

nutritionist, or nurse, and is based on Federal guidelines. This health screening is free to program applicants.

### Financing and Administration

WIC is a Federal grant program that provides each State with a set amount of money to serve its most needy WIC population. Local public or nonprofit private health or welfare agencies, which operate the program, apply to their respective States or jurisdictions to qualify for funds. Individual participants apply to one of the approximately 10,000 local clinics that provide WIC services.

In FY 1996, Federal program costs were \$3.69 billion. (This amount includes the cost for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This program, which was established in 1992, provides WIC participants additional coupons to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets.)

### National School Lunch Program

The National School Lunch program is a federally assisted meal program, which operates in public and private schools and residential child care institutions, provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children.

The National School Lunch Act of 1946 created the modern school lunch program. By the end of its first year, about 7.1 million children were participating in the program. Since the program began, more than 180 billion lunches have been served.

### Benefits

More than 94,000 schools and residential child care institutions participate in the National School Lunch program. In FY 1996, more than 25 million children each day got their lunch through the program.

Most of the support USDA provides to schools comes in the form of cash reimbursements for meals served. Schools in the lunch program get cash subsidies and donated commodities from USDA for each meal they serve. The reimbursement is highest for meals served to students who qualify to receive their meals free, and the lowest reimbursement is for students who pay full price. The current cash reimbursement rates are: Free meals, \$1.8375; reduced-price meals, \$1.4375; and full-price meals, \$0.1775.

Schools can charge no more than 40 cents for a reduced-price lunch. USDA sets no limit on the amount they can charge for full-price meals. Higher reimbursement rates are in effect for Alaska and Hawaii.

In addition to cash reimbursements, schools receive commodity foods, called "entitlement" foods, at an annually adjusted per meal rate (15 cents in 1997) for each meal they serve. Schools can also receive "bonus" commodities when they are available from surplus stocks purchased by USDA under price support programs. About 17% of the total dollar value of food for

the lunch program is provided directly by USDA as commodities. Schools purchase the remaining 83% from their own vendors.

### Eligibility

Any child at a participating school (94,000) may purchase a meal through the lunch program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

Children from families with incomes over 185% (currently \$28,860 for a family of four) pay full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent. Local school food authorities set their own prices for full-price meals.

### Financing and Administration

The National School Lunch program is usually administered by State education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with local school districts. USDA's Food and Consumer Service administers the program at the Federal level. School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the lunch program receive cash subsidies and donated commodities from USDA for each meal they serve. In FY 1996, total program costs were approximately \$5.3 billion, exclusive of State administrative costs and bonus commodity donations.

### School Breakfast Program

The School Breakfast program is a Federal program that provides States with cash assistance for nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential child care institutions. The program began as a pilot project in 1966, and was made permanent in 1975.

### Benefits

Over 6 million children in more than 65,000 schools start their day with the School Breakfast program. In 1996, an average of 6.6 million children participated in the program every day. Of those, 5.7 million received their meals free or at a reduced price. The schools submit a claim for meals served to their State agency. USDA reimburses the State, which in turn reimburses the local school food authority. For school year 1996-97, the Federal Government reimburse schools at the following rates: \$1.0175 per meal for free breakfasts; 71.75 cents for reduced-price breakfasts; and 19.75 cents for paid breakfasts.

Schools may qualify for higher "severe need" reimbursements if a specified percentage of their meals are served free or at a reduced price. The severe need payments are 20 cents higher than the normal reimbursements for free and reduced-price breakfasts. More than 60% of the breakfasts served in the School