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SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS AND THE AMERICAN DIET: EXPLORING A CONTESTED FOOD TERRAIN

Rebecca Som Castellano

University of Kentucky, somcastellano@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS AND THE AMERICAN DIET: EXPLORING A CONTESTED FOOD TERRAIN

This study examines the social actors and issues involved in constructing and contesting the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), in order to identify whose interests are involved in shaping an institution which transmits dietary habits and food knowledge to the nation's children through the mid day meal.

For the historical analysis, I collected data from historical accounts of the NSLP, congressional hearings, laws, and newspaper articles. For the contemporary analysis, I interviewed 15 actors representing organizations key to federal NLSP policy making. To frame my analysis, I utilize a model of power, based on the work of Arts and Van Tatenhove (2004), and the work of Burstein (1991), who describes issue creation and movement in policy domains.

The key findings of this study are that actors with the most financial resources (e.g. the food industry) do not automatically achieve their interests in the policy making process. In fact, at key times of contestation, economically powerful actors form alliances and adjust their agenda in reaction to the use of other forms of power by economically weaker actors. This information can help economically weaker actors (e.g. the farm to school movement) understand how to increase their influence in the policy domain.

KEYWORDS: SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM, POLICY, POWER ANALYSIS, FOOD
POLITICS, FOOD KNOWLEDGE

Rebecca Som Castellano

Signature

9/19/2009

Date

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS AND THE AMERICAN DIET:
EXPLORING A CONTESTED FOOD TERRAIN

BY

REBECCA SOM CASTELLANO

DR. KEIKO TANAKA

Director of Thesis

DR. KEIKO TANAKA

Director of Graduate Studies

9/19/2009

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THESIS

REBECCA SOM CASTELLANO

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

2009

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS AND THE AMERICAN DIET:
EXPLORING A CONTESTED FOOD TERRAIN

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Rebecca Som Castellano

Director: Dr. Keiko Tanaka, Associate Professor of Sociology

Lexington, Kentucky

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Chapter 1

I. Introduction

In 2008, more than 30.5 million children received school lunches each day through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a permanent federally legislated program since 1946 (USDA FNS 2009b). The cost of the program for the fiscal year of 2008 was \$9.3 billion dollars (USDA FNS 2009b). Ideally, federally regulated school lunch policy would have the ultimate goal of providing the most nutritionally beneficial meals to all children. And, in fact, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) website states that school lunches should be ‘nutritionally balanced’ and partially or completely subsidized, so that all children can receive the mid day school meal (USDA FNS 2009b). But, when a multitude of diverse actors become engaged in policy making, policy outcomes do not necessarily match such basic policy goals.

II. Scope of Study

The objective of this thesis is to understand the legislative outcomes of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) by examining the formation of actors and issues involved in the NSLP policy making process. Understanding the outcomes of the policy making process is important because such outcomes directly impact the dietary health and food knowledge of school children in the United States. In this thesis, I have analyzed the key actors and issues at important historical periods, starting with the 1940s, as well as the current reauthorization process, which began in 2004, in order to achieve the above stated objective.

Research Questions

The primary questions which guide this research project are: (a) Who are the key actors in the historical and current process of developing and transforming the National School Lunch Program in the United States? (b) What key issues were/are important for these social actors (or how did/do they frame the issue of school lunch)?, and (c) Whose interest's were/are represented in NSLP policy outcomes?

In order to answer these research questions, I have conducted a historical and contemporary analysis of the actors and issues in the NSLP policy domain. I apply a theoretical model of power in the policy making process in order to understand the relationships between actors in the NSLP policy domain. For the historical analysis, I identified key periods of change through review of historical accounts of the program (the policy formation era, the hunger lobby era, the privatization era, and the turn to nutrition era). From there, I identified the actors involved in the NSLP at these key periods. I then conducted a content analysis of congressional documents as well as newspaper articles and speeches, in order to understand the issues of debate and contestation involved in the NSLP at these key time periods, as well as what the subsequent legislative outcomes were. For the contemporary analysis, I interviewed several social actors central to the policy making process to understand the current important issues and players in the construction and contestation of the program (see Appendix 1 for a list of interviewees). Through this analysis, I aimed to identify whose economic interests, political motivations and moral values have been engaged in the policy making process, and how and why actors have achieved legislative success.

Goals of Study

By answering the above research questions, this research aims to achieve three specific goals. First, I aim to develop a historical understanding of how school lunch program policy has been developed, transformed and contested in the United States. Second, I aim to use this information in developing an analysis of the current social actors involved in constructing and contesting the NSLP. Finally, by revealing the varied actors and interests involved in the construction and implementation of school lunch programs, as well as those involved in contesting the current school lunch program, this research hopes to shed light on the points of debate and contestation around the NSLP, which in turn suggests who is benefiting from the program, and how the outcomes of the program match the programs intended outcomes and mission. Ideally, I hope that this research will contribute to an increased understanding of how key actors at the federal level are impacting food knowledge and dietary patterns, via a national policy that directly influences what Americans eat.

Hypotheses

I have developed three hypotheses for this project. First, there are social actors with different, but interrelated interests. The NSLP policy outcomes represent the negotiation which occurs between these actors. Specific interests include utilizing the NSLP to (a) feed poor children of our nation, (b) provide healthy meals for all children, (c) accommodate the interests of the food industry or commodity agriculture, and (d) expand the sustainable agriculture movement through farm to school initiatives. My second hypothesis is that the NSLP policy negotiation process has changed over time, involving different social actors and interests at different time periods to varying degrees.

Finally, I hypothesize that macro level changes have impacted how social actors are arranged and how negotiation processes take place in the NSLP policy domain.

III. Why Study the School Lunch?

Changes in the production and distribution of agricultural products appear to be coinciding with changes in what and how foods are consumed. Heffernan and Hendrickson (Heffernan *et al.* 1999; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007; Hendrickson *et al.* 2001) reveal that the food and agriculture system has become increasingly concentrated in ownership and control: few people are operating larger farms, processing plants, and distribution outlets. This is problematic because agricultural concentration impacts who has power in determining what and how food is produced, who produces it, where and under what conditions it is produced and who will get to eat (Heffernan *et al.* 2001). In parallel, between 1977 and 1996, food consumption from outside of the home has risen from 18 percent to 32 percent, in terms of total calories (Lin 2008). This change coincides with changes in the types of foods consumed. In 2000, total meat consumption was 195 pounds per person per year, up from 138 pounds per person per year in 1950. The average annual consumption of fats and oils has risen by 67 percent between 1950 and 2000 (USDA 2003).

One of the most concerning examples of our changing dietary habits is the dramatic rise in childhood obesity rates. According to data from the National Center for Health Statistics, (2006), children between the ages of six and eleven have seen obesity rates rise from 4 percent in 1971-1974 to 15.1 percent in 1999-2000, to 18.8 percent in 2003-2004. Among children between the ages of twelve and nineteen obesity rates have risen from 6.1 percent in 1971-1974, to 14.8 percent in 1999-2000, to 17.4 percent in

2003-2004 (National Center for Health Statistics 2006). The statistics on adolescent obesity are the most concerning, because, as Schneider (2000: 959) states, “adolescent obesity has recently been shown to be an even better predictor of adult obesity, morbidity, and mortality than childhood obesity.” There is further evidence that availability and accessibility to quality food is related to inequalities based on socioeconomic status, race, gender, and age. The poor, both in rural and urban areas, are less able to access quality and affordable foods due to the lack of food outlets (Lang and Rayner 2002; Morton *et al.* 2005).

In light of these changes in food production, processing and distribution, which are occurring in tandem with society wide changes in food consumption, I assert that it is important to understand the federal food policies which link production/distribution and consumption of food. We learn from a young age important information about food knowledge and develop lasting dietary habits. There are three noticeable ways that young people are socialized about food: (1) through our family and friends, (2) through various forms of media, and (3) through community based socializing settings such as schools and churches.

This research focuses on the third way that young people experience food socialization. In the United States, the NSLP is one location where we can examine institutional processes that generate socio-culturally embedded knowledge and practices about food. The reach of the NSLP not only impacts what and how children eat, but has additionally extended into the household through the transfer of food knowledge and dietary habits from children to their parents (Levine 2008). The generation of knowledge and practices about food through the NSLP can be linked to the various social actors who

have historically been influential in designing, implementing, promoting, and challenging NSLP policy.

One of the most obvious actors involved in the NSLP are those promoting agricultural interests. As mentioned above, the food and agriculture system is experiencing consolidation of ownership and control at the levels of production, processing, and distribution (Heffernan *et al.* 1999; Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007; Hendrickson *et al.* 2001). These structural changes are “so strong that they often undermine the desired and expected outcomes of much of the agricultural policy developed” (Heffernan *et al.* 1999: 1). The NSLP is, in part, an agricultural policy because it regulates the purchase and use of US agricultural products. Further, the NSLP utilizes the agricultural industry as its primary supplier of food for the program. Thus, the policy of the NSLP is in part impacted and undermined by concentration in the agricultural sector, and by those representing agricultural interests in the policy domain.

Actors interested in promoting food access for hungry children have also played an important historical role in NSLP program policy. Such actors have undoubtedly shaped not only who the program serves, but also how poor children are cared for and perceived. Further, those promoting access have aligned with others, such as the private food industry, who have helped them achieve and retain favorable legislative outcomes in the NSLP policy domain.

Those interested in promoting nutrition have also been engaged in the NSLP policy domain since its inception as a permanently legislated Act. Nutritionists have played an important role in influencing standards and regulations for the food served in the school food environment. Nutrition professionals have not, however, always been on

the side of promoting nutrition outside of the interests of the food industry, but have often engaged in compromises with those promoting the interests of the private sector.

A recent entrant to the NSLP policy domain includes actors advocating for incorporation of sustainable agriculture principles in schools. This movement calls for promotion of locally grown and consumed food products. Due to the location of the school lunch program within the greater context of agricultural and trade policy, the school lunch program has emerged as a location of contestation between those advocating for conventional/mainstream agrifood systems, and those advocating for alternative/sustainable agrifood systems.

IV. Organization of this Thesis

This thesis proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I review relevant literature on the topic of school lunches, and I introduce the methodology employed for this project, including the methods I used to gather data, and the theoretical framework I utilize to describe and explain what the data reveals. Chapter 3 provides a historical overview of the NSLP, covering the years leading up to the permanent legislation of the program in 1946, and continuing to current day. From there, I move to the historical analysis in Chapter 4, where I describe four historical time periods, reviewing the key actors and issues involved in each of those time periods, as well as the important outcomes represented in the changing legislation. In Chapter 4, I find that during the four periods of historic change (the policy making era, the hunger lobby era, the privatization era, and the turn to nutrition era), social actors were able to achieve positive legislative outcomes by increasing their relational and structural power, thus establishing dispositional power, and then using this dispositional power to in turn impact relational and structural power,

ultimately impacting change in the policy domain. In Chapter 5, the contemporary analysis of the NSLP is undertaken. This chapter reveals that historically powerful actors are using their dispositional power to impact relational and structural power, specifically by forming coalitions and making compromises with other actors. In Chapter 6, I discuss my interpretation of the findings, and provide my conclusion.

The primary finding of this thesis is that the model of power I describe in Chapter 2 helps demonstrate the relationships between key actors in the NSLP policy domain. This dynamic model of power helps us understand why it is not always the most financially powerful actors who achieve success in the legislative process, and why powerful actors form coalitions and made compromises with others. As the next four chapters will show, this model helps explains why, despite the wishes of powerful southern Democrats, the hunger lobby was able to achieve success in the 1970s, or why the private food industry, by far the most financially powerful actor in the policy domain, is forming coalitions with nutrition advocates and changing their product offerings in the school food environment.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methods

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I review relevant literature in order to locate this project within the scholarly work predating this research. Next, I describe the theoretical framework for this research, utilizing Bas Arts and Jan Van Tatenhove's (2004) work on power and the policy making process as well as Paul Burstein's (1991) work on issue formation and movement of issues within policy agendas. The chapter concludes with a description of the methods employed for this research project.

II. Literature Review

In this section, I review much of the existing scholarly literature which I have found on the topic of school feeding and national school lunch policy. I examine several topics including, (1) historical review, (2) effectiveness of school feeding, (3) child health outcomes and the school food environment, (4) school feeding, sustainable agriculture, and farm to school movements, and (5) legislative action and school feeding. I conclude this section with a discussion of what we can learn from this literature, what limitations exist in this literature, and the gap in the literature in which my thesis aims to fill.

A. Historical Review

There are a number of scholarly contributions on the topic of school feeding, written from a historical perspective. Some primarily aim to develop historical overviews of the NSLP. For example, Gunderson (1971) reviews the program up until 1971, with the intention of providing an overview for the United States Department of Agriculture, while Levine (2008), a professor of history, discusses the development of the NSLP, paying particular attention to how social reform and public policy impacted the

NSLP. Others provide historical review of the NSLP in order to create context for their research (Lautenschlager 2006; Morgan and Sonnino 2008). Lautenschlager's work focuses on the topic of lunches in the United States, and includes school lunches as a small part of her research. Morgan and Sonnino, whose work is addressed in more detail below, study the role of school lunch programs in promoting sustainable agriculture. There are also authors who examine more generally the historical topic of child nutrition, and address the school environment as a part of their research (Levenstein 2003; Poppendieck 1999).

B. Effectiveness of School Feeding

Several contributions to the literature fall under the broad heading of effectiveness of school feeding. In 1905, Miller published an article describing how a specific high school lunch program in Chicago effectively dealt with the inability of students to consume a healthy noon-time meal (Miller 1905). In this lunch program, a lunchroom was constructed, and lunches were prepared by a local women's club. Miller concluded that while some found the provisioning of school lunch problematic, because it placed unnecessary responsibility in the hands of the school board, this specific school lunch was a model program, which improved the health and scholarship of students.

In 1958, Lissner applauded the accomplishments of the then 11 year old NSLP program for improving nourishment for students as well as providing a market for agricultural products. Lissner's (1958) work called for examination of the issue of child hunger at a deeper level, by addressing the socioeconomic conditions which hungry children were living in. He asserted that "a society that puts off the solution of its social and economic problems is obliged to mitigate the effects of its ignorance and reaction by

charity” (Lissner 1958:144). He saw the school lunch as a band-aid fix which did not address deeper causes of childhood malnutrition.

Current research on the effectiveness of school feeding includes publications from the USDA. For example, a comprehensive report published in July of 2008, titled “The National School Lunch Program: Background, Trends, and Issues” addresses the various challenges that program administrators face, such as “tradeoffs between nutritional quality of foods served, costs, and participation, as well as between program access and program integrity” (Ralston *et al.* 2008). A publication by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc titled *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment-III* demonstrated that during the 2004-2005 school year, most school meals met USDA target goals for nutrients over the course of a typical week, and that saturated fat intake decreased since the 1998-1999 school year (Mathematica Policy Research, Inc 2009).

