



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Minnesota Vikings, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and Second Harvest Heartland to Help Secure 200,000 Meals for Hungry Minnesota Children This Summer**

#### **Vikings Children's Fund Summer Lunch Program aims to increase participation in the USDA's Summer Food Service Program**

**MINNEAPOLIS—(May 27, 2009)**—The Minnesota Vikings, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and Second Harvest Heartland today announced the official launch of the [Vikings Children's Fund Summer Lunch Program](http://missingmeals.org/summer-feeding/) (<http://missingmeals.org/summer-feeding/>), which will help secure up to 200,000 additional meals for Minnesota children this summer. The Vikings have pledged \$92,000 to the effort, which is helping to expand the USDA-sponsored Summer Food Service Program.

“The Vikings Children's Fund aims to positively impact the well-being of our children and help provide them with the means to be healthy, strong and vibrant members of our community as they grow,” said Steve LaCroix, vice president of sales and marketing, chief marketing officer with the Minnesota Vikings. “Proper nutrition will always be essential to a child's well-being, which is why the Vikings are honored to participate in this program with Hunger Solutions Minnesota and Second Harvest Heartland.”

During the school year, 270,000 Minnesota school children receive free or reduced-price meals but just 54,000 children receive free or reduced-price meals during the summer months, according to the Minnesota Department of Education, which administers both the National School Lunch Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

“There is an incredible discrepancy in the number of children receiving nourishing meals during the summer months compared to the school year,” said Alice Seagren, Minnesota's Education Commissioner. “We know that many Minnesota families struggle to provide healthy and satisfying meals for their children during the summer, which is why the USDA's Summer Food Service Program is so critical. We are grateful for the generosity, ingenuity and leadership the Minnesota Vikings, Hunger Solutions Minnesota and Second Harvest Heartland have provided in improving the participation rate in Minnesota.”

One of the leading contributing factors to low participation rates in the Summer Food Service program in Minnesota is a lack of sites that serve food. While more than 2,000 schools statewide served free or reduced-price meals during the 2007/2008 school year, only 370 sites served them during the summer of 2008. The Vikings Children's Fund Summer Lunch Program is helping to expand the Summer Food Service Program by using grant money from the Minnesota Vikings to secure new meal sites and expand the reach of existing sites.

“A lack of access to the food they need is one of the greatest barriers to Minnesota children participating in the Summer Food Service program,” said Rob Zeaske, executive director of Second Harvest Heartland. “Already, the Vikings Children’s Fund Summer Lunch Program has added more than 40 new summer meal sites statewide, which will help us significantly in achieving our goal of securing up to 200,000 additional meals for eligible children this summer.”

According to Zeaske, securing an additional 200,000 meals for Minnesota children this summer will result in a 14 percent increase in the number of total free or reduced-price meals served when school is out. In 2008, 1.4 million meals were served in Minnesota through the Summer Food Service Program. The Vikings Children’s Fund Summer Lunch Program aims to increase that number to 1.6 million.

“We know that the need for hunger relief has never been greater. Weak economic conditions and rising food insecurity, especially as it affects child hunger, make it absolutely essential that we increase access to safety-net nutrition programs like the Summer Food Service Program,” said Colleen Moriarty, executive director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. “The Vikings Children’s Fund Summer Lunch Program is a wonderful example of how collaborative efforts can truly benefit those in need.”

For more information on the Vikings Children’s Fund Summer Lunch Program, visit <http://www.hungersolutions.org/vikings-childrens-fund-summer-lunch-program>.

### **About the Vikings Children’s Fund**

The Vikings Children’s Fund is a means for Minnesota Vikings players, coaches, staff and their families to focus their community support. The organization’s mission is to rally the resources of the Vikings, the University of Minnesota Department of Pediatrics, the corporate community, and fans in an effort to support the many needs of children’s charities throughout the Upper Midwest. Since its inception, the Vikings Children’s Fund has distributed nearly \$8 million in grants. To learn more, visit [www.vikings.com](http://www.vikings.com).

### **About Hunger Solutions Minnesota**

Hunger Solutions Minnesota (HSM) is a comprehensive hunger relief organization that works to end hunger in Minnesota. The organization takes action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting agencies that provide food to those in need, advancing sound public policy, and guiding grassroots advocacy. HSM advocates for the maximum use of all federal public nutrition dollars available and works to improve low-income Minnesotans’ access to all nutrition programs. HSM recommends that people struggling with hunger and poverty screen themselves for public program benefits by visiting [www.bridgetobenefits.org](http://www.bridgetobenefits.org).

### **About Second Harvest Heartland**

Second Harvest Heartland is the Upper Midwest’s largest hunger-relief organization, with a mission of ending hunger through community partnerships. 41 million pounds of grocery products were distributed last year to hungry seniors, families and children through more than 1,000 non-profit member agencies and programs, including food shelves, soup kitchens, shelters, senior centers, faith-based organizations, and children’s after-school programs serving 59 counties in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. For each \$1 donated, Second Harvest Heartland can distribute more than \$9 worth of grocery products for those in need. For further information, visit [www.2harvest.org](http://www.2harvest.org) or call 651.484.5117.

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