



Media Statement

First global School Meal Summit wraps up in Paris: Rich & poor countries worldwide announce grand plans, while Canada stays home and ponders.

Ottawa (October 19, 2023)—The first global School Meals Coalition Summit, hosted by the United Nations World Food Program, wrapped up in Paris, France today. Commitments and achievements of governments include:

- The **United Arab Emirates** announced plans to increase coverage of its new school meal programs from 0% to 100% in two years, with 70% locally sourced and that it will lead the UN Climate Change Conference COP28 (Conference of the Parties) meeting in Dubai, including special sessions on food systems featuring a school meals program on “Education Day.”
- **South Sudan** recognized the need to ensure that its school food program has a basis in legislation to ensure that is not a precarious ad hoc program.
- **Japan** has extended its school meal program to 100% of students and, as current president of the G-7, hosted a [G-7 statement on global food security](#) declaring, in part: “Supporting...broader social protection and safety net responses, including school meals programs...[which] can serve as safety nets.”
- **Sri Lanka** pledged to extend its school meals program to 100% of students by 2030.
- **Armenia** pledged to make its school meals program fully universal by 2030 after assuming full national financial responsibility from the World Food Program in 2023.
- **Tajikistan** pledged to cover 50% of students in its school meal program and retrofit all canteens by 2027.
- **Ghana** aims to entrench its school food program in law and making it fully universal by 2030.
- **Burundi** promised to reach 50% of students by 2027 and 100% by 2032 and intends to supplement programs with a second meal.
- **Lebanon** aims to increase coverage of its school meals program from 12% in 2023 to 100% by 2030.
- **Luxembourg** aimed to source 40% of school from organic sources and increase coverage to 100% of students as soon as possible.
- **Brazil’s** school food program feeds 40 million students daily and is guaranteed, free of charge by the country’s constitutional law. Its Vice-Minister of Education stressed the importance of children worldwide realizing the right to food at school. Brazil hosted a Latin American meeting of 23 countries on school food focusing on political will, local procurement, and efficiency. Brazilian government announced plans to join Finland, France and Kenya as Coalition co-chairs and announced its intention to host the second School Meals Coalition Summit in 2025.
- **African Union** requested to be co-chair of the Coalition.
- **Benin** coverage of school food programs rose from 31% in 2016 to 75% in 2023, 75% of which is sourced locally with universal coverage by 2026 with the budget escalations already decided in a draft law sent to Parliament to ensure program is permanent with nutrition standards.
- The **World Food Programme** is preparing a manual to help countries implement and improve school food programs and plays a central role in supporting the Coalition and organizing the Summits.
- **Finland** embraced the involvement of the private sector, but cited a data management program to simplify planning, not the problematic processed food companies that are so motivated to dilute nutrition standards are promote their own product sales.
- In the **United States**, 30 state legislatures have introduced bills to ensure that free school meal programs are universally accessible, regardless of ability to pay.
- **100+ nonprofit groups, including the Centre for Health Science and Law**, endorsed a [school food call to action](#).

Background and key themes

Putting the affordability of school food in context: According to the [State of School Feeding Worldwide 2022](#) report, national governments operating school food programs generally pay for them from national government budgets when a country's Gross National Income exceeds the equivalent of US\$3 per day, per capita. (Canada's GNI per capita is approximately US\$160 per day.) Approximately half of low-income countries (GNI of \$1 to \$3 per person per day) delivering school food programs rely on foreign government donor assistance from, for example, the World Food Programme. School meal programs are delivered by the Salvation Army on a charitable basis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of only three countries worldwide that has consistently been classified as a failed state for more than a decade. Some African countries spend half of their budgets paying foreign bank and government loan debts. One conference delegate quoted the late President of Tanzania as saying: "Am I supposed to starve children to pay my debts?" Despite the formidable financial struggles facing many countries, they appear to show more resolve than Canadian governments in aspiring to universal school food programs.

Nascent federal government program (funding & nutrition standards): The Canadian federal government announced plans to launch a national school food program in its 2019 federal budget, then the 2021 Liberal election platform (\$1 billion over five years beginning in 2022), then 2021 mandate letters for two ministers. Funds have not yet been appropriated. Nutrition standards and governance criteria to access to funds have not yet been developed. Many schools require retrofits to prepare and store food safely. A federal program would complement under-funded provincial programs, though governments of BC, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba recently boosted funds.

Conflicts of interest: Journalists should be mindful of efforts by food companies to influence school food programs when selecting news sources. Even in Canada, one of the original champions of a national school meal program, [Breakfast for Learning, a project of the women's magazine, Canadian Living](#), was later taken over by the [Loblaw grocer's subsidiary, Presidents Choice Children's Charity](#). Likewise, [Breakfast Club of Canada has been led by the CEO of McDonald's Canada](#) for several years. Neither is a member of the Coalition for Healthy School Food. In CHSL's opinion, news viewers and readers are entitled to be apprised of such conflicts of interest in news coverage and many would be surprised to know that such information was either not known to journalists or withheld during reporting. The Coalition for Healthy School Food urges [8 guiding principles, including conflict of interest safeguards](#).

About the Centre for Health Science and Law: CHSL is an Ottawa-based health advocacy organization focussed on food issues. Bill Jeffery, BA, LLB, is its Executive Director and General Legal Counsel he joined the Summit remotely. Since 2002, he has advocated the creation of a national, universal, publicly funded school food program with strong nutrition standards and conflict-of-interest safeguards to prevent food companies from steering spending, program, and policy decisions to favour their commercial ambitions. CHSL is a founding member of the Coalition for Healthy School Food and a member of its Steering Committee since its inception. CHSL is accredited by the UN Economic and Social Council and is one of 100 partner organization of the World Food Program's global School Meal Coalition. He can be reached in Ottawa at BillJeffery@HealthScienceAndLaw.ca & mobile/WhatsApp 1-613-565-2140.

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