A forthcoming book written by sociologist Janet Poppendieck examines the historical and contemporary dynamics of the NSLP, as well as the school breakfast program, in order to understand why the school food environment in the United States exists in its current state (Poppendieck forthcoming). The overarching objective of this work is to understand the (in)effectiveness of the NSLP in achieving its stated goals both historically and currently. In this research, Poppendieck takes a social constructionist approach, and focuses on a far broader topic than the present thesis does. This piece has not yet been published, and it is therefore not possible to fully review its contents, and its implications for this paper.

C. Child Health Outcomes and the School Food Environment

A separate body of literature examines not only the effectiveness of school feeding programs, but further examines how the school food environment promotes or inhibits the health of children. Scheele (1948), for example, discusses the relationship between school lunch programs and national health. He asserts that while the school lunch program (in effect for two years at that time) was making important improvements in children's health, programs should also be enacted which take into consideration the health service needs, specifically the nutritional needs, of the entire nation (Scheele 1948).

More recent contributions which provide an examination of the school food environment on children's health comes from the fields of public health, public policy, and medicine, as well as from the USDA, the federal agency tasked with administering the program. For example, the publication "Ecological Predictors and Developmental Outcomes of Persistence Childhood Overweight," published by the USDA, suggests that "overweight children progressed less than their non-overweight peers did in reading and math achievement [...] and were rated lower on academic and socio-emotional factors by their teachers and themselves" (Gable, Britt-Rankin, and Krull 2008). Participation in USDA school feeding programs (including the NSLP) were included as variables in this study. The report makes the connection that proper nutrition, which can be provided through programs like the NSLP, have a role on the performance of students in the classroom.

Other research on the topic of the school food environment and health outcomes examine the increased role of competitive foods at schools. Some research has compared

the health of NSLP meals versus competitive foods, while other research focuses solely on the health impacts of competitive foods. Competitive foods include foods sold during the lunch period, as well as at non-lunch times, through vending machines and a la carte stands.

The Mathematica publication discussed above shows that competitive foods are widely available in schools across the nation, particularly in secondary schools. Further, it demonstrates that NSLP participants consume more nutrients than nonparticipants, and competitive foods are consumed less by NSLP participants than nonparticipants (Mathematica Policy Research, Inc 2009). Similar findings were provided by Wechsler et al., who demonstrate that competitive foods, which are often low in nutritional quality, high in calories, and often considered “snack foods”, are widely present in schools across the nation (Wechsler *et al.* 2001).

Weber Cullen, et al (2000) compare the fruit and vegetable intake of students who only have access to the NSLP, versus those who also have access to a snack bar. Their findings reveal that at school, students with less educated parents consume more fruits and vegetables, and that those students with access to the snack bar consumed less fruits and vegetables. In other words, students who are given money to purchase their own food at school generally pick the less healthy options sold through vending machines and a la carte stands, while poor students who are eligible for free and reduced price lunches are forced to eat the NSLP offerings. In such scenarios, it is the lower income students who are actually receiving foods of higher nutritional quality. The negative repercussions of this situation include the identification of lower income children among

their peers, as their lack of choice in the school food environment singles them out (Weber Cullen *et al.* 2000).

Crooks (2003), an anthropologist, examines the role of competitive foods relative to nutrition and income for schools in Eastern Kentucky. She finds that overweight children consume more daily servings of fats, oils and sweets, which are more prevalent in snack foods, like those offered in the competitive food environment. Crooks (2003) found that snack foods are often substituted for more healthy food offerings, leading to an obvious reduction of nutritional intake. Further “school is a primary source of information about good nutrition, thus offering snack foods in school provides a contradictory message, one that can affect snack consumption outside of school and has the potential to undermine both short-and long-term nutrition goals” (Crooks 2003). An additional finding was that despite the fact that parents, teachers, and administrators were aware of the negative impacts of competitive foods, they relied heavily on them to finance school supplies and activities, which allowed them to offer programs to all children, regardless of socioeconomic status. Many schools enter into agreements with soft drink companies to sell only their products, in exchange for capital improvements to schools.

Willey *et al.* also examine the impact of competitive foods sold at schools on childhood nutrition, and suggest that while children need *opportunities to supplement main meals* schools should limit the current trend in offering snacks high in sugar and fat. Further, they assert that the competition between these snacks foods and school meals is detrimental to student’s health because it provides unhealthy foods in the school food environment and increases stigma for low income students (Willey *et al.* 2000). Dietz &

Gortmaker similarly suggest that the school lunch and competitive foods offerings are a learning moment as they are occurring in the teaching environment. They assert that this opportunity is particularly important given current trends in childhood obesity and the need to teach healthy eating practices (Dietz and Gortmaker 2001).

Sociologist Anthony Winson also examines the school food environment in order to understand the issue of obesity in the childhood population (Winson 2008). He found that the availability of unhealthy foods were high in the schools he examined, and that students were actively choosing these products over more healthy options. Winson attributes structural issues such as advertising targeting youth, the use of vending machines to generate income for schools, and the close proximity of fast food restaurants to schools to the unhealthy nature of the school food environment. It is clear from this group of scholars that there are serious obstacles to students consuming a nutritious meal at school.

D. School Feeding, Sustainable Agriculture and Farm to School Movements

Moving from nutrition to food production, there has been a recent expansion in literature which examines the relationship between the school feeding environment and the sustainable agriculture movement. For example, Morgan and Soninno (2008) examine how school food environments provide opportunity for the movement towards ‘green’ and sustainable development around the world. They discuss changes in school feeding in New York City, London, Rome, as well as rural parts of the United Kingdom, and school feeding in the developing world, specifically Africa, which has been initiated through programs sponsored by the UN. Morgan and Soninno (2008) assert that school lunch programs are helping address malnutrition in developing countries and the obesity

concerns in developed nations. Morgan and Soninno (2008) assert that the ‘Green Revolution’ could be extended if such programs thought beyond procurement, and more towards “larger, more significant social and spatial scales” (200). They further suggest that “the public plate could be harnessed by the state, particularly a Green State, to honor the most basic of all human rights: the right to food” (Morgan and Soninno 2008: 200). They call for an increased ethic of care, at both the global and local levels. Through such efforts, they suggest that ‘significant’ benefits of sustainable agriculture could be realized around the world.

There is further literature examining the efficacy of farm to school programs. This research often examines the farm to school movement’s role in engaging in Lyson’s concept of ‘civic agriculture,’ embedding ideas of sustainability in the school environment, and providing increased nutrition to children (Lyson 2004; Vogt and Kaiser 2006). The farm to school movement is seen as offering solution to multiple ‘problems’, including: (1) the perceived threat on child health observed largely through increased obesity in the childhood population, (2) the increasing industrialization and globalization of the international food system, and (3) the reduction of ‘food miles’ which is seen as a way to improve environmental conditions. Recent scholarship on farm to school programs include the work of Vallianatos, Gottlieb, and Haase (2004) and Vogt and Kaiser (2006), who examine the ways that farm to school movements connect farmers with schools, which in turn provides important benefits to local farmers as well as students. Bagdonis, Hinrichs, and Schafft (2009) examine variation in the “development and prospects for FTS [farm to school] programs” by engaging their research in a civic agriculture framework.

Allen and Guthman (2007) examine the ways that farm to school movements are functioning in parallel with the traditional school food programs, which allows them to adopt “rhetoric of neoliberal governmentality, including personal responsibility and individual success, consumerism, and choice” (1). The authors find this problematic because such practices further embed the practices of neoliberalism, and prevent creative solutions to social problems. In response to Allen and Guthman, Kloppenburg and Hassanein (2007) assert that individual farm to school programs have “contributed to the emancipatory possibilities” which exist in the fight against the industrialization of food, and the subsequent deteriorating impacts on rural communities (Kloppenburger and Hassanein 2006).

Aside from these scholarly contributions, there has been a recent surge of publications profiling individual schools and their farm to school programs (Black 2009; Miller 2009; Richardson 2009).¹ Overall, the literature is optimistic about the dual role these programs can play in providing nutritional meals to students, and assisting in maintaining the network of small farms across the nation.

E. Legislation, Industry, and School Feeding

While a great deal of literature examines the health and sustainability of school lunches, there is also a body of literature which examines the relationship between legislation, industry influence, and school feeding. Early contributions include the work of Nelson (1950), who describes the connection between commodities and the school lunch program in Iowa. Nelson aimed to confirm or deny that the major intention of the program at that time was commodity support for US agricultural products. He found that

¹ See also the National Farm to School’s website, which lists state by state, as well as general, publications, discussing individual programs, as well as how to manuals (<http://www.farmentoschool.org/publications.php>).

commodity support in fact varied by product, but that overall, “the school lunch program’s effectiveness as an over-all price support mechanism may have been overemphasized” (Nelson 1950).

More recent literature includes the work of Marion Nestle (2003) in her book *Food Politics*, which examines how the food industry and federal food policy impacts dietary choices and food knowledge. One of the messages of *Food Politics* is that the food industry’s primary aim is to get people to eat more food. She asserts that the efforts of the food industry to increase food consumption have spilled over into the school food environment. The food industry has exploited the perceived agency of children by marketing unhealthy foods directly to them, and by making junk foods available to children directly through the school food environment (Nestle 2003).

Weiss and Smith (2004) examine the link between legislative action and public health concerns, specifically obesity. The authors assert that the interests of the food, beverage and agricultural industries play a powerful and detrimental role in the outcomes of children’s health through agricultural commodities in the NSLP, and through advertising aimed at children. They problematize the fact that regulation of these issues occurs at both the federal, state, and even district level (Weiss and Smith 2004).

Unfortunately, Weiss and Smith miss some important points. I assert that they lack a sophisticated analysis of the role of commodities in child nutrition programs. They don’t consider the agency given to local school district authorities in choosing the commodities they want to receive, and they fail to acknowledge the role that competitive foods (such as vending machines and a la carte lines) play in school economics. While the obesity issue is no doubt related to these minimally nutritious competitive foods, their role in the

school environment is more complicated than the authors take time to discuss. Further, they conflate those commodities which are subsidized in the farm bill with commodities which are provisioned for school lunches. I appreciate that these authors examine the role of federal food policy as a causal mechanism in the outcomes of health, specifically the issues of obesity in the childhood population, and that they touch on an important theoretical tool: examination of power. However, their methodology is too shallow, and therefore does not offer robust results.

Overall, the above reviewed literature tells us a great deal about school feeding, including a general historical overview of the NSLP, the impacts that the school food environment has on the health outcomes of children, and the ways that the sustainable agriculture movement is enacting change in schools through farm to school movements. There are nevertheless gaps in this research.

One gap which this thesis aims to fill is specific examination of the relationships between the social actors and issues involved in the policy making process of the NSLP. By understanding the specific actors who influence legislative output, the field can better understand the dynamics that result in a national policy that plays an important role in teaching Americans what and how to eat. Understanding this phenomenon is important when considering the consequences of childhood eating habits on long term health, and the overall cost obesity has on society. At stake in the formation of the NSLP is not just what will be eaten by American school children, but further how they will live as adults

III. Theory

A. Introduction

The aim of this research is to understand the key actors involved in the construction, maintenance, and contestation of the NSLP, the agenda of the actors involved in the policy making process of the NSLP (e.g. what issues they want addressed and how they frame these issues), and whose interests are represented in policy outcomes. The core of this research, therefore, is concerned with the formation of social actors in the NSLP policy domain, and how this formation impacts the outcome of the policy making process. In order to understand this formation, we must examine the issue of power. For this reason, I utilize the work of Bas Arts and Jan Van Tatenhove (2004), who theorize power in the policy making process. I further utilize the work of political sociologist Paul Burstein (1991), who describes how social actors engage in issue development, agenda setting, and adoption of policy proposals.

B. Power in the Policy Making Process

In order to understand how power influences the formation of social actors in the NSLP policy domain, I look to the theoretical approach developed by Bas Arts and Jan Van Tatenhove, described in their 2004 article “Policy and Power: A Conceptual Framework between the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Policy Idioms.” Arts and Van Tatenhove develop a theoretical perspective on power which is influenced by Clegg’s circuits of power theory and Giddens’ structuration theory. The authors assert that power must be understood at three different, but interconnected, levels: relational, dispositional, and structural.

Before moving into discussion of Arts and Van Tatenhove's theoretical contribution to this work, it is important to have a brief understanding of what they borrow from Giddens and Clegg. First, it must be understood that for Giddens, power is highly connected with his theory of structuration. For Giddens, structuration is the "moment of the reproduction of agency and structure" (Haugaard 2002: 146). This moment of reproduction is bound in time and space (Haugaard 2002: 146). Structure is reproduced or transformed because of social action. However, for Giddens, structures do exist outside of human action because they are made enduring through social systems, which are sets of structures (Haugaard 2002: 147). For Giddens, social actors are not uninformed, but are purposive actors, reproducing structures for their own reasons and agendas. Structure and agency are not separable, and therefore represent a dualism, rather than a duality.

Arts and Van Tatenhove insist that their view of power maintains a balance between agency and structure; they assert that neither can be privileged. The work of Giddens is especially influential in Art and Van Tatenhove's structural layer of power. Arts and Van Tatenhove assert that there are structural aspects within and outside of a given policy domain which impact the policy making process. Nevertheless, these structural aspects are produced and reproduced by human action. Structural transformation cannot be tied to individual social actors: it transcends individual social actors. But, while this is true, and while structural change is time and space bound, it is collective human action which inevitably does change the structures which enable and constrain the policy making process. Retaining a balance between structure and agency

allows for development of a framework which helps explain how the formation of social actors in the NSLP policy domain impacts the policy outcomes.

Arts and Van Tatenhove also borrow significantly from Clegg's 'circuits of power' theory, specifically by using his circuits as a base for their own three layered model of power. For Clegg, the first circuit is A exercising power over B, which he labels episodic power. This circuit acts as a foundation for Arts and Van Tatenhove's relational power. But, Clegg asserts that the first circuit is reflective of a deeper circuit, which is dispositional power (Haugaard 2002: 247). For Clegg, dispositional power "is reflected in the 'rules of the game' which constitutes reality" (Haugaard 2002: 247). Here, we can see that this is clearly a foundation for Arts and Van Tatenhove's dispositional layer of power. Further, Clegg asserts that these circuits of power impact the ability of actors to engage in the use of power. "A dominant group maintains a system by continually organizationally outflanking others while, at the same time, those wishing to change the status quo have to organizationally outflank those who are presently outflanking them" (Haugaard 2002: 248). This discussion is also reflected in how Arts and Van Tatenhove describe both dispositional power, and also the relationships between the layers of power. Arts and Van Tatenhove combine the perspectives of Giddens and Clegg, and build upon them, developing their three layers of power: relational, structural and dispositional. The work of Giddens and Clegg will be clearly reflected in the work of Arts and Van Tatenhove below.

