The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federally funded nutrition assistance program designed to provide healthful meals and snacks to children and adults receiving day care. Training staff involved in the CACFP is viewed as one way of accomplishing the programs’ objective.

Training, according to Webster’s Dictionary, is the “act, process, or method of one that trains and the state of being trained.” The purpose of training child care center staff involved in the CACFP is to educate with the intent of improving the services offered to children and to enhance the way in which the organization operates.

What better way to acquire the information than going directly to those associated with providing meals and snacks. Researchers from the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division (ARD), talked to child care center directors and surveyed a national random sample to collect their views and opinions of training needs for those involved in the CACFP.

The information presented in this Insight highlights the results of a two-phase research study. The study results will assist NFSMI, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), state agencies, and training consultants in developing and presenting training materials that meet the needs of child care directors and staff members involved in the daily operations of child care centers serving meals to children within the guidelines of the CACFP. Also, training materials that already exist will be highlighted in this Insight in an effort to better serve and inform those child care directors and staff members desiring available training materials.

**FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: PHASE I**

A total of 38 child care center directors was invited to participate in Phase I of the study. Conducting focus groups proved to be an excellent method of collecting pertinent information related to training needs. Participants were willing to discuss their concerns and desires for training. They also expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to come together to let their concerns be known and network with other child care center directors. Several of the directors openly expressed an appreciation for having a supportive state agency staff that provided appropriate training and was available on an as-needed basis.
The focus group participants identified 35 training needs for child care center directors and staff involved in the CACFP. Commonalities gleaned from the training needs centered around paperwork, nutrition, and training issues. The researcher used the 35 training needs to develop a survey questionnaire that would be used in Phase II of the study. (See Tables I and II).

Overall comments made by focus group participants provided information about their overall thoughts, attitudes, and opinions of the CACFP. Listed are frequent comments made by child care center directors participating in the focus group sessions:

“The time required to document and complete our paperwork is overwhelming, but without the documentation we would have audit violations.”

“Is there any way training could be provided to automate the paperwork process and reduce the amount of time a manual system requires?”

“Without the reimbursement provided through the CACFP, we would have to skimp on the type, amount, and quality of food provided to the child.”

“Our staff turnover requires ongoing training; therefore, we need a variety of training delivery methods.”

“Training is not always conveniently located and the cost associated with the training is difficult for our center to cover.”

“We need training that will meet the needs of the new inexperienced director and staff, as well as training for those experienced in the CACFP.”

“I would like to see more hands-on training; the videos are nice, but I believe in hands-on training.”

**CACFP PHASE I: FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH**

- Invited 38 child care center directors to participate
- Obtained representation from twelve states (Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Nevada, California, and Arizona)
- Conducted 4 two-hour focus group discussion sessions in geographically different USDA regions
- Collected information in a systematic approach, using semi-structured, open-ended questions, each having a distinctive function in the focus group research process
- Identified thirty-five training needs for child care directors and facility staff
- Generated data to assist in the development of a four-part survey questionnaire

**CACFP PHASE II: SURVEY RESEARCH**

- Selected a proportional, stratified, random sampling of 1505 child care center directors
- Mailed surveys March 1, 2000
- Mailed a reminder postcard two weeks after survey mailing to all participants
- Generated a 54% return from the national sample, some states rendering a 100% return
- Collected top five training needs for child care facility directors and staff involved in the CACFP
- Collected information that would profile child care centers and directors
The purpose of the survey was to have child care center directors prioritize the top five training needs that are most important to those involved in the CACFP. Also, they were asked to respond to a group of questions that provided general information about themselves and the child care programs they were operating. Fifty-four percent of those surveyed completed and returned the questionnaire by the deadline. Tables I and II present training needs in descending order. Additional highlights providing “stats” from the survey are presented in “Fact Finder.”

Top five training needs for child care center directors in descending order:

- USDA food program (CACFP) regulations/requirements
- Record keeping/documentation
- Preparing for an audit/review
- Creditable and non-creditable foods
- Menu planning with the child in mind

