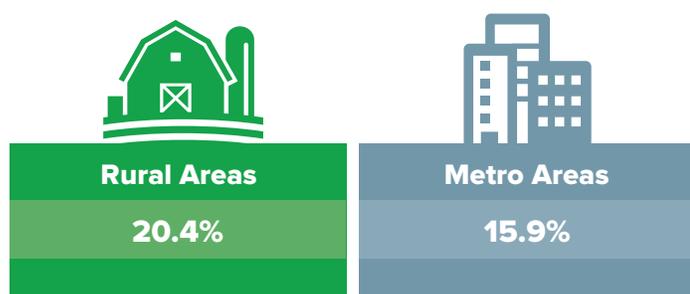


# Rural Hunger in America: SCHOOL BREAKFAST



The School Breakfast Program ensures 12.1 million low-income students across the country start their school day ready to learn. School breakfast is particularly important for low-income students in rural communities who are more likely than their peers in metropolitan areas to live in food-insecure households, and, who often face additional barriers to accessing the program.

**1 in 5 households with children in rural areas (20.4%) was food insecure compared to more than 1 in 7 in metropolitan areas (15.9%) in 2016.\***



## Increasing school breakfast participation benefits rural communities by:

- improving dietary intake, reducing food insecurity, and improving student health;
- reducing student absenteeism, tardiness, and behavior referrals;
- increasing student test scores and academic achievement;
- bringing in federal funding to provide needed nutrition to children; and
- stimulating the local economy by providing local farmers a market for their produce and foods.

To learn more, see FRAC's [Breakfast for Learning](#), [Breakfast for Health](#), and [The Connections Between Food Insecurity, the Federal Nutrition Programs, and Student Behavior](#).

## Did You Know?

### Many Rural States Are Breakfast Champions:

Seven (Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Vermont, and West Virginia) of the 10 most rural states in the country [ranked](#) in the top 20 states for breakfast participation during the 2016–2017 school year.

### Breakfast Expansion Helps Rural Farmers:

Partnering with local farmers to procure and serve fresh, local produce and food can help support the local economy and increase community support for the program. For more information, visit USDA's Community Food Systems [webpage](#).

### Due to Funding Uncertainties, Some Rural School Districts Are Moving to a Four-Day School Week to Reduce Costs:

Losing a day of school means that children will lose a day of access to school nutrition programs — which can include breakfast, lunch, and afterschool meals and snacks. Affected families will have to stretch limited budgets even further to account for additional meals once consumed at school.

\* "Metro Areas" are those contained within Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as delineated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); each of which contains at least one Census Bureau-delineated urbanized area of 50,000 or more people. "Rural Areas" consist of non-metropolitan areas.

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*“School breakfast improves student academic achievement and reduces absenteeism, tardiness, and behavior referrals, but too many rural students are missing out on a healthy morning meal. Rural schools can take steps to increase school breakfast, such as offering breakfast after the bell, so their students start the school day ready to learn.”*

— Dr. Allen Pratt, Executive Director, National Rural Education Association

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## Too Many Students Still Miss Out on School Breakfast

The traditional school breakfast program — served in the cafeteria before the school day starts — misses too many students. Common [barriers](#) that limit participation are often more pronounced in rural areas, including:

- long bus rides that do not allow for enough time to eat before school;
- late bus arrivals; and
- the stigma associated with participating in the program, especially in small, close-knit communities.

Additionally, some rural schools may face unique challenges, including:

- limited administrative capacity and qualified staff;
- dispersed student populations;
- limited food and supply options; and
- aging or inadequate equipment and infrastructure.

## Strategies to Increase Rural School Breakfast Participation

There are a number of proven strategies to ensure all students in rural areas reap the many benefits of school breakfast.

- **Offer breakfast at no charge to all students in high-poverty, rural schools.** Many schools are able to offer free breakfast to all students by adopting [community eligibility](#). Schools that are not financially able to offer free breakfast to all students can consider eliminating the charge for students who are certified to receive reduced-price school meals.

- **Implement breakfast after the bell models** (breakfast in the classroom, “grab and go,” and second chance breakfast). For example, breakfasts are delivered to the classroom or picked up from carts when students enter the school. Then, students eat breakfast together in the classroom, while the teacher collects homework, takes attendance, goes over the goals for the day, or conducts other morning activities.
- **Offer breakfast on the bus** to students who have long bus rides to school.
- **Partner with local farmers** to help bring in local produce and foods for the school breakfast programs.
- **Identify available funding sources** — both public and private — that can help purchase new equipment and provide training for staff.

The School Breakfast Program reaches millions of children in rural communities with a nutritious morning meal each school day and provides a critical support for struggling families trying to stretch limited resources. By adopting strategies to increase breakfast participation, more children struggling with hunger can start the day with breakfast, fueled with the nutrition they need to learn and be healthy.

*This fact sheet is part of a series on rural hunger developed by the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) with the support of Smithfield Foods. FRAC and Smithfield Foods have teamed up to create the Rally Against Rural Hunger initiative to raise awareness about rural hunger and to connect eligible people across the country with federal food assistance programs so they may get the nutrition they need for their health and well-being.*