Defining Power in the Policy Making Process

In this section, I look at how Arts and Van Tatenhove describe power and the policy domain, or, as Arts and Van Tatenhove (2004) would assert, the policy

arrangement, which “refers to the way in which a policy domain is shaped, in terms of organization and substance, in a bounded time-space context” (341). I then take their definition and describe how it can be applied to understanding the formation of actors in the NSLP.

Arts and Van Tatenhove suggest that there should be a dual focus when examining power in the policy making process: on one hand, agents should be viewed as having resources (or not having resources) in policy arrangements. Agents also achieve (or do not achieve) policy outcomes. In this regard, Arts and Van Tatenhove utilize as a starting point the definition of power provided by Giddens: “the capacity of agents to achieve outcomes in social practices” (Giddens quoted in Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004: 347). They assert that resources and outcomes should not be equated, however, as there is a difference between having access to resources, and engaging resources in an effective manner. Arts and Van Tatenhove also assert that power must be considered “both in organization and discursive terms” because “policy agents may become influential not only by organization resources, like money, personnel, tactics, but also by arguments and persuasion, or by both” (347). Further, Arts and Van Tatenhove suggest that “power games are not necessarily zero-sum games, although this may be the case. For example, policy coalition A may win in certain political struggles at the cost of policy coalition B, and vice versa. In other circumstances, however, these coalitions may also join hands, and achieve something *together*” (347, italics in original). Finally, Arts and Van Tatenhove suggest that power in the policy making process should be considered as multi-layered. “Actors do have and exercise power, but are always embedded in historically and socially constructed structures, e.g. in terms of institutions and

discourses. These to a substantial degree constitute their identities as well as enable and constrain certain types of behavior” (347). This dynamic definition of power is comprehensive, and offers important explanatory power for this research.

Vital to the examination conducted here is the understanding that the processes leading to policy outcomes for the NSLP are impacted by how individuals and organizations exert power through use of resources available to them, and what level of intervention those resources allow. Further, it is crucial to understand the important methods in which structures regulate power dynamics within larger society, and enable or constrain action within the NSLP policy domain. Additionally, it is vital to understand not only how individual agents gain access to resources, and how the structure of society impacts the decision making process, but further how these layers of power impact the actual arrangement of social actors within the NSLP policy domain. The three layered model of power and policy therefore involves: (1) relational power, (2) structural power, and (3) dispositional power. Below, I will describe in greater detail the three layers of power described by Arts and Van Tatenhove, and discuss how they are each important for analysis of the NSLP policy domain.

Transitive and Intransitive Relational Power

The first layer, which is relational power, refers to “agents who are capable of achieving outcomes in interactions” (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2004: 349). The constitutive elements of power in this layer are actors, resources, outcomes and interactions (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2004: 350). There are two types of relational power: transitive and intransitive. Transitive power relates to power struggles, and involves “actors achieving outcomes *against* the will of others in a zero-sum game” while intransitive power refers

to the formation of actors working together (Arts and Van Tatenhove 2004: 350). The authors assert that both types of relational power are involved in the policy making process, and this is certainly true with the NSLP.

In the policy making process of the NSLP, analysis of relational power involves understanding how individual actors, and individual agencies or organizations have access to resources which enable them to achieve their desired outcomes in the policy making process, whether working together (intransitive), or in opposition (transitive). For example, when we look to the hunger lobby era, we can see that these social actors were able to increase their relational power through interactions with civil rights and welfare rights organizations. They were also able to increase their relational power through increasingly respected data, and by finding politicians who would act as advocates for their cause in the policy making process. When they achieved substantial relational power, they utilized it in a transitive way, in order to achieve their goals against the will of others, like nutritionists and those interested in maintaining segregation.

Structural Power

The second layer of power is structural, and refers to “the way macro-societal structures shape the nature and conduct of agents, being both individuals and collectivities (organizations!)” (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2004: 350). This concept of power is based on structural asymmetries, as access to the use of resources varies between agents. Structural power reminds us that we must not only examine power dynamics *within* the policy domain of the NLSP, but must further consider the structured asymmetries which exist in larger society. Here, we can understand to a greater significance the ways that agents have (uneven) access to resources. For example, we

can look to the structure of policy making processes which extend far beyond the policy domain of the NSLP. We can look to issues of race, class, and gender in understanding the power dynamics associated with the construction, maintenance and contestation of NSLP policy.

This layer of power also relates to the modernization of society as well as changes in political systems. Most importantly for this research, when social values about specific issues shift, there is a structural shift in priorities, which in turn impacts the policy making process. For example, during the hunger lobby era there was increasing public awareness and concern about issues of hunger and poverty. This impacted social beliefs about health and welfare, which in turn increased the structural power of the hunger lobby. This enabled them to achieve favorable policy outcomes. Similarly, in the privatization era, there was increased emphasis on shrinking government and increasing efficiency. There was also increased popularity of fast foods and processed food consumption. These structural changes impacted the power of the food industry and their ability to enter into the school food environment.

Dispositional Power

The third layer of power is dispositional. This layer of power refers to “the agency’s capacity to act” (Clegg as cited in Arts and Tatenhove 2004: 350). Analysis of dispositional power enables understanding of how various organizations and coalitions are positioned in relation to each other in the NSLP policy domain at specific periods of time. “Through this type of power, agents are positioned in organizations vis-à-vis each other, and these positions co-determine what agents may achieve in terms of relational

power” (Arts & Van Tatenhove 2004:350). An organization’s dispositional power directly impacts their ability to achieve policy outcomes.

Dispositional power is largely determined by structural and relational power. For example, in the original policy making process, agricultural interests were already dominant in the political realm, which allowed them to achieve their interests in the subsequent legislative Act. Further, nutritionists and home economists had access to data, and a strong relationship with both the public and politicians. Because these social actors had these relationships, they were able to achieve dispositional power in the policy making process, and have their interests represented in the original legislative outcome.

Operation of Layers of Power in the NSLP Policy Domain

It is important to understand more fully how we can apply these layers of power to the actors in the NSLP policy domain. In assessing relational power, I examine actor’s access to resources such as money, data, analysis and the ability to argue, as well as the relationships actors have with important individuals and organizations. For example, I can understand that the private food industry has relational power through their financial wealth.

In assessing structural power, I examine how larger social structures constrain and enable actors to influence the policy making process. Structural power is directly related to changes in society, such as the role of commodities and the private food industry, as well as society wide values and beliefs regarding issues such as health, nutrition, and food production and consumption. For example, I can see that changing scientific knowledge about the role of vitamins and minerals or saturated fats have impacted the power of specific actors at specific times in the NSLP policy domain.

Dispositional power is seen as a result of relational and structural power. These layers of power provide actors certain resources which they utilize in the negotiation process. Dispositional power is therefore determined by examining the position of actors vis-à-vis each other. Dispositional power then allows us to explain the formation of organizations, and how this influences the policy making process.

These layers of power are not operationalized as stagnant and flowing in one direction. Established dispositional power also impacts the ability of actors to utilize and even shape structural and relational power. For example, once the hunger lobby achieved dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain, they were able to impact other relationships and the structure of the NSLP. Each of these layers of power are therefore distinct, but they are also interrelated.

While Arts and Van Tatenhove provide important insights about power in the policy making process, they do not specifically address the relationship between social actors and issues, and how issues are engaged in the policy making process. Burstein (1991) offers important insights into this process of connecting issues and actors, and engaging issues, in the policy domain.

C. Issue Creation and Issues on the Agenda

In his work on policy domains, which are “a component of the political system that is organized around substantive issues,” Burstein (1991) offers important insight regarding issue creation, how issues get on the policy making agenda, and how issues move up the agenda (328). The research conducted here is concerned with understanding *what issues* have been engaged in the policy making process throughout history, as well as today, and what actors are attached to these issues in the context of the NSLP.

Burstein (1991) addresses the question of how issues become a part of the legislative process by asking three questions: (1) where does the public policy come from?, (2) how do some issues attain government attention, and thus get placed on the government agenda?, and (3) once on the agenda, how do issues get placed on the ‘decision agenda’, where “they are actively considered for adoption?” (331). Burstein asserts that issue construction is a social phenomena, which is developed on a continuous basis by social actors. It is a cultural and a social process which engages other policy domains. In this regard, there is a close relationship between social actors and issues. Within specific policy domains, it is the actor who presupposes the issues. But the issues, which are formative in the original policy domain, cannot be defined as outside of social actors.

Table 2.1: Burstein’s Key Factors of Pushing an Issue in the Policy Domain

Issue Creation	Adding on the Agenda	Moving up the Agenda¹
Ideas are borrowed from other domains An issue must be made meaningful There must be a defined problem and an amenable solution	Resources (financial, human, etc.) Openness of government to new ideas Role of government agencies Relationship between experts and legislators Legal rules Relationship between the issue and the public	The mass media The relationship between the public and professionals Focusing events such as crises or disasters Perception of Issue by Constituents

Note: 1. The factors below are necessary in addition to those which help an issue added on the agenda:

Source: Burstein 1991

At the most basic level, for something to become a public issue, it first must be defined as a problem open to a human solution (Burstein 1991). So, while childhood

hunger was a problem for many years, it was not until school attendance was mandatory that the idea of a national school lunch program was even considered as a potential solution. Therefore, it is clear that serving lunches in schools became a policy issue when there was an identifiable problem, and a recognized solution. The NSLP became supported at the federal level when a policy which was amenable to different sets of important actors was developed.

In fact, understanding issue formation at a very early stage of the program can help explain how the NSLP policy domain was originally formed. Burstein suggests that we can further examine how policy making ideas are borrowed from other policy domains, both nationally and internationally. For example, individual programs in the US, as well as international, federally funded programs in Europe, were influential in the creation of the NSLP policy domain. Further, the domains of nutrition science and home economics, education, and agriculture were also available for the NSLP policy domain.

Finally, for an issue to be adopted as a part of the political process, social actors must make the issue meaningful. Burstein suggests that the development of a causal story is important, because such stories can “explain how a group comes to experience harm and to show who is to blame and must take responsibility” (Burstein 1991: 331-332). Further, causal stories have a social base. By making the issue of hunger a national crisis, which was possible largely because of the malnutrition of young men which was revealed during World War One (WWI), the issue became meaningful. Further, the causal base was meaningful because it extended across social classes, and impacted the overall health of the nation and its ability to defend itself. It is experts that are given the responsibility to generate ideas: they are also most likely to win acceptance for their ideas.

As Burstein points out, “Their expertise gives their ideas special status, and their highly developed professional communications networks available to them provide opportunities to disseminate their ideas” (Burstein 1991: 332). Therefore, nutrition scientists and home economists played an important role in getting the issue of school lunches to become a part of federal policy. Understanding how individual issues become a part of the policy process can help reveal how issues are engaged (by either being adopted or not) within the NSLP policy domain.

Once an issue is identified, it must become a part of the government agenda. There are a number of factors which impact the acceptance of an issue on the government agenda. One factor is the resources (e.g. financial, human, etc) available to those who have interest in the issue. This factor is directly related to power (primarily relational, but also dispositional and structural, which was addressed above). Another factor is the openness of government officials to new ideas. If government officials are open to new issues related to the NSLP, they are more likely to take meetings with those who are generating new ideas, and are therefore more likely to include these ideas on the legislative agenda. For example, U.S. President Obama has asserted that he is concerned about hunger and health food (Black 2009; Pollan 2009). He has already been taking more and longer meetings with advocacy organizations working on these issues. Government agencies also play a role in getting issues on the agenda. The USDA plays a large role not only in implementing NSLP policy, but is also influential in the policy making process. According to Burstein, the more the USDA is open to change in the program, the more likely it is that new ideas will be accepted as part of the legislative agenda.

Another factor which impacts the ability of issues to reach the political agenda is the relationship between experts and legislators/bureaucrats. If those with expertise are telling legislators and bureaucrats that a specific issue is scientifically legitimate and or important, they are more likely to adopt such issues on the agenda. Legal rules which exist (i.e. rules regarding lobbying & campaign donations) are also a factor in impacting how an issue can become a part of the agenda. For example, if there are limitations on the level of influence industry can play in pressuring legislators to address their interests, this can impact how likely their issues are to become a part of the agenda. Finally, the relationship between an issue and the broad public is also a factor. This links back to my third hypothesis, which asserts that over time, changes in public sentiment, as well as in structure, have impacted the outcomes of NSLP policy. An issue which has broad based support and public awareness is more likely to make it onto the legislative agenda.

Once an issue is on the agenda, there is (or isn't) movement of the issue *up* the agenda. Burstein argues that "movement up the agenda will be affected by the same factors that get an issue on the governmental agenda initially and by four additional facts as well" (Burstein 1991: 334). These additional factors include: (1) the mass media, which rarely is responsible for getting an issue on the agenda, but can powerfully impact how well an issue advances once on the agenda, (2) the relationship between the public and those professionals concerned with the issue, (3) the perception of the issue by the constituents, specifically those directly impacted by the policy outcome, and (4) "focusing events" which can include "crises or disaster" (Burstein 1991: 335).

By examining how an issue is affected by these various factors, we can further explain how and why certain issues have the opportunity to make it into policy outcomes

within the NSLP policy domain. For example, during the hunger lobby era, the role of media was very important in getting access as the primary issue in the NSLP policy domain. It is clear that research publications, TV specials, as well as news reports which made public the issues of hunger and poverty, all played a role in shaping public opinion on the issue. This, in turn, impacted the relationship between the public, and those advocating for decreasing hunger and poverty. Constituents include children, parents, teachers, and school food administrators, who always have an important voice in the status of school meals. Further, focusing events remain very important. The current ‘obesity epidemic’, for example, is prompting nutritionists to have the most dispositional power in the NSLP policy making process.

Burstein also has important insights regarding issue heterogeneity within policy domains. First, he asserts that there is a ‘tendency toward institutional isomorphism’ (Burstein 1991: 339). Groups will copy others to either deal with the uncertainties of the legislation process, or in order to imitate the powerful. Second, majority support for an issue is a requirement of adoption into the legislative documents. This knowledge induces coalition building, and important compromises. “Once a coalition favoring a particular proposal has been constructed, those involved are likely to avoid developing new proposals, for fear that doing so will cause the coalition to collapse and delay policy change” (Burstein 1991: 339). These dynamics impact how many issues get represented in the NSLP policy making process.