Operating a child care center is “big business” and may be intimidating if child care directors do not know or have an understanding of the regulations and requirements associated with the CACFP. Four of the top five training needs are associated with the “bottom-line” and have the potential of directly impacting the operational stability of a child care center. Not only are child care directors responsible for serving healthful meals that children like, they must also command an understanding of the CACFP regulations and documentation requirements and provide proof of a well-run program upon request by the governing agency. The top five training needs (listed in Table I) point out that directors have a real desire for training that would assist them in managing a financially solvent and operationally sound child care program that complies with federal, state, and local regulations.
### Training Needs of Child Care Directors (N=691°)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Training</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USDA food program (CACFP) regulations/requirements</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record keeping/documentation</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for an audit/review</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creditable and non-creditable foods</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menu planning with the child in mind</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal pattern requirements</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost effective program management</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning affordable meals</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and reduced price meals application processing</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing food waste</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management techniques</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition education materials targeted for parents</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing new foods to children</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety procedures</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic and cultural menu planning</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing computer skills</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition education materials for children</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>09.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Training Needs for Child Care Facility Staff (N=691°)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Training</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food safety procedures</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealtime, a positive experience</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing new foods to children</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal pattern requirements</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing food waste</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA food program (CACFP) regulations/requirements</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record keeping/documentation</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menu planning with the child in mind</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creditable and non-creditable foods</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family style meal service</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food storage procedures</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition education materials for children</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food preparation techniques</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning affordable meals</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management techniques</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic and cultural menu planning</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training the adult</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>09.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant and toddler menu planning</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>07.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition education materials targeted for parents</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>07.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Respondents chose more than one category.
FACT FINDER

The following facts are “stats in the March 2000 NFSMI research study, “Training Needs Assessment of Child Care Center Directors and Staff Involved in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).”

- **46%**
  What percentage of child care centers serve after-school snacks?

- **17%**
  What percentage of child care centers receive USDA commodities?

- **57%**
  What percentage of facility staff receive training 1 to 5 hours every six months?

- **47%**
  What percentage of facility staff desire on premises group training?

- **76%**
  What percentage of directors have managed the CACFP for less than one year?

- **58%**
  What percentage of directors have been employed in the child care profession for 1 to 10 years?

- **53%**
  What percentage of child care directors has a baccalaureate degree or higher?

- **92%**
  What percentage of centers have VCR and TV monitors’ accessible for training.

- **44%**
  What percentage of child care directors are 41 to 55 years of age.

Top five training needs for child care facility staff in descending order:

- Food safety procedures
- Mealtime, a positive experience
- Introducing new foods to children
- Meal pattern requirements
- Preventing food waste

Child care directors responded by prioritizing the top five training needs for the facility staff in areas relating to service of safe and wholesome food children like, while following the meal pattern requirements established by the CACFP. In doing so, meals served to children should be in an environment that would support a pleasant dining experience while having minimal food waste. Of those directors responding to the questionnaire, 31% to 40% view these training needs as important.

PRACTICAL USE OF THIS INFORMATION

The data collected from this study will assist NFSMI, USDA, state agencies, training developers, and child care directors in providing training that is valued by the child care practitioner. Additional information hinted that all too often, child care practitioners are not aware of existing training materials that could aid their efforts in providing healthful meals and services to children within the guidelines of the CACFP. Marketing available training materials and services to the child care practitioner would lead to a better informed child care director and assist in meeting training needs at the local center. See “For More Information” for training material available through NFSMI.

Focus group participants felt that child care training professionals should develop two levels of training curriculum to better meet the needs of entry level directors and those directors with experience in the CACFP. In doing so, program goals would be better served. Also, training professionals would be advised to schedule training to meet diverse scheduling and location.
For More Information

In an effort to inform child care professionals of available training resources, we have provided the following “Training Resources” accessible to you through NFSMI. An example of a wonderful training resource that is full of valuable information is the CARE Connection. The CARE Connection is a ten-lesson series containing 48 mini-lessons for those working in a CACFP. Training topics include an overview of the CACFP, basic program requirements, sanitation and food safety, meal pattern requirements, basic meal planning, food preparation techniques, and time-saving techniques. Menu Time Memo for Child Care, a fact sheet is published six times per year. Current topics affecting the CACFP are discussed in each fact sheet. For more information about the child care products listed under “Training Resources,” call 1-800-321-3054 or visit our Web site at www.nfsmi.org.

TRAINING RESOURCES:


National Food Service Management Institute. (1995). What’s Cooking? (Future publications will be titled Mealtime Memo for Child Care)


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Information about this and other topics may be obtained by contacting the

NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE
The University of Mississippi
Telephone: 800-321-3054
Order Number R115-00

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This publication has been produced by the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division, located at The University of Southern Mississippi, with headquarters at The University of Mississippi. Funding for the Institute has been provided with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service to The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the University of Mississippi or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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