



## **FRAC: Model Afterschool and Summer Advocacy Efforts**

### **Model Program**

#### **Expanded Outreach Efforts Increase Participation in Rural Pilot Project** **Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, PA**

Hunger Action, an anti-hunger advocacy group in Pennsylvania, has partnered with the Department of Education to recruit new Summer Food Service Program sponsors in rural communities around the state through the new Rural Pilot Project.

The Rural Pilot began in June of 2004 when Congress created special rules for Pennsylvania, enabling the state to operate summer feeding sites at locations where low-income children constituted forty-percent (instead of the usual 50%) of the population. The pilot is currently set to expire after two years.

In an effort to utilize the Rural Pilot's new rules to increase summer food participation, staff members at Hunger Action created a database of community groups and churches that were involved with charitable food in thirty-six counties around Pennsylvania and sent information about the summer food program to each organization. Sue Mitchem, Communications Coordinator at Hunger Action, then set up meetings, along with the Department of Education, with over 200 community groups, county and school officials around the state to educate people about the summer food program, explain the new guidelines for rural areas under the pilot project and recruit new sponsors.

Hunger Action's recruiting work was based on establishing relationships with school district staff, such as the school food service provider, and local food banks and community groups. They commended the community's current work to end childhood hunger, through efforts such as the establishment of a school breakfast program, and then highlighted how those efforts could be strengthened by serving summer food through the Rural Pilot project. Local contacts in each area were asked to help secure a space, such as school board meeting room or cafeteria, for a meeting about the summer food program, at which Mitchem gave an overview of the program and highlighted the USDA's new Summer Food Outreach video. To get an average of 20-30 community stakeholders at each meeting, volunteers at Hunger Action used the organization's database to call people in each county and encourage them to attend the meeting. Mitchem also asked her primary contacts in the area to suggest additional people to invite.

Due to the intensive outreach efforts of Hunger Action, along with the Department of Education, rural areas saw 22 new sponsors in the summer of 2005 and an increase of 98 sites over the previous year. Twenty sponsors provided meals in rural areas under the special 40% rules and operated 40 summer food sites. Hunger Action estimates 3,000 rural children received meals at those sites throughout the summer.

Next year, staff at Hunger Action will again be traveling to more than forty counties to promote the summer food program and revisit current sites to encourage expansion. Hunger Action also secured funding to offer \$15,000 in start up grants for new sponsors to help cover some of their operating costs such as heating and cooling equipment and picnic tables.

"The Rural Pilot has significantly helped us increase summer meals participation around the state, especially for children we previously had difficulty reaching in rural areas", Mitchem explained. "We hope to add even more sponsors through the pilot next year to ensure that each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties has at least one summer meals program."

For more information, contact: The Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, 717-233-6705,  
[www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org)