By combining the work of Burstein, who helps describe many features of the policy domain, with the work of Arts and Van Tatenhove, who provide important insight in the power dynamics embedded in the policy making process, we can effectively

illustrate how social actors and issues engage in the NSLP policy domain. Burstein specifically helps us understand issue formation and how issues become a part of legislative agenda. Arts and Van Tatenhove provide a theoretical perspective which helps explain the formation of social actors through their three layered model of power. This perspective demonstrates the power dynamics of key players, and the issues they bring to the policy domain, in the policy making process of the NSLP. By understanding these important power dynamics, we can understand what issues key actors *would like* to see addressed in NSLP policy, and what issues *are* addressed in NSLP policy outcomes. This helps us begin to understand the relationship between social actors, issues, policy outcomes, and the subsequent food products, dietary habits, and food knowledge that is transmitted to our nation's children through the mid day meal.

IV. Methods

Two complementary methods of data collection were utilized for this qualitative research project. The first was a collection of historical documents, which illuminate the social actors involved at specific points of change in the historical evolution of school lunch programs in the United States. Second, interviews with a diverse range of social actors involved in the NSLP policy making process at the national level help reveal what is occurring right now in the reauthorization process. I aim for these methods to provide data which reveal the relationships between social actors involved in the processes of constructing and contesting school lunch policy, the ways that each group of social actors has framed the issue of school lunch, and whose frame became reality through the outputs of the legislative process.

A. Historical Analysis:

In order to answer the questions: who are the key actors in the historical process of developing, transforming and contesting school lunch programs in the United States? Specifically, whose point of view did these key actors represent, and who benefited from the policy decisions made?, I utilized the method of historical analysis. I started the historical analysis by reviewing secondary sources on the National School Lunch Program, including Susan Levine's *School Lunch Politics* and Julie L. Lautenschlager's *Food Fight! The Battle Over the American Lunch in Schools and Workplaces*. Based on review of these works, I determined that there were four distinct historical time periods which my analysis should cover. These were: (1) the construction of the original 1946 permanent federal National School Lunch Act, which I call the Policy Formation Era, (2) the Hunger Lobby Era, which involved the rise of those advocating for access for poor children throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, (3) the Privatization Era, which involved the entrance of the private food industry into the school food environment, which started in the late 1960s, and (4) the Turn to Nutrition Era, which gained momentum starting in the 1990s.

Table 2.2: Key Periods of Change for the NSLP.

Time Period	Era	Primary Issue
Leading up to 1946	Policy Formation	Creating a permanent, federal National School Lunch Act
1960s-1970s	Hunger Lobby	Providing access to the school lunch for hungry children
1970s-	Privatization	The entrance of the private food industry into the school food environment
1990s-	Nutrition	The heightening of nutrition concerns in the school food environment

My historical analysis continued with a review of articles published in the New York Times during the above time periods. I utilized the New York Times because it is a comprehensive news source that publishes articles of national importance, including policy happenings in Washington DC. I searched the New York Times archives using the key words 'school AND lunch'. I then sorted through these results to find articles which specifically addressed issues or processes related to the NSLP policy making process during those times. In the end, I reviewed 209 articles.

I additionally reviewed Congressional transcripts related to these transformative time periods. I looked specifically for legislative hearings, as well as the actual legislative acts, which illustrated who the key actors were, and what the issues of contestation were, during the time periods identified above. I was guided in my selection of hearings and testimony by historical accounts of the school lunch program, including the work of Levine and Gunderson, which identified historical and contemporary key actors. A list of Congressional transcripts can be found below, in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: List of Congressional Documents Utilized

Date	Title	House of Congress
May 2, 3, 4, and 5, 1944	School Lunch and Milk Programs	<i>Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry US Senate</i>
March 23 to May 24, 1945	School-Lunch Program	<i>Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture House of Representatives</i>
June 3, 1946	Public Law 396: National School Lunch Act	
July 21, 1966	National School Lunch Act	<i>Hearings Before the Select Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives</i>
January 16 and March 6, 1969	National School Lunch Programs	<i>Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives</i>
September 1969	Poverty, Malnutrition, and Federal Food Assistance Programs: A Statistical Summary	Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs US Senate
September 29, 30, and October 1, 1969	School Lunch and Child Nutrition Programs	<i>Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry US Senate</i>
September 16, 1971	School Lunch Regulations	<i>Hearing Before the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry US Senate</i>
March 8 and July 11, 1973	National School Lunch Act	<i>Hearings Before the General Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, US House of Representatives</i>
September 13, 1973	School Lunch and Breakfast	<i>Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Agricultural Research and General Legislation of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry US Senate</i>
June 17, 24, 30, July 22, 1976; July 24, 1976, August 2, 9, 25, 26, 30, 31, September 1, 2, 30, 1976	Oversight Hearings on the School Lunch Program	<i>Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, US House of Representatives</i>

Table 2.3: List of Congressional Documents Utilized, Continued.

Date	Title	House of Congress
December 1988	Child Nutrition Programs: Issues for the 101st Congress	<i>Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education Committee on Education and Labor US House of Representatives</i>
March 3, 1992	Oversight on the School Lunch Program	<i>Hearing Before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, US Senate</i>
February 23 and July 21, 1993	Hearings on H.R. 8: Child Nutrition Reauthorization	<i>Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocation Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, US House of Representatives</i>
January 1994	Child Nutrition Programs: Issues for the 103D Congress	<i>Committee on Education and Labor, US House of Representatives</i>
March 1, 1994, May 16, 1994, June 10, 1994, and June 17, 1994	S. 1614-Better Nutrition and Health for Children Act of 1993	<i>Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and the Subcommittee on Nutrition and Investigations</i>
September 7, 1994	Review of the US Department of Agriculture’s Proposed Rule, “Nutrition Objectives for School Meals	<i>Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Department Operations and Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, US House of Representatives</i>
April 17, 1997	Hearing on Food Safety in the School Lunch Program	<i>Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families of the Committee on Education and The Workforce US House of Representatives</i>
July 16, 2003	Testimony of Eric M. Bost, Under Secretary, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services	<i>Subcommittee on Education Reform, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, US House of Representatives</i>
March 4, 2009	Statement of the School Nutrition Association Before the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry	<i>Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry United States Senate</i>
March 31, 2009	Congressional Testimonies before the Senate Committee on Agriculture	<i>Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry US Senate</i>

B. Qualitative Interviews

In order to answer the question: Who are the key actors involved in the current process of developing, transforming and contesting the school lunch programs in the United States? Specifically, whose point of view do these key actors represent, and who benefits from the policy decisions made?, I conducted semi-structured interviews. In the NSLP, a significant amount of decision making occurs at the state, county, and district level. Due to the limitations of an MA thesis, I chose to focus on the historical nature of the NSLP, and the current, federal level actors involved. I did not make contact with local level decision makers. In all, I conducted 13 interviews with 15 individuals.²

Table 2.4: List of Interview Categories

Category	Number of Interviews
Legislative Representatives	1
Education	2
Nutrition & Health	3
Access	3
Government Agency	2
Industry	3
Sustainable Agriculture	1

C. Data Collection

I first utilized information gathered for my historical analysis in determining which organizations, representing key actors in the NSLP policy domain, I should interview. I also consulted with Dr. Janet Poppendieck, who has conducted research in the area, to get her expertise on who I should speak with. Further, once I began my interviews, I utilized the snowball technique, by asking my interview subjects who they saw as the most important and influential actors in the NSLP policy making process.

² Please see Appendix 1 for a complete list of interview subjects.

I contacted interview subjects either via phone or email and arranged interviews at locations convenient for respondents. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.³ The interviews were semi-structured, and interview questions generally aimed at understanding what the mission and goals of the organizations were in general, and what the organization/agencies mission and goals were specific to the NSLP. I also asked respondents to identify key issues they would like to see addressed in NSLP policy, who they viewed as important social actors in the NSLP policy making process, and what changes they would like to see in the policy in the future. I also asked respondents about the barriers they experienced in achieving their policy priorities. Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and were transcribed verbatim.

D. Data Analysis

For the historical analysis, I first gathered data from secondary sources on the key periods of change and contestation described above. From there, I identified who these authors believed to be the influential actors and issues involved. I then utilized primary sources to confirm, adjust, or expand on these authors' analysis of the key actors and issues. I specifically looked to understand the relational, structural, and dispositional power of the actors. For the historical analysis, these were therefore my primary themes: key actors, key issues, and relational, structural and dispositional power.

For the contemporary analysis, I transcribed the interviews, and interview notes were kept. All notes and transcriptions were analyzed by utilizing categorizing strategies of thematic coding. The process began with a small set of pre-conceived themes, but I then expanded upon these themes once the analysis was under way. Specific themes can be found below in Table 2.5. In analysis, the responses of individual actors were viewed

³ Please see Appendix 2 for a list of interview questions.

as representing their organizations perspective: I therefore made an assumption that individuals responses mirrored the organizations perspectives, and that the organization had a homogenous perspective on issues. While it is true that individuals in organizations no doubt do have divergent opinions and perspectives, I asked respondents to not give their personal views, but the views of their organization as a collectivity.

Table 2.5: Themes Used to Code Interview Transcriptions

Access	Reimbursement Rates	Nutrition	Competitive Foods
Quality Food	\$ as Barrier	Constituents	Collapsing Free & RP Meals
Certification/Verification	Access to USDA	Industry	Wellness Policies
State vs. Federal Control	Commodities	Farm to School	Nutrition Education
Role of Experts	Attitude as Barrier	Intransitive Power	Transitive Power
Coalitions	Universal Free Lunch	Relationship w/Legislators	Government Open to new ideas
Outside Critics	IOM Report	Nutrition	Obesity
Mission/Goals	Provision 2	Direct Certification	Stigma
Change in Social Ideals	Training	Equipment	School as location for change/solution
Kids Preferences/Kids as agents			

E. Limitations

While there are a number of limitations which exist in this research project, I believe none of them inhibit the making of inferences. The first limitation in this research is the use of secondary sources, such as the work of Levine and Gunderson, for the historical analysis. However, while I have relied on these works to frame the

historical analysis of the NSLP, my own primary research resources support their general findings.

The second limitation is the method used to determine who to interview, as well as the limited number of interviews conducted. The snowball technique utilized for this project is limited in the scope, as it does not result in a random selection. Instead, interview subjects were targeted because of their specific characteristics, in this case who they work for (Member of Congress, USDA, interest group, food industry, etc). The benefits of the snowball technique are that it is the most efficient and cost effective method to connect with members of a specific policy domain. Attempting random selection among policy related workers in Washington D.C. would of course turn up a sample population where many of the respondents would not have any expertise or knowledge of the NSLP.

I am confident that I interviewed many influential actors in the NSLP policy domain, given that I spoke with representatives from the legislative branch, the USDA, agricultural commodities, nutrition, access, education, as well as those promoting sustainable interests. I also attempted to conduct interviews with a number of actors who would not return my inquiries, or who refused to go on the record in an interview. For example, Senator McConnell of Kentucky would not allow an interview. I further did not receive return correspondence from members of the House of Representatives. I had an extended contact with current staff of the USDA, but was unable to get them to commit to an interview. I also made multiple contacts with various industry organizations, but was unable to get them to contact me back in order to arrange interviews.

With any interview, there are limitations in obtaining the collection of unbiased, honest, and straight-forward information from respondents. As an interviewee, I no doubt became a part of the policy domain, which impacted both my data collection, and my ability to analyze the data in an unbiased manner. For example, the majority of the respondents were individuals representing larger organizations with complicated and detailed policy agendas, which could potentially suffer if various internal positions were leaked to the public. I expected on the onset of this project that the responses I collected from the interview process would be filtered by the political needs and agenda of the organizations of which I made contact. How different the true response would be without the organization's agenda to consider is something I do not know for sure. However, I believe that the responses I did collect generally represented the interests and policy agendas of the organizations for which my respondents work. I was able to compare their responses with their historical actions, in order to determine their policy goals and agendas. In all, these issues represent the limitations of my project. I do not believe that they inhibit me from making accurate inferences from the data and methods utilized for this project.

Chapter 3: A Brief History of School Meals in the United States

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a historical overview of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). I start by describing the factors which influenced the introduction of school meal programs in the United States. Next, I describe the time period leading up to the permanent legislation of the NSLP in 1946. Then, I divide the history of the NSLP into three periods, discussing the trends and macro structural conditions under which the NSLP has operated since 1946. Finally, I end with a brief description of the program today.

A. Factors Encouraging School Lunch Programs in the United States

To understand the NSLP in its current form, it is important to understand the various factors which influenced the introduction of school lunch programs in the United States. First, school meal programs emerged in Europe prior to those in the United States, which set an example for the United States to follow (Gunderson 1971). Second, a new ‘scientific’ understanding of food developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s thanks to the emerging fields of nutrition science and home economics, which encouraged the formation of school lunches because malnutrition could be measured, and was found to be wide spread across America, and across social classes (Levenstein 1993; Levine 2008). Third, the late 19th and early 20th century brought about tremendous changes in America, specifically in the forms of urbanization, industrialization, and increased immigration. These changes impacted ‘American’ dietary practices (Lautenschlager 2006; Levenstein 2003; Levine 2008). Fourth, school attendance became mandatory. Because all young people were required to go to school, it became a

viable location to address the issue of malnutrition. Fifth, the malnourishment of the US population was widely publicized when the young men who were recruited for World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) were shown to be unfit for duty (Levenstein 1993; Levine 2008). These changes combined set the stage for the introduction of school meal programs in the United States.

B. School Lunches Begin in the United States

In the United States, individual school lunch programs originated in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Such programs were initially led by “private societies and associations interested in child welfare and education” (Gunderson 1971: 5). Some of the earliest examples of school lunch programs in the United States occurred in East Coast cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. In many early examples of school meals, programs were started by organizations, and gradually gained institutional legitimacy and financial support from school boards and local governments. In general, the primary objectives for school lunches were to improve the nutritional health of children and transfer food knowledge to the greater population.

Early on school lunches had to be supported financially and physically on an individual basis. Urban areas were more well suited for this, because there were more organizations and associations, often led by women, who could provide such resources. Efforts to provide school lunches in rural areas were less successful, because they lacked the financial and human support that the urban programs relied upon. In rural areas, it was University Cooperative Extension Agents, as well as some Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) that provided support for school lunch programs. Extension agents largely provided expert knowledge about food preparation, and PTA organizations helped

provide equipment, and some money for food. Like the urban programs, however, these rural attempts at school lunch programs were sporadic, uncoordinated, and were mostly unsupported beyond individual school districts (Gunderson 1971; Levine 2008). Early school lunch programs, in both urban and rural areas, proved largely successful in terms of improving physical and mental capacities of children at school (Levine 2008; Gunderson 1971).

