the 20th century, malnutrition emerged as an urgent national concern. The Great Depression had created staggering unemployment rates, leaving many without the means to purchase food and dependent on public assistance. At the same time, as many as forty percent of those drafted during World War II – the equivalent of 10 divisions – were rejected for reasons related to malnutrition

While school meal programs existed in various forms throughout the first half of the 20th century, this threat to military readiness and testimony by the head of the Selective Service were the driving forces behind congressional action to create the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in 1946.

The final legislation passed by Congress included a policy statement declaring that the program was established “as a measure of national security.” The NSLP remains the foundation for fighting malnutrition and ensuring children grow up healthy and prepared to serve their nation in any way they choose. Over the years, Congress has built upon this foundation to ensure all children have access to fresh and nutritious foods.

While the resulting patchwork of programs have made great strides, malnutrition still exists in the United States. **Today, malnutrition—literally, a lack of proper nutrition—has caused an urgent threat in a growing obesity crisis.**

Today, a third of young adults between the ages of 17 and 24 could not qualify for military service due to excess weight alone. When including other behavioral and educational-related factors, a full 77% of U.S. youth could not meet the basic qualifications for service in the Armed Forces.

This staggering statistic means that less than a quarter of young Americans have the opportunity to be afforded the pathways to the middle class and economic security provided by military service.





And the broader trends should concern all Americans; a strong national security is not just about a strong military, but a healthy and capable public ready to contribute to productive American life.

Lawmakers have acted to fight this urgent crisis; the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act was passed in 2010, making major improvements to child nutrition programs including the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This meaningful action was an important step, but **the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing gaps that require significant adaptation and modernization.**

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The Farm Bill, set to be reauthorized every five years, and last updated in 2018, sets out federal support for our nation's food systems. It codifies the SNAP and SNAP nutrition incentives, programs that are essential to families accessing fresh and nutritious foods, as well as provides for important nutrition education initiatives like SNAP-Ed and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). In 2018, SNAP Nutrition Incentives, named the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentives Program, (GusNIP), was updated and expanded. These changes are essential to increasing access to fresh and nutritious foods, but more needs to be done in adapting programs, modernizing nutrition education, and strengthening our nation's food system.

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FEDERAL POLICY AGENDA

Mission: Readiness, a nonpartisan organization of nearly 800 retired admirals and generals, believes that America's growing recruitment and child malnutrition crisis necessitate action to ensure that federal nutrition programs act in the interest of safeguarding America's national security.

Our roadmap includes includes a plan to:



**ADAPT AND INNOVATE
FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS**



**MODERNIZE AND INTEGRATE
NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAMS**



**SUPPORT A DURABLE,
RESPONSIVE FOOD SYSTEM**



SUPPORT STATE AND LOCAL EFFORTS



ADAPT AND INNOVATE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Organizational Focus: Gaps in our three primary federal nutrition programs prevent consistent access to fresh and nutritious food for all children year-round. Lack of access to fresh and nutritious food leads to malnutrition manifesting as obesity. Partnership between families, communities, food producers, private entities, and all levels of government should be leveraged to adapt and innovate these programs.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The NSLP is the foundation of child nutrition, as it is the primary access point to ensure that young people have consistent access to fresh and nutritious meals. This program provides subsidized, federally funded, nutritionally balanced, lunch, breakfast and afterschool snacks. The Summer Meals Program allows for lunch to be available to school-aged children in low income areas when school is not in session during the summer months.



Admiral (Ret.) James M. Loy, former U.S. Coast Guard Commandant, joins children for lunch in New London, Connecticut

ADAPT AND INNOVATE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Foundational Policy Focus:

- Maintain strong nutrition standards for school meals, proactively addressing and pushing back on attempts to rollback standards, e.g. sodium limits and whole grain and fruit and vegetable requirements
- Ensure schools have adequate resources to update their school meal infrastructure to foster use of fresh fruits and vegetables, in preparing nutritious meals that appeal to kids in a way that allows them to use more fresh ingredients
- Increase federal meal reimbursement rates to remove barriers to school participation in breakfast and afterschool snack programs
- Expand summer meals programs to reach all children experiencing food insecurity in the summer months and who struggle to access healthy food on the weekend, through expanding congregate meal sites, facilitating meal delivery or mobile sites, allowing take home meals, and Summer EBT for children who can not access fixed, mobile or delivery sites

Policy Priorities for Congress:

- Permanently authorize adaptations to federal school and summer meal programs, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, to sustain access to fresh and nutritious meals for kids year-round Expand summer meals programs to meet the needs of children year 'round, by using alternative meal delivery sites like housing complexes, local civic centers, in addition to community and school based meal sites
- Expand successful healthy food and commodities distribution models, such as the existing Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), to support students in rural communities in accessing fresh and nutritious foods during out-of-school times Allow USDA commodities to be included in take away meals or food boxes at school and summer meal sites for families experiencing food insecurity

ADAPT AND INNOVATE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP provides parents and children with direct payments to purchase food at retailers, and serves as an essential tool in combating food insecurity in low-income families. As access to fresh and nutritious foods is critical to reversing child malnutrition, ensuring that families can utilize SNAP benefits to purchase fresh and nutritious foods is a key policy priority.

