



Press release for Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. For immediate release.  
For more information contact Patty Barker, Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign Director,  
[pbarker@arhungeralliance.org](mailto:pbarker@arhungeralliance.org)

### **New Report Finds an Increase in Arkansas Low-Income Children Receiving Summer Meals**

**Little Rock, AR** (June 10, 2013) – Participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs saw a well-above average increase in Arkansas, with over 36,800 low-income children receiving summer meals on an average day in July 2012, according to a new national report released today. The Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance noted that despite a minimal 0.5% increase nationally, Arkansas served meals to 16.3% more children last summer, moving Arkansas from 27<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> in summer meals participation in the U. S. The Alliance credits its own Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign for much of this progress in Arkansas. The campaign supports the Summer Nutrition programs through advocacy and outreach, working with state partners to increase the number of summer meals sponsors and sites to serve hungry Arkansas children.

Arkansas's performance was far better than the national rate, which reached only one in seven low-income children, according to *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*, an annual analysis by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). The report measures participation in the Summer Nutrition Programs by comparing the number of children receiving summer meals to the number of low-income children receiving school lunch during the regular school year. "The increase in summer food participation is very encouraging, but Arkansas needs to do even better," said Patty Barker, Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign director. "It is in everyone's best interest to ensure that children have adequate nutrition during the summer so they stay healthy and are ready to learn."

Low participation means missed meals for children and missed dollars for the state. If Arkansas were to reach 40 children with summer food for every 100 low-income children who get school lunch during the regular school year, an attainable goal, Arkansas would have fed 57,251 more children every day in July 2012 and brought in \$3.9 million more federal dollars to do so.

Designed to fill the food gap when school is out, the Summer Nutrition Programs fight hunger and contribute to better nutrition for children during the summer. The Alliance noted that Arkansas was one of several states that managed to increase participation and make significant improvements to the quality of the meals offered. Arkansas, with a participation rate increase of 16.3%, had the 6<sup>th</sup> largest increase nationally.

State and community leaders can also follow the lead of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which continues to prioritize participation in summer meals – USDA strategies include its annual Summer Food

Awareness Week (June 10 to 15, 2013) to raise awareness of the program and its efforts to reduce administrative barriers to make it easier for sites and sponsors to participate. Such actions will move the programs in the right direction and should be continued.

“USDA is providing strong leadership with its emphasis on improving summer meals, but Congress will need to fix some of the underlying problems in the programs in the 2015 Child Nutrition Reauthorization to truly repair the Summer Nutrition Programs,” said FRAC President Jim Weill. “Congress must take a fresh look at the Summer Nutrition Programs and consider ways to improve this faltering program so it more effectively addresses hunger and obesity.”

The Summer Nutrition Programs, which include the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program, should be filling the food gap for the thousands of low-income Arkansas children who rely on school breakfast and lunch during the school year to help keep hunger at bay. Through these programs, children aged 18 and under can receive free meals at participating summer sites at schools, parks, other public agencies, and nonprofits. In Arkansas, families can find nearby summer meal sites by calling the national toll-free hunger hotline, 1-866-3HUNGRY or 1-877-3HAMBRE.

**About the report:**

Data for Arkansas came from an annual report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), a national anti-hunger advocacy and research group. The FRAC report, *Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation*, gives data for all states and looks at national trends. FRAC measures national summer participation during the month of July, when typically all children are out of school throughout the month and lose access to school meals. The report is available online at [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org).

**X X X**

**The Alliance**

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is a non-profit collaborative network of more than 250 hunger relief organizations across Arkansas including the Arkansas Foodbank in Little Rock, the Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas in Jonesboro, Harvest Texarkana Regional Food Bank in Texarkana, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas in Norfolk, Northwest Arkansas Food Bank in Bethel Heights and River Valley Regional Food Bank in Fort Smith who are dedicated to reducing hunger through direct relief, education and advocacy. We invite you to visit [www.ARhungeralliance.org](http://www.ARhungeralliance.org) for details on hunger relief programs and volunteer opportunities.