During the 1930s, amidst the Depression era, concerns about malnourishment mounted, and states increased involvement in the school lunch by adopting legislation. During this time, more children were undernourished and local school boards, societies and associations were finding it increasingly difficult to financially sustain individual school lunch programs. The need for assistance from the government to continue individual school lunch programs became evident, and thus the movement towards state, and then federally assisted school lunch programs began (Lautenschlager 2006: 62). According to a 1941 Bureau of Agricultural Economics USDA report entitled “School Lunch Program and Agricultural Surplus Disposal” published in October 1941, “By 1937, 15 states had passed laws specifically authorizing local school boards to operate lunchrooms. Although the laws commonly authorized the serving of meals at cost, usually the cost of the food only, four States made special provisions for needy children” (As quoted in Gunderson 1971: 13).

Following the lead from the patchwork of state programs, the federal government first provided funds for school lunches in the form of labor costs. In 1932, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation provided loans for such activities in Missouri, followed by further assistance in 1933 and 1934 under the Civil Works Administration

and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, key pieces of Roosevelt's New Deal. This effort employed 7,442 *women* to provide school lunches in 39 states. (Gunderson 1971: 13). This funding became more substantial in 1935 with the creation of the Works Projects Administration, which was formed to create jobs for those who needed them by employing individuals in public works projects.

During the Depression era, farmers were struggling due to excess product and no market for disposal. Hunger as an issue also became of greater concern for the American public during this time given unemployment rates and the overall economic slowdown (Levenstein 1993). The federal involvement in the school lunch programs helped simultaneously address the issues of hunger, unemployment, and price support. This perfect storm led to the passage of Public Law 320 on August 24, 1936, which created the Commodity Donation Program. This federal legislation aimed at removing surplus commodities from the open market which were depressing prices, and disposing of them through other channels. "Needy families and school lunch programs became constructive outlets for the commodities purchased by the USDA" under this legislation (Gunderson 1971: 14).

This commodity distribution program was assigned to the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, which offered further help to schools in 1939 and 1940 by employing representatives who promoted growth for school lunches in each state. New federal employees worked with various actors, including local school authorities and PTA organizations (Gunderson 1971). Creating legislation that concurrently benefited agricultural interests and promoted school lunches, and placing the administrative responsibility for school lunches in the hands of the Federal Surplus Commodities

Corporation, would have a lasting impact on the NSLP, still evident today; many of the rules and regulations that made up the 1946 school lunch legislation were adopted previously by the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation. Mainly, the focus on providing a surplus market first, and proving nutrition to children second, remained. National support for school lunches, however, did not come solely because of this need to dispose of surplus agricultural products. Nor were school lunches seen as only providing nutrients to children. School lunches served as a key component of the education of young people, as it was the lunch hour which provided schools the ability to educate children about nutrition and healthy eating habits. Many hoped that these lessons would extend into the household, and improve the diet of Americans, and moreover work to ‘Americanize’ immigrant’s dietary practices. It was also hoped that school lunches could teach “citizenship, money management, and consumer problems” (New York Times 1944).

Further, school lunches were not seen as merely a tool for feeding poor children. Rather, they were a tool to teach proper nutrition and a proper American diet to all children, no matter their income. In an article published in the Reader’s Digest in 1941, J.D. Ratcliff states that “the original federal plan [referring the Civil Works Administration] was to feed only children of relief families, but checks showed malnutrition prevalent at higher economic levels and the program was enlarged to include all children needing food” (Ratcliff 1941). The idea that the school lunch should provide nutrition for all children was carried into the policy making process for permanent legislation.

The assistance of the WPA and commodity distribution, as well as the labor provided through the National Youth Administration, allowed school lunches in the United States to flourish throughout the mid to late 1930s and early 1940s. As of February 1942, 92,916 schools served lunch to 6 million children every day (Gunderson, 1971). World War II quickly reversed this progress. The WPA ended in 1943 as war industries boomed, thus creating jobs for men and women. Further, the armed forces required use of food commodities which had previously been given to schools. The effects of these changes would have been even more dramatic had it not been for Public Law 129, enacted in July 1943 (Levine 2008). This law, which amended Section 32 of the Agricultural Act of 1935, authorized the expenditure of funds which could be used to maintain school lunch and milk programs for one year: July 1, 1943-June 30, 1944. This law provided cash subsidy payments which could be used to purchase food, but could not be used to cover labor or equipment costs. The program was renewed for the fiscal year of 1944-1945, and again for 1945-1946. As of April 1946, 45,119 schools were serving lunch to 6.7 million children each day (Gunderson, 1971).

Despite this increase in participation, many school districts were hesitant to partake due to the uncertainty of continued federal support. To run a school lunch program required school districts to incur significant costs, specifically in the form of equipment and infrastructure, as well as labor. Permanent federal funding was therefore increasingly necessary if the program was to continue. Further, school lunches continued to receive public support, because malnutrition continued to be perceived as a problem (Levenstein 1993). According to Major General Lewis B. Hershey, a Selective Service Director who testified before the House Agriculture Committee, “low nutrition was a

large factor in the rejection by Selective Service of 4,500,000 draftees” (New York Times 1945).

Table 3.1: List of Programs and Laws Influential in Developing School Lunch Programs up to 1946

Title	Year	Description
Reconstruction Finance Corporation	1932	Provided loans for school lunch programs
Civil Works Administration / The Federal Emergency Relief Administration	1933, 1934	Took over the RFC work of financially aiding school lunch programs
Works Project Administration	1935	Formed to create jobs for those in need; many were employed in school lunch programs
Public Law 320	August 24, 1936	This law aimed to remove surplus commodities from the open market, and dispose of them in other channels, including school lunch programs.
Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation	1939 & 1949	The FSCC was assigned administrative tasks associated with Public Law 320. During 1939 and 1940 it also aided schools by employing representatives who promoted grow for school lunches in each state; these employees worked with local school authorities and PTA organizations
National Youth Administration	1930s and 1940s	Provided additional labor and equipment for school lunch programs
Public Law 129	July 1943	Authorized expenditure of funds which could be used to maintain school lunch and milk programs for one year: July 1, 1943-June 30, 1944; it was renewed for the fiscal year of 1944-1945, and again for 1945-1946

C. The National School Lunch Program Achieves Permanent Legislation

Permanent legislation for school lunches was a natural next step for the program.

The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) was signed by President Truman in June of 1946. Because of the role the program was playing in providing outlet for surplus agricultural products, school lunch gained the congressional support necessary to institute the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In addition to agriculture advocates, nutrition scientists, home economists, and education advocates also played a role in promoting the need for permanent legislation. These various actors all had diverse goals for the implementation of permanent federal legislation. Further analysis of the policy outcomes and the social actors and issues involved in this process can be found in Chapter 4. In this section, I describe the trends and macro structural conditions which have impacted the NSLP since its 1946 passage.

As addressed above, a number of important structural changes enabled the NSLP to become permanently legislated. Subsequent changes for the NSLP also occurred in line with macro structural changes. Table 3.2 briefly demonstrates the overarching changes which impacted the NSLP policy domain.

Table 3.2: List of Presidents and Macro-Structural Changes Impacting the NSLP

Presidents (years in office)	Macro-Structural Changes
Truman (1945-1953)	Initiation of permanent National School Lunch Program
Johnson (1963-1969)	Issues of poverty and access begin to become a visible problem; school lunches are seen as culprit and location for change
Nixon (1969-1974)	Nixon legislates the free lunch mandate, changing the focus of the program from nutritious food for all children and location for surplus agricultural disposal to a child welfare program
Nixon/Ford/Carter/ Reagan (1969-1989)	Implementation of the free lunch mandate leads to the increase of poor children receiving lunch, but a dramatic decrease in participation from full price paying students. Further, cultural ideas about food, including what types of food should be consumed, and where such foods should be consumed, were changing. These changes led to the entry of the private food industry in the school food environment.
Reagan (1981-1989)	Ideals about efficiency and small government dominated structural ideal, and in downsizing government, Regan attempted to downsize school lunch.
Clinton (1993-2001)	In light of increasing concern about nutrition, Clinton asked Ellen Haas to join FNS and improve nutrition in school meals.

D. The Impact of Historical Trends and Structural Changes on the NSLP:

1946-1960s

Between the 1946 implementation of the NSLP and the early 1960s, little contestation occurred in the NSLP policy domain. In the post war era, consumers were primarily concerned with the cost of food, and were less concerned with the taste and nutrition of food products (Levenstein 1993). While the image of the stay at home mother pervades media images of the 1950s, women continued to work outside of the home. The post war era also led to increased enrollment in post secondary education

largely due to the GI Bill (Levenstein 1993). These factors led to an increase in income for much of the working class; and the suburbs expanded in order to accommodate the increasing number of families desiring home ownership. These changing economic and housing conditions impacted what people were eating, and convenience foods and eating out became increasingly popular (Levenstein 1993).

Throughout the 1950s, while many Americans continued to live in hunger and poverty, concerns about malnutrition were dormant in the broad American public throughout this time. The absence of hunger and poverty as issues meant that people were not concerned with making school lunches accessible for poor children. With very few exceptions, there was no subsidy which enabled poor children to receive the hot school lunch meal, and the number of poor children receiving school meals declined from 17 percent in 1947 to less than 10 percent in 1960 (Poppendieck, forthcoming). According to Levine (2008), “the period between 1946 and 1960 marked a remarkably complacent time when it came to questions of poor people in America”, and schools mostly ignored the provision in Section 9 of the NSLA which stipulated that poor children should be fed meals free of charge or at a reduced cost (105). This is not to say that poverty and hunger did not exist: rather, it went ‘unnoticed’, or was overshadowed by the perception of affluence for which this time period is well known. While the original 1946 NSLA had promised “in principle, to feed the nation’s children and to provide free meals for those who could not afford to pay” (Levine 2008: 106) neither goal was being achieved by the end of the 1950s.

While public support for the poor and hungry declined throughout the 1950s, support for agriculture increased. Throughout the 1950s, the USDA was primarily

concerned with supporting “farm incomes and provid[ing] technical support to the increasingly industrialized agricultural sector” (Levine 2008: 106). The application of technology in the agricultural sector was providing hope that US Agriculture could feed the poor and hungry around the world. This time period not only turned the concern of agriculture abroad, but nutrition scientists also became internationally focused. The food industry was developing relationships with nutritionists and home economists during the 1950s, as the United States focused tremendous energies on feeding the developing nations of the world, turning a blind eye to the realities of hunger facing America (Levenstein 1993; Levine 2008). During this time, little was therefore known about the state of nutrition in the United States. Further, as surplus foods were increasingly utilized for international aid, which largely benefited US commodity production, the need for the school lunch program as a location for surplus disposal decreased.

E. The Hunger Lobby Era

Unlike the 1950s, the 1960s brought about the ‘discovery’ of poverty in America. Renewed concern about the condition of hunger at home brought about increased complacency about the world food situation. In turn, it became increasingly difficult to politically address the issue of international hunger in the policy realm. The ‘discovery’ of poverty in America is in fact widely linked to politicians, who, when made aware of the fact that hunger and poverty remained very real problems for many Americans, latched onto the issue as a way to gain political capital and attract media attention (Levenstein 1993). Further, the civil rights movement grasped a hold of the issues of hunger and poverty, because they could be directly tied to issues of race and class (Levenstein 1993; Levine 2008).

The group of organizations who became vocal about the issue of hunger in America during this time period became known as the 'hunger lobby'. This new hunger lobby "linked domestic poverty to racial inequality and demanded a reorientation of domestic food and agricultural priorities" (Levine 2008: 108). This was in stark contrast to the 1950s, when the belief prevailed that the mechanization and industrialization of agriculture would solve any hunger problems which might remain (Levenstein 1993). For the hunger lobby, one of the top priorities was to ensure that poor children received free lunches.

The first legislative changes benefiting those promoting food access for poor children came in 1962. Further changes occurred through the implementation of the 1966 Child Nutrition Act. Like the 1946 legislation, this act did not sufficiently provide regulation for enforcement for provisioning of free and reduced price lunches. Control was left to state and local authorities, which meant that virtually no change occurred; issues of stigma and poverty continued to be concerns for the school lunch program. In 1967, a year after the legislation was passed, only 12 percent of the students participating in the NSLP were receiving free or reduced price meals, a nearly zero percent increase from prior to reauthorization. Since the 1930s, the location of hunger in America shifted from the rural South to the urban North with the Black migration. Urban schools which had large populations of poor students did not have the infrastructure needed to operate school lunch programs, and federal, state and local funds were not available.

The hunger lobby was more successful as the decade progressed. By the end of the 1960s, effective legislation was finally put in place. Nixon came into office at the height of the hunger lobby's powerful reign, and he was prompted to expand the reach of

the program to poor children by increasing the funding for free meals. Some suggest that Nixon turned the NSLP into “the nation’s premier poverty program” (Levine 2008: 3). His support was crucial for the hunger lobby’s agenda.

The legislative success of the hunger lobby led to increases in participation in the NSLP, specifically for free and reduced price eligible students. Further, school lunches were no longer functioning as “a significant outlet for surplus agricultural commodities” (Levine 2008: 154). Federal reimbursement more often came in the form of cash as opposed to donated food. Throughout the 1970s, it became evident that there were more hungry children in the nation than had been realized, and in attempting to utilize school meals to address this issue, the priorities of the NSLP changed; the NSLP essentially turned from focusing on agricultural support to poverty prevention.

F. Privatization of the School Food Environment

As the priorities of the NSLP shifted from agricultural support to poverty prevention, macro structural changes impacting the food and agriculture industries were also occurring. The culmination of these factors brought about significant changes in the school food environment. Public sentiment towards the plight of the hungry and poor quickly dissipated in the 1970s, as the public became increasingly concerned about excess federal spending. Further, as food prices experienced inflation, and real wages decreased, people became increasingly concerned about their own ability to feed their families (Levenstein 1993). Further still, the private food industry, which throughout the 1900s utilized advertising to attract loyal customers, continued to influence what and how Americans ate. The food industry increasingly developed relationships with nutritionists and home economists, which also impacted how Americans perceived the role of the food

industry in their lives (Levine 2008). In light of these changes, the food industry quickly gained access to the school food environment.