Foundational Policy Focus:

- Support nutritional incentives to use SNAP benefits to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and nutrient dense healthy foods, like the GusNIP program
- Foster eligible families' enrollment in the program by reducing stigma and barriers around enrollment

Policy Priorities for Congress

- Expand the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) to reach more families enrolled in SNAP
- Incentivize full subscription of the program across all states



Mission: Readiness members meet with then-U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan about the national security imperative of child nutrition programs

ADAPT AND INNOVATE FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC provides funding for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

This program is essential to establishing consistent access to fresh and nutritious foods at all stages of a child's development.

Foundational Policy Focus:

- Ensure more eligible families enroll in the program, by reducing barriers and stigma
- Allow for eligible families to maintain WIC certification through the early years of a child's life, increasing the recertification time frame that helps families stay enrolled
- Increase diversity of food choices and purchasing options in WIC, to reflect cultural and regional preferences

Policy Priorities for Congress

- Update food packages at least every five years, aligning with publication of USDA Dietary Guidelines
- Permanently authorize pandemic adaptations to WIC, such as remote enrollment and issuance of benefits, that could create lasting reductions in barriers to accessing the program
- Expand WIC eligibility for children to their sixth birthday, or when they enter kindergarten, whichever comes first



MODERNIZE AND INTEGRATE NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Organizational Focus: Promoting the consumption of fresh and nutritious food for children at times when they are not reached by school and summer meal programs is crucial to ensuring consistent access to these foods at every stage of development. Modernizing nutrition education and integrating it into each federal nutrition program is essential. Doing so will help motivate kids to eat more fresh foods and bring those experiences home to parents, prompting the purchase and consumption of more fresh fruits and vegetables in the home.

Foundational Policy Focus:

- Expand the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) to operate during out-of-school times, especially summer months when local produce is typically at its peak, by adapting the program to operate in settings other than school classrooms
- Prioritize, and increase funding for, technical assistance provided by USDA to train food preparers in the school and summer meal programs to provide visually appealing, more nutritious, balanced meals with ingredients kids are familiar with, to lead to healthier outcomes

Policy Priorities for Congress

- Require SNAP-Ed providers to integrate recipes and food selection education into markets at the point of selection
- Incentivize collaboration between SNAP-Ed and GusNIP-funded projects to expand educational opportunities



SUPPORT A DURABLE, RESPONSIVE FOOD SYSTEM

Organizational Focus: A healthy, community integrated, efficient food system is essential to combating child malnutrition. Existing nutrition programs are key to creating a durable, responsive food system, and no single nutrition program exists in a vacuum. Linkages between existing or new programs should be identified and strengthened. Opportunities exist for increased public-private partnerships to address challenges like food deserts and food waste.

Foundational Policy Focus:

- Incentivize supermarkets in frontier, rural, and tribal communities to accept SNAP and GusNIP through offsetting costs of markets accepting EBT and GusNIP
- Support innovations to reduce food waste in schools and markets, including food recovery networks
- Prioritize farm to school programs for funding support

Policy Priorities for Congress

- Enact policies that support the creation and sustainment of community feeding networks
Incentivize producers to sell to local, regional markets and supermarkets in underserved communities and community feeding networks
- Incentivize food vendors to locate in rural, tribal, and frontier areas through federal community development investments opportunities
- Address food packaging challenges for shelf stable products that meet nutritional requirements for federal nutrition programs through clear guidance on requirements and options
- Encourage shelf stable prepared meals that meet NSLP and WIC nutritional standards by making them eligible for reimbursement/purchase



SUPPORT STATE & LOCAL EFFORTS

Organizational Focus: Mission: Readiness has always believed that America's federal nutrition programs should serve as a baseline to ensure all of our nation's children have access to the fresh and nutritious food they need to be successful. **But these programs should be a floor, and not a ceiling,** and we strongly support efforts at the state level to participate, fund, or expand new and existing federal infrastructure.





For more, visit StrongNation.org/MissionReadiness
or email team@missionreadiness.org