Funding became a serious concern for the NSLP after the enactment of the free lunch mandate. Economic support for the program, either at the federal, state, or regional level, which could finance the extension of the program and its change in focus was largely not provided. School meal programs across the nation subsequently faced severe budget problems. To address this, schools were forced to raise the cost of lunches for paying students, which in turn led to a severe decline in the number of non-subsidized students participating in the NSLP. In turn, the NSLP was not only legislated as a child welfare program, it was perceived as such in schools. Stigma in the lunch room once again became an issue of major concern, and approximately one million students stopped utilizing school meals between the years of 1970 and 1973. This trend continued throughout the early 1980s, when school lunch participation declined from 15 to 35 percent (Levine 2008: 154-155). Overall, between 1970 and 1980, participation in the program increased, but this was due largely to the dramatic increases in poor children receiving lunch.

Congressional and USDA changes in legislation and regulation allowed the food industry to enter into the school food environment in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was contrary to the language of the original legislation, which explicitly stated that private industry was not allowed to operate school lunches. This reversal of the original policy is not surprising given the mandate to feed poor children, the subsequent budgetary realities facing the program, the power that the food industry had amassed in the political realm, and the fact that Americans were largely not questioning the role of

the food industry (Levine 2008; Levenstein 1993). Private industry promised efficiency and fiscal responsibility for school meals, something that was popular with the American public.

American concern with small government and efficiency, as well as the lack of concern regarding nutrition and access, continued into the 1980s. However, public support for the idea of school lunches remained. In 1980, Ronald Reagan came into the Presidency, and promised to downsize government. And downsize the NSLP he did. In fact, within two years, almost one quarter of the NSLP budget was eliminated. These cuts reduced reimbursement rates, lowered eligibility criteria for free and reduced price lunches, and excluded a number of private schools from the program (Levine 2008). The Reagan administration wanted to turn the program more formally into a child welfare program by eliminating the subsidies for children whose parents could afford to pay for school lunch, and by eliminating fraudulent applications for free and reduced price meals.

In some regards, Reagan was successful. In the early 1980s, there was a 96 percent participation rate for the NSLP among those children who qualified for free meals. However, participation among children who could pay for school meals was only 69 percent (US Congress 1988). While very little fraud was in fact found, “after the Reagan cuts, an estimated 2,700 schools dropped out of the National School Lunch Program, and the number of children participating declined by 3 million” (Levine 2008: 175). What the Reagan administration did not take into account, however, was the public loyalty attached to the NSLP, specifically the concern for feeding the near poor. Public support was reflected by Congressional action, which resisted the proposed Reagan

budget cuts. While some cuts were made, such as reduction of meal subsidies, the NSLP still maintained support from Congress (Levine 2008).

G. School Meals and the Turn Towards Nutrition

While nutritionists and home economists had long played a role in the NSLP domain, in the 1990s, nutrition concerns came to the center stage. The history of the field of nutrition science, and the relationship between the field and the public is long and complicated (Levenstein 1993). Prior to World War II, most nutrition science research was conducted in conjunction with the food industry, or was based on the observations of doctors, who had small sample sizes. The research and data were unreliable (Levenstein 1993). And while in the early 1960s, some thought that there was no more research left to be done by nutrition scientists, the late 1960s saw the shattering of health sciences into a multidisciplinary activity (Levenstein 1993: 174). Universities increasingly became involved in nutrition research. Charitable foundations also increasingly funded nutrition research, and the private food industry as well as the pharmaceutical industry increased their research efforts. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, critiques of the field also became more intense, especially the relationship between research and private interests (Levenstein 1993). Thus, the quantity and quality of nutrition research increased throughout the 20th century.

The focus of nutrition research also evolved throughout the 20th century. For example, in the 1940s, concern revolved around specific nutrients, and the public was encouraged to consume vitamins and fortified foods. In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, however, there was a “veering away from a half-century or more concentration on vitamins and additives toward a concern with lifestyle” (Levenstein 1993: 202). It was

during this time that realities of overweight and obesity became alarming to the American public.

Increases in rates of childhood obesity were attributed to a number of social changes which had occurred throughout the 20th century. For example, some people blamed working women for the changing nature of diet and nutrition in America. They asserted that mothers no longer had time to provide appropriate food choices for their children, and that mothers now had ‘excess income’ which could be used to purchase snack foods (Lautenschlager 2006). Others blamed the lack of nutrition education in schools. The nutrition education element of the 1946 legislation was never, in fact, implemented, which led some to blame the USDA. Still others blamed increasing rates of overweight and obesity on individuals making bad food choices (Levine 2008).

Changes in the field of nutrition research and American ideals about food and health all impacted the ability of nutrition to rise as an influential topic in the NSLP policy domain. While previously the nutritional concerns of those working in the NSLP policy making process were with malnutrition (individuals not receiving enough calories and nutrients) and diseases associated with malnutrition, research was revealing that increasingly people were consuming too much of the wrong types of foods, and this in turn was leading to heart disease, diabetes, and other health concerns. Some began to believe that “school lunches, intended to provide needy children with nutrition they would otherwise not get, appeared the culprits—or at least the allies—in promoting poor food habits” (Levine 2008: 171). In fact, “nutritionists and children’s welfare advocates blamed the Department of Agriculture as much as fast-food restaurants for children’s obesity” (Levine 2008: 172-173). These individuals and organizations felt that the

USDA was too reliant on the food industry, and that their close relationship was impacting the ability of the USDA to set proper nutrition standards (Levine 2008). Further, the USDA was considered lax on regulating adherence to nutrition standards: most evaluation was based on self-reports from school food operators.

Changing regulations in the mid 1990s allowed fast food chains to enter the school food environment. The food industry benefited from being in schools not only because they were an additional location for business, but further because they could develop relationships, and thus brand loyalty, with children. But, while the food industry was allowed greater entry into the school food environment throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, in the mid-1990s, Clinton initiated changes for school meals. New nutrition standards were set through application of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children, which came out of the federal legislation of 1994 and 1995, enacted the first change in nutritional guidelines and standards since 1946. These guidelines required that schools participating in the NSLP meet specific nutritional guidelines, such as limited amounts of saturated fat. But, these guidelines could be met over the course of a week.

H. Current Trends

Today, overarching social concerns continue to impact the NSLP policy domain. For example, the issue of childhood obesity has become of increasing concern, not only for those promoting nutrition, but also for those promoting other issues such as access. Even the food industry is starting to change the foods they offer, in order to appear sympathetic to the nutritional needs of children. Access also remains a concern for many

in the NSLP policy domain, and in light of the recent recession, many stress that school feeding provides an important safety net for poor and hungry children.

The NSLP therefore continues to play an important role both in acting as the largest federal child nutrition program, and as providing a measure of community health and well being (Levine 2008). Dependence on the food industry by school lunch operators has continued, and the debate about nutrition, privatization, and paying for a program which is mandated to serve poor and hungry children remains today. The NSLP has most recently been legislated through the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, and the major outcomes of that legislation, specifically local wellness policies and the fresh fruit and vegetable program, reveal that nutrition, as well as traditional debates about local versus federal control, remain.

Many of the trends regarding participation and funding of the program are revealed in data which shows the total federal costs of the program, which includes cash payments and commodities, as well as the participation levels and percent of free and reduced price lunches served.

Table 3.3: Trends in Federal Costs and Participation for the NSLP

Year	Total Federal Cost of Program (cash payments & commodities distributed)*	Participation	
		Total*	% free & reduced price
1970	679.4	3,368.2	15.1
1980	3616.9	4,387.0	45.1
1990	4446.6	4009.0	48.3
2000	7556.8	4,575.2	57.1
2007	10918.4	5028.6	59.3

Source: USDA FNS 2009b

I. Mechanics of the NSLP Today

The NSLP continues to be federally assisted, and currently operates in more than 100,000 public and non-profit private schools; it is also offered in residential child care institutions. As of the 2006-2007 school year, participation reached 30.5 million children. On average, nearly 18 million participating children receive free or reduced price lunches. The program “provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more than 30 million children each school day” (USDA FNS 2009b). The Food and Nutrition Service of the USDA continues to oversee the program at the federal level, with the program being further administered at the state level, often through state education agencies, and through agreements with school districts. School districts voluntarily choose to participate in the program, and are able to receive cash subsidies and donated commodities as reimbursement for lunches sold, so long as they (1) serve lunches that meet the federal nutrition guidelines, and (2) offer free and reduced priced meals to eligible students. Decisions regarding what foods are served and how they are prepared are made by local school authorities (USDA FNS 2009b). The NSLP still requires that students are provided with at least one-third of their daily RDA for specified key nutrients, and lunches cannot exceed 30 percent of calories from fat, and must provide no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.

Eligibility for the NSLP remains based on household income, with the reduced price meal costing no more than 40 cents per meal. Eligibility is determined in two ways. First, there is direct certification/categorical eligibility, which means that if students come from households that are already receiving specific benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families,

or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or if they are homeless, runaway or migrant children, they automatically qualify for free school meals. These children do not have to fill out paper applications: they automatically qualify for the NSLP. The second way that eligibility is determined is through income qualification. Since children are eligible for the NSLP based on income, if they do not fit into one of the above categories, they must prove their eligibility through their income. For reduced price school lunches, household income must fall between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level, while eligibility for free meals requires household income to fall below 130 percent of the federal poverty level (Food Research and Action Council 2008).

For the fiscal year of 2006, federal cash reimbursements for the NSLP equaled \$7.4 billion dollars. Reimbursement rates for the 2008-2009 school year can be found below in table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Federal Reimbursement Rates for the NSLP

Type of Lunch	Cost
Free	\$2.57
Reduced Price	\$2.17
Full Price	\$.24

Source: USDA FNS 2009b

The reauthorization of the Child Nutrition and WIC legislation is currently in process, with the current legislation set to expire in September of 2009. Many of the issues discussed throughout this history section remain unresolved today, although the issues appear to be less contentious, and collaboration between issue groups more common.

II. Conclusion

Understanding the history of the NSLP is essential in providing a foundation of knowledge as we move into the analysis of key actors, issues, and outcomes of the NSLP policy domain. Much of the trends and structural conditions described throughout this chapter impacted the relational, structural and dispositional power of actors. We will see in the following chapters that these layers of power, and our historical understanding of the macro structural conditions under which policy changes occurred helps explain why certain actors were successful at making change in the NSLP policy domain at specific time periods.

Table 3.5: Actors and Issues During Periods of Contestation for the NSLP

	Policy Formation Era (leading up to 1946)	1946-1960s*	Hunger Lobby Era
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production
Education	State versus federal control	State versus federal control	State versus federal control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby		Hunger lobby not yet formed/hunger concerns focused internationally	Access for poor and hungry children
Private Food Industry			
Farm to School Movement			

* This period of time for the NSLP policy domain lacked distinctive contestation between actors. The actors involved during this time period remained the same as before, and the program continued to grow and develop.

Table 3.5: Actors and Issues During Periods of Contestation for the NSLP, continued.

	Privatization Era (late 1960s-)	Nutrition Era (1990s-)	Current Day
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition/ eventually supported hunger lobby	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition and obesity	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition and obesity
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production
Education	State vs. Federal Control/Eventually supported hunger lobby	State vs. Federal control	State vs. Federal Control/moving toward concern re: obesity
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation		
Hunger Lobby	Access for poor and hungry children/Aligned with private food industry	Access for poor and hungry children	Access for poor and hungry children/moving toward concern re: obesity
Private Food Industry	Getting access to school food environment/Paying for free lunch mandate	Maintaining & increasing access to school food environment/avoiding federal regulation	Maintaining & increasing access to school food environment/asserting more concern for nutrition/obesity
Farm to School Movement			Improving health of children by supporting local agriculture

Chapter 4: Historical Analysis

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the social actors and issues involved in negotiating National School Lunch Program (NSLP) policy during key historical periods of change. I first analyze the social actors and issues involved in creating the initial NSLP legislation of 1946. Next, I analyze the achievements of the hunger lobby throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, which culminated in the free lunch mandate. Then, I analyze the movement towards privatization of the school food environment, which began in the 1970s, and continued to be contested and considered in legislation throughout the 1980s and onward. I conclude this chapter with an analysis of the ‘turn to nutrition’ which became an active topic of contestation in the 1990s and continues into current day.

In each time period, I first introduce the key actors engaged in the policy domain during that specific period. I then review what the primary issues of debate were, and then move to providing a synopsis of the policy outcomes for that time. Next, I discuss why the outcomes came to be. The reader can recall that the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 helps explain how individuals and organizations exert power through the use of resources available to them (relational power) and how power embedded in larger structure impacts the policy making process (structural power). Both of these layers of power can impact the formation of social actors within the domain of the NSLP. It is this formation which dispositional power refers to, and it is dispositional power which largely impacted who achieved their interests in the original NSLP policy outcomes. Since that time, established dispositional power in turn has impacted relational and structural power. This dynamic and interchanging model of power helps

explain why specific actors were powerful during periods of change and contestation. It specifically helps us understand why less economically powerful actors achieved their interests in policy outcomes at certain time periods.

II. The Policy Making Era (leading up to 1946)

In the period leading up to the creation of permanent legislation for the NSLP, a number of actors came together and influenced the policy making process. All key actors had specific ideas about what the design and administration of the program should look like and who it should serve. The ability of each set of actors to utilize relational and structural power varied, which determined their dispositional power, and thus their ability to influence the policy making process.

Table 4.1: Actors and Issues in the Policy Formation Era

Policy Formation Leading up to 1946	
Nutritionists & Home Economists:	Nutrition for All Children/ Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture:	Disposal of Agricultural Surplus/ Support for Commodity Production
Education	States versus Federal Control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation

A. Key Actors

The primary actors engaged in the original NSLP policy making process were nutrition advocates (e.g. The American Dietetic Association, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Children’s Bureau), representatives of the agricultural and food industry (e.g. the Dairyman’s League, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the

Independent Grocer's Association), educators (e.g. the National Education Association), those promoting access for poor children (e.g. Lucy Gillett and Hazel Kyrk of the Bureau of Home Economics), and congressional representatives pushing for states rights' (aka, continuing the 'local tradition' of segregation) (1946; Gunderson 1971; Lautenschlager 2006; Levine 2008). These groups battled and negotiated for leverage and power in the drafting of the 1946 legislation.

While all of the above mentioned actors were supportive of a national school lunch program, they did not all share the same interests in the program. Child welfare advocates and agricultural actors were particularly interested in different issues: "indeed, the two groups continually vied for control over the American diet, most particularly, children's meal programs" (Levine 2008: 71). Further, congressional representatives shared different perspectives and concerns regarding a permanent program. Fiscal conservatives were concerned with increasing federal spending; conservative southern Democrats were concerned that federal intervention in schools would impact their tradition of school segregation (Levine 2008).

B. Issues

Major issues of debate during the original policy making process included (1) whether surplus agricultural products should be included, (2) which federal department the program should be administered through, (3) the degree of federal versus state control, (4) whether nutrition education should be a component of the program, and (5) whether regulations should be established for nutrition and access.

These issues were directly tied to the interests of specific actors. For example, those promoting agricultural interests saw the school lunch as an excellent location for

surplus product disposal, and were less concerned with the nutrition or access aspects of the program. Those promoting the use of surplus commodities were therefore interested in establishing a program administered through the USDA. Further, they did not want to see nutritional restrictions implemented that would prevent the consumption of surplus commodities (Levine 2008). Southern Democrats, who supported school lunches because they provided agricultural support, and also helped to nourish poor children, were concerned that a permanent, federally regulated school lunch program would impede on 'states rights', or the ability of states to continue to practice segregation. Local control was also very important to those promoting school lunches from the education point of view (Levine 2008).

Other actors connecting personal interests with their interests in the NSLP policy domain included those promoting nutrition science and home economics. These actors saw the school lunch as a prime location to teach important lessons about good eating habits. For nutrition advocates, the intentions and perceived benefits of school lunch programs went beyond solving the issues of malnourished and underweight children and workers. School lunches "held the promise of fulfilling a dual role. It could simultaneously feed undernourished bodies and train eager young minds in the habits of efficiency, cleanliness, nutrition and decorum. A third possible benefit was that through the children, reformers might reach and affect the health of the broader community" (Lautenschlager 2006: 66). School lunches were seen as providing opportunity for influencing food knowledge and dietary habits of children, which could pervade the home, and influence society at large (Lautenschlager 2006: 58-59).

C. Outcomes

The lasting legislative proposal for a permanent school lunch program came from the conservative southern Democrat, Senator Richard Russell, who supported the program because it provided agricultural support for his state, and because he saw hunger as a significant problem in the Southern region of the United States. His version of the bill was a compromise measure between two other competing bills. One, proposed by liberal Senator Richard Wagner, kept the program in the USDA, but allowed significant federal involvement in schools, while the other, written by liberal southern Democrats Allen Ellender and Ellison Smith, planned for administration in the Department of Education, but kept federal involvement out of the schools. Russell's compromise bill found support in southern Democrats because of the benefits such a program provided for farmers, and because it left significant control at the state and district level. NSLP debate in the House of Representatives was largely concerned with whether or not the program would promote nutrition education (New York Times 1946).

The claimed intentions of the original NSLP are revealed in one of the first passages of the original Act:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of Congress, as a measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities and other food, by assisting the States, through grants-in aid and other means, in providing an adequate supply of food and other facilities for the establishment, maintenance, operation and expansion of nonprofit school lunch programs.

This passage makes clear that there were two primary goals for this legislation: first, to *help states* in improving the health of children through the provision of nutritious food,

and second, to assist food producers by providing a location for disposal of agricultural commodities.

In the end, agricultural interests achieved dominance in the policy making process. The Act stipulated specific guidelines for the use of agricultural surplus in the NSLP. For example, Section 9 of the Act states that, “Each school shall, insofar as practicable, utilize in its lunch program commodities designated from time to time by the Secretary [of Agriculture] as being in abundance, either nationally or in the school area, or commodities donated by the Secretary.” Here, it is clear that the role of surplus agricultural commodities was firmly entrenched in the NSLP policy making process. Further, the National School Lunch Act of 1946 gave tremendous administrative power to the Secretary of Agriculture.

The interests of nutrition advocates also received some attention, but far less than agricultural interests. The voice of home economists and nutrition scientists, who developed the Recommended Daily Allowances (RDAs) which became a part of the year to year school lunch contracts implemented in the 1930s (Levine 2008) are represented in Section 9 of the Act, which states: “Lunches served by schools participating in the school-lunch program under this Act shall meet minimum nutritional requirements prescribed by the Secretary [of Agriculture] on the basis of tested nutritional research.” However, no further regulations were stipulated in the Act. It should be further noted that nutrition education was completely left out of the Act, which was a certain defeat for nutrition advocates.

This legislation also reveals that the interests of those promoting school lunches for poor children were not influential in the policy making process. Section 9 of the Act

states that: “meals shall be served without cost or at a reduced cost to children *who are determined by local school authorities* to be unable to pay the full cost of the lunch” (italics added). This passage reveals that there were no specific federal guidelines to determine who was in need and who was not. And while Section 9 further stipulates that “no physical segregation of or other discrimination against any child shall be made by the school because of his inability to pay”, again, there were no regulations stipulating how children should be treated in the school food environment.

This legislative Act reveals what actors were influential in the policy making process, and even demonstrates that certain social actors were more influential than others: agricultural interests were a top priority, nutrition was a second priority, and concerns for poor children, while mentioned, were much less influential in the policy making process. While there is specific language about the provisioning of surplus agriculture products for schools lunches, there is a lack of precise regulations regarding nutrition and provisioning of lunches for poor children. The priority of agricultural interests at the time was further demonstrated by the fact that the administrative responsibility for the program was placed in the USDA. While this legislation provides evidence that agricultural interests and those protecting states rights had the most power in the policy making process, how was this power established?

D. Operation of Power

Using the layers of power theory can help describe why certain actors were more successful in achieving favorable outcomes in the 1946 policy making process. The work of Burstein is also especially useful in explaining how key actors utilized power in this initial era. Burstein suggests that pre-existing policy domains can help in forming new

policy domains. Therefore, actors who can pull from pre-existing policy domains have structural power. Burstein also asserts that key to relational power are relationships with politicians, agencies (e.g. the USDA), the public and those with expert status.

Structural Power

Key actors were therefore able to engage in the creation of the NSLP policy domain when they had power embedded in pre-existing policy domains. Pre-existing policy domains existed for agriculture, education, nutrition science, southern Democrats, and to a lesser degree, those promoting access. Evidence of these pre-existing policy domains is found in actor's ability to previously achieve favorable programs and policies, or demonstrate influence on social ideals.

Those promoting agricultural interests had a well established policy domain by the 1940s, which was the time when debate over the development of permanent federal legislation for the NSLP was occurring (Levenstein 2003). Federal programs and policies supporting agricultural interests were developed throughout the Depression and Post War eras (e.g. the Agricultural Adjustment Act; the Farm Security Administration). Further, as described in Chapter 3, federal level policy supporting agricultural interests in school lunches were already in place. Those promoting agriculture had an interest in seeing school lunches continue as they provided a steady outlet for their products.

Promoters of education, as well as nutrition scientists and home economists also had established policy domains by the 1940s, which provided them structural power in the new NSLP policy domain. For example, in the early 1900s, education became mandatory for all children. This establishment of federal law firmly embedded education as a federal and national interest, and an education policy domain was therefore

established. Those promoting education, such as the Parent Teach Association (PTA), had an interest in promoting school lunches, asserting that there was a connection between the nutrition children received and their ability to learn (Levine 2008).

For nutrition science and home economics, a policy domain formed when these actors were able to provide scientific knowledge about what constituted a nutritious diet. Nutritionists were now experts who provided important information to the public, as well as policy makers. Further, the New Deal era had an emphasis on federal social welfare programs, which enabled these actors to develop a federal policy domain. As described in Chapter 3, nutritionists and home economists were concerned about widespread malnutrition in America at that time, and they felt that school lunches could provide nutritious food for children, and teach important lessons, which could then be taken home. Each of these pre-existing policy domains attempted to impact the NSLP policy making process. The previous work of these policy domains provided structural power which actors could utilize.

Changing social norms and values about where and how foods should be consumed amongst the broad American public also increased the structural power of many key actors, and impacted the ability of key actors to achieve favorable outcomes in the NSLP policy making process. As we can recall from Chapter 3, throughout the 20th century, women were increasingly working outside of the home, convenience foods were increasingly consumed, and people were more likely to eat away from home. These changes made it more acceptable for children to eat lunches which were prepared and served at school. These changes therefore increased the structural power of key actors promoting the NSLP. The more that actors were able to utilize structural power, the

more they could increase their dispositional power, which then enabled them to influence the NSLP policy making process and achieve favorable policy outcomes.

Relational Power

Not only did key actors engage in structural power to establish dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain. They also utilized relational power to establish dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain. And, in fact, relational power and structural power were closely related to each other during this Era. For example, those promoting nutrition and education interests experienced increased legitimation, and therefore increased relational power, when social awareness and practices evolved, specifically in terms of nutrition, health, and education. As nutritionists experienced increased legitimacy, their expert status increased, as did their access to financial and human resources. This relational power put nutritionists and home economists in a strong position vis-à-vis other actors in the NSLP policy domain. Those promoting educational interest also had relational power; they were the ones who were working closely with children and managing and administering schools, which provided them with valuable perspective. Evidence of their involvement and influence is found in their involvement in congressional testimony (e.g. US Congress 1945).

It was clear in the above outcomes section that those promoting agricultural interests had the most power in the NSLP policy domain, as they were able to achieve the most favorable outcomes in the legislative Act. This can be explained by the relational power that those promoting agricultural interests had. Those promoting agricultural interests had relational power in large part through financial resources. Further, they were also able to legitimize their role in the NSLP policy domain because they provided

food for the nation, something of obvious concern and importance, especially in the post-Depression and post-War eras. Those promoting agricultural interests also had relational power because of their established relationships with politicians and the USDA.

Establishing relationships with legislators is a key way for actors to develop relational power in the NSLP policy domain. Congressional representatives have significant dispositional power in the policy making process as they are responsible for designing and voting on legislative acts. The dispositional power of Congress people varies, based on factors such as tenure and the interests backing specific legislative members.

Congressional representatives had varied opinions when it came to school lunches during the initial policy making process, but those who wielded the most power in Congress were supporters of agriculture: the southern Democrats. Some Congress people strongly supported the NSLP because it provided needed nutrition for children. Others supported the bill because it first aided agricultural interests, and secondarily aided children (Levine 2008; Gunderson 1971). Others felt that the program should not exist at all; they believed it was not the role of the federal government to nourish children (Levine 2008; Gunderson 1971). However, because of the dispositional power of Russell, and other conservative southern Democrats, agricultural interests were able to develop prominence in the 1946 legislation. Those promoting agricultural interest were therefore able to exercise transitive relational power because of their close relationship with powerful Congress-people.

While experts such as home economists and nutritionists had relational and structural power, and were able to get the issue of school meals on the legislative agenda, as well as minimal mention of RDAs in the Act, they had less relational power, and

therefore less dispositional power, than others, specifically those with agricultural interests. The field of nutrition science was much younger than agricultural interests, which meant that they had less money, they had less developed relationships with prominent members of Congress, and they had fewer connections with the USDA, who as the administrative agency for the program wielded influence. They were unsuccessful in getting nutrition education legislated, or in getting the program administered through the Department of Education, which were both interests of many actors promoting nutrition and education interests, including Dora Lewis with the American Home Economics Association, Mrs. Paul Leonard with the National Parent Teacher Association, as well as the National Education Association (US Congress 1973b).

Those with the least relational and structural power at that time were those promoting school lunches for poor children. These advocates had few monetary resources, did not have significant relationships with legislators, and had little to no connection with the USDA. Further, their issue was not a concern for larger society at that time, and they were therefore unable to utilize structural power.

E. Conclusion

During the initial policy making process for the NSLP, actors representing agricultural interests as well as those promoting nutrition and education pulled from pre-existing policy domains and structural conditions to establish dispositional power in the policy domain. These actors also utilized relational power, such as monetary resources and relationships with politicians, to establish dispositional power in the policy domain. However, dispositional power among key actors varied based on the degree of relational and structural power each had. The way that actors were positioned vis-à-vis each other

impacted their ability to achieve advantageous outcomes in the final 1946 Act. This helps explain how agricultural interests were so heavily favored both in the written Act, and were also able to ensure that the program was administered through the USDA.

III: The Hunger Lobby Era

Between 1946 and the early 1960s, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) remained relatively untouched and uncontested. This quickly changed in the early to mid 1960s with the ‘discovery’ of poverty and hunger in America. In this section, I discuss the actors and issues involved in the ‘right to lunch movement’ of the 1960s and 1970s. I discuss the outcomes of this time of policy making, and conclude by examining how power can help describe why the hunger lobby achieved such tremendous success during this time period.

A. Key Actors

During the 1960s, the hunger lobby became a very powerful actor in the NSLP policy domain. This hunger lobby, which brought together the anti-hunger and anti-poverty movements, as well as the civil rights movement, incorporated the school lunch program into their agenda; for them, the school lunch was a viable location to push for change (Levine 2008). Specific players in the hunger lobby included hunger activist John Kramer, head of the Citizens’ Crusade Leslie Dunbar, the Poor People’s Campaign, the Black Panthers, and the Committee on School Lunch Participation (CSLP). Over time, these organizations and individuals united around a set agenda, and as the hunger lobby they managed to succeed in fundamentally changing the function and administration of the NSLP.

Table 4.2: Actors and Issues in the Hunger Lobby Era

	Policy Formation Leading up to 1946	1946-1960s*	Hunger Lobby Era 1960s-1970s
Nutritionists & Home Economists:	Nutrition for All Children/ Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for All Children/ Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for All Children/ Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture:	Disposal of Agricultural Surplus/ Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of Agricultural Surplus/ Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of Agricultural Surplus/ Support for Commodity Production
Education	States versus Federal Control	State versus Federal Control	States versus Federal Control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby:		The hunger lobby was not yet formed: national concern re: hunger was focused internationally.	Access for poor and hungry children

* This period of time for the NSLP policy domain lacked distinctive contestation between actors. The actors involved during this time period remained the same as before, and the program continued to grow and develop.

B. Issues

In the 1960s and 1970s, debate in the NSLP policy domain revolved around two primary issues. The first issue involved *who* should benefit from the NSLP, and actors generally came down on two sides. One side consisted of those who believed that the NSLP should be primarily concerned with providing school lunches for poor children (primarily the hunger lobby). On the other side were those who felt that the school lunch program was originally, and should remain, a program which provided nutritious school lunches at a reasonable price for all children (this included more traditional nutrition

advocates and some education advocates, specifically organizations like the American Dietetic Association (ADA), the National Education Association (NEA), and the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)). In addition, there were several key actors who wanted both outcomes, and who desired a universally free school lunch program (such as the American School Food Service Association, now known as the School Nutrition Association (ASFSA/SNA)).

In addition to debate regarding who should receive school lunches, there was also debate over *how* school lunches should be served. There were again two distinct positions on this debate. Some argued that school lunches should be served to all with respect and dignity, and that eligibility standards as well as treatment should be federally regulated. On the other side were those who believed in ‘states’ rights’, or those that believed that individual states should be able to determine who received lunch and how lunches were served. “The major stumbling block in the way of enforcing national standards for eligibility and service in school lunch programs were entrenched patterns of racism and states’ rights interests” (Levine 2008: 145). These two very different agendas produced significant contestation for the NSLP.

C. Outcomes

Over a period of approximately 10 years, the hunger lobby achieved significant legislative victories, which effectively mandated the feeding of hungry children school lunches with dignity and respect. The first favorable legislative change for the hunger lobby came in 1962; for the first time, funds for free and reduced price lunches were authorized for the NSLP. An experimental program was enacted which entailed a Congressional appropriation for commodities of \$10 million to be procured by the

Secretary of Agriculture, of which \$2.5 million was to be used for commodities distributed to schools in 'poor economic condition' (Gunderson 1971). Further, in the 1962 amendment to the NSLP, the Secretary of Agriculture was directed to provide free lunches for all poor children. However, there was not appropriation of new funds for this purpose (Levine 2008: 112).

Mounting pressure from the anti-poverty and anti-hunger initiatives, and growing awareness about the problems of child hunger in the United States, combined to bring about further legislative change in the form of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, which replaced and expanded the original National School Lunch Act (NSLA). However, despite the fact that the hunger lobby was successful in incorporating language advocating for free meals for hungry children in the 1966 reauthorization of the NSLP, the Act "did not fundamentally alter the National School Lunch Program's basically inequitable financial and administrative structures" (Levine 2008: 113). For example, no money was appropriated for equipment, facilities, or labor (Levine 2008). As has been previously stated, schools with the greatest populations of poor children were also the schools with the greatest operational barriers, such as lack of equipment and appropriate facilities.

The 1966 legislation did not disrupt the tradition of allowing state level decision making regarding the provisioning of school meals. In a number of examples, school lunch funds went to a small handful of schools, generally avoiding the most impoverished schools, where a majority of students were made up of African-American and Hispanic-American students. Factors used to determine who should receive free meals included whether kids looked thin enough to be hungry, or if they were perceived to be from good

versus bad families. Further, as eligibility was determined locally, students were required to do things such as work for their meals, perform well in school, stand in separate lunch lines, and pay with special tokens for their lunches, all activities which clearly identified them as poor (Levine 2008). “The result was widespread inequality and inconsistency from state to state and district to district” (Levine 2008: 115). States and schools could distribute their special assistance funds in any manner they favored. These outcomes clearly ran counter to the interests of the hunger lobby.

Aside from these setbacks, the achievements of the hunger lobby were substantial and are most evident in the legislative changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nixon became president in January of 1969, and early on he asserted that his goal was to “reach every needy school child with a free or reduced-cost lunch” (As quoted in Gunderson 1971: 26). Legislation which developed national standards for how school districts determined eligibility for free and reduced priced meals was drafted in 1969 and adopted in May of 1970. This legislation regulated a maximum charge for reduced price lunches, set at 20 cents. In addition, it asserted that children’s eligibility for free or reduced price lunches should not be made public, that such students should not be required to use a separate lunch room, serving line, entrance, lunch hour, or receive a different lunch and that they should not be required to work for their meal. Section 11 of this legislation provided funding for the increased regulations for provision of free and reduced price meals, and also provided funding for non-food costs. These outcomes demonstrate the success of the hunger lobby in the NSLP policy making processes.

D. Operation of Power

The hunger lobby achieved legislative success by increasing their relational and structural power, which in turn aided them in developing a high level of dispositional power. They increased their relational power by developing relationships with the USDA and legislators, and by attaching to or producing research which supported their interests. They also used the power of argumentation to increase their relational power. Further, once the hunger lobby had established increased dispositional power, they were in turn able to influence relational and structural power in the policy domain, which enabled them to continue to maintain their power in the policy making process.

Increasing Relational Power through Relationships with Politicians

In the 1960s, the hunger lobby increased their relational power by developing relationships with politicians. As discussed in Chapter 3, throughout the 1960s, the issues of hunger and poverty became of concern for the American public, and public concern about nutrition was on the decline. Surplus agriculture, while used for international causes in the 1950s, could now be diverted to the home front. As awareness about the state of childhood hunger in the United States increased, it became increasingly advantageous for politicians to address this issue. It therefore became easier for the hunger lobby to engage congressional leaders as well as the President in their cause, thus increasing their relational and dispositional power.

Legislative support came largely from liberal legislators. As Levine points out, “The hunger lobby found ready congressional allies in liberal legislators. Most notably, for the first time, urban Democrats, who were in the midst of challenging their party’s intransigent southern wing, began to focus on food policy” (Levine 2008: 129). Specific

supporters included Senators Robert Kennedy of New York and Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania, who took their infamous trip to the Mississippi Delta, where they ‘revealed’ great poverty and hunger. However, while Kennedy and Clark’s trip is etched in many historical narratives, it was Senator George McGovern of South Dakota who was responsible for many NSLP legislative advancements.

In the late 1960s, McGovern convened a hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs. During field hearings for this committee, which occurred across the nation, the issue receiving the greatest attention was the inability of the NSLP to feed poor and hungry children. McGovern reacted to the testimony given by a number of doctors to the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs by stating that the condition of malnutrition was “a moral outrage”(Hamilton 1969). A New York Times article reported that “What has startled some members of the McGovern committee is why the existing Federal programs—hot lunches for school children, distribution of farm surpluses, food stamps exchange for groceries—have not reached into the rural and urban pockets of poverty to meet the problem” (Weaver 1969). McGovern’s high profile in the Democratic Party assisted the success of the hunger lobby.

Developing such close relationships with legislators who were sensitive to the hunger lobby’s cause aided in achieving legislative victories. For example, when President Johnson proposed cuts to school lunch budgets because of financial problems largely associated with the Vietnam War, his proposal was rejected by Congress (Morris 1966). Not only did Congress reject Johnson’s proposals, but they began to put together new legislation, providing increased support for the school lunch program, including

increased support for needy children, which produced the 1966 Child Nutrition Act (New York Times 1966). In sum, for the hunger lobby, relational power proved to be a key building block to their success in the 1960s and into the 1970s, and was largely achieved through the establishment of relationships with legislators.

Increasing Relational Power Through Relationships with the USDA

In order for the hunger lobby to truly achieve their policy desires, they also needed to achieve USDA support. While the power to create and change legislation resides in Congress, the power to enforce (or not enforce) this legislation resides in the executive branch and the USDA. The Secretary of Agriculture therefore has significant dispositional power in the policy making process. When the hunger lobby was young and starting to achieve policy victories, the USDA was uncomfortable with the changing focus of the NSLP. While sympathetic to the needs of poor children, the Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman believed that the primary function of the USDA was to assist farmers, not to serve as a welfare agency. Freeman further read the mission of the original NSLP legislation as a program which was to provide the benefit of nutritious food to all children, not just poor children (Levine 2008). This impacted how changing regulations were communicated with state and district school food administrators (Levine 2008).

Freeman's position, and thus the position of the USDA, on school lunches changed throughout the 1960s, demonstrating the increased relational power of the hunger lobby. While Freeman had always been concerned about childhood hunger, he had originally been skeptical about having federal interference at the state level (Levine 2008). Evidence of Freeman's changing position is found in his testimony for the U.S.

House of Representatives in January and March of 1969. In voicing his support of making available \$100 million a year for three years for free and reduced price meals, Freeman directly addressed problems associated with the lack of uniform eligibility standards and the unwillingness of states to develop lunches in all schools. While not wanting to infringe on states' rights, Freeman nevertheless suggested that "a number of legislative modifications should be made to further strengthen the administration of the program. These include the establishment of national eligibility standards based on income, and provision of authority for the Secretary to operate programs directly if local authority refuses or fails to meet decent standards of administration" (US Congress 1969). The increased power of the hunger lobby is clearly demonstrated by the changing stance of the most powerful social actor in the USDA, which was charged with administration of this program.

Increasing Relational Power Through Research and the Media

The hunger lobby also utilized research and the media to increase their relational power. One of the best examples of this is found in the activities of the Committee for School Lunch Participation (CSLP), a coalition of five women's organizations. The coalition consisted of The Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.), the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), and the Church Women United (CWU). All of these organizations felt strongly that the Department of Agriculture should focus less on subsidizing agriculture, and more on feeding hungry children. While the CSLP originally formed to help implement the 1966 NSLP policy changes in their local communities, it soon became clear that there was need for activism

on a larger scale, and they instigated a nationwide survey of school lunch programs (Levine 2008: 131). Their research culminated in a report published in April of 1968, titled *Their Daily Bread (1968)*.

This publication clearly demonstrated that the 1966 legislation had not changed the fiscal and administrative structure of the NSLP, that free lunches for poor children were not being implemented, and that abuses were occurring, specifically widespread discrimination against poor and hungry students. The CSLP considered change at the federal level the only solution, and suggested that (1) the formula for pricing and funding of school lunches be reexamined, and (2) that explicit, uniform federal standards and guidelines be set for school lunches. The CSLP study received attention and respect on Capital Hill. For example, Freeman invited CSLP to provide input on improving the guidelines for school lunches. *Their Daily Bread* thus provided the CSLP, and the hunger lobby by proxy, increased relational power.

In addition to increasing relational power by utilizing sound research, the CSLP also harnessed relational power by fitting into ‘appropriate gendered norms’ and “eschew[ing] the tactics of the street” (Levine 2008: 138). These women were middle class and liberal, and they believed that their conventional and lady-like behavior would afford them “a certain legitimacy” and “entrée into the halls of government” (Levine 2008: 137).

Their Daily Bread provoked increased media attention for the hunger lobby, and provided them with legitimacy in the public eye. In the New York Times on May 6, 1968, an article discussed the publication, and stated that “the committee’s demand that free lunches be made available to all who cannot afford to pay must be met without delay

[...] it is intolerable to expect children to get any benefit from free education while they go hungry and to subject them to the humiliation of scrounging leftovers in order to be strong enough to learn” (New York Times 1968).

Other examples of the hunger lobby using research and the media to increase relational power included a 1968 publication conducted by the Citizens’ Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States, titled *Hunger USA*. This publication asserted that there was evidence of hunger and malnutrition in every location they conducted research. This publication was then turned into a CBS television documentary, which aired in May of 1968. These various forms of media encouraged the USDA to conduct their own research. The hunger lobby was able to utilize increased relational power through their expert status, research and the use of the media to encourage change and support at the federal level.

Structural Power

The hunger lobby also utilized macro structural changes to increase their dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain. Structural changes occurred in tandem with the hunger lobby’s increased relational power. As the hunger lobby increased their relational power they in turn had increased access to the media, which led to increased public attention and awareness about the realities of childhood hunger and poverty in America. As attention and awareness increased, structural ideas about the realities of hunger and poverty changed. These changes made the American people more sympathetic to the interests of the hunger lobby. In turn, by utilizing these changes in structure, the hunger lobby increased their relational power. Together, their increased

structural power and relational power led to increases in dispositional power, which allowed them to achieve legislative victory.

Reacting to the Power of the Hunger Lobby

As the hunger lobby increased their dominance in the NSLP policy domain, other social actors in the NSLP either re-negotiated their stance on school lunches, and attached themselves to the hunger lobby, or they fell out of power. For example, Richard Russell and Allen Ellender remained engaged in Congress, and had increased their relational and dispositional power because of their increased tenure. They both were on important committees and “did what they could to contain calls to turn school lunches into poverty programs” (Levine 2008: 145). However, in the late 1960s, these men experienced decreased power in the NSLP policy domain because of structural changes: agricultural interests were receiving less support in light of the increased awareness of childhood hunger and poverty. Despite the growing concern of certain key actors that the school lunch was becoming a welfare program at the expense of the nutritional well-being of all children, the NSLP moved “from an outlet for farm surpluses to a small convenience for part of the middle class to an important welfare benefit for children of the poor” by the early 1970s (Levine 2008).

Other social actors either modified their positions, or attached themselves to the hunger lobby in order to maintain a position in the policy domain. For example, a number of influential nutrition actors, including Daniel Patrick Moynihan, adviser to President Kennedy, nutritionist William H. Sebrell, and nutritionist Jean Mayer, blamed malnutrition among the poor on a ‘culture of poverty’, asserting that malnutrition was not just an outcome of lack of income, but involved poor food choices that were handed

down among generations. In the end, the argument made a strong call for increased nutrition education. These nutritionists were able to continue advocating for nutrition education by framing the issue within the thesis of the hunger lobby.

Other actors continued to be concerned that shaping the school lunch as a welfare program would mean that other school children would be left without a healthy meal. They framed the issue of school lunches around the issue of malnutrition, pointing to the fact that malnutrition was not limited to the poor (US Congress 1966).⁴ Other organizations concerned with issues of nutrition and feeding all students simply put aside their own priorities and supported the hunger lobby, hoping to slip in their other concerns on the side (US Congress 1971; New York Times 1969). As time passed and the hunger lobby increased their dispositional power, they were able to impact relational and structural power in the policy domain. This instigated organizations like the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA), the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Dietetics Association (ADA) to change their tactics and support the hunger lobby, in order to stay engaged in the NSLP policy debate.

E. Conclusion

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, the hunger lobby increased their dispositional power to a degree which allowed them to utilize transitive relational power. The issues of nutrition, and nutrition education, as well as agricultural interests and states' rights were far less important in the policy making process by the end of this time. The hunger lobby was successful because they managed to impact the social attitudes of the broad public, which impacted their structural power. They increased their relational

⁴ See, for example, the testimony of Mary Condon Gereau, legislative consultant for the NEA.

power through research which gave them legitimacy in debate. They also increased their relational power by utilizing resources such as increased funding, increased congressional and USDA support, and through their use of transitive relational power and established dispositional power, they forced other powerful organizations, such as the NEA, the ADA, and the PTA to support their issue. The dispositional power of the hunger lobby further led to legislative changes that impacted the structure of the NSLP, which in turn impacted the future shape of the program beyond questions regarding who the program should serve.

IV: The Privatization Era

Implementation of the free lunch mandate led to financial problems for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In order to solve these problems, the private food industry was allowed entry into the school food environment. Their entry brought about major changes and contestation in the NSLP. In this section, I discuss why the private food industry was allowed access into the NSLP policy domain, the positions of other actors on their entry, the legislative and regulatory outcomes which enabled private industry access to the school food environment, and how power can help describe why the private food industry was so successful in having their interests legislated.

Table 4.3: Actors and Issues in Privatization Era

	Policy Formation Era (leading up to 1946)	1946-1960s*	Hunger Lobby Era (1960s-1970s)
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production
Education	State versus federal control	State versus federal control	State versus federal control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby		Hunger lobby not yet formed/hunger concerns focused internationally	Access for poor and hungry children
Private Food Industry			
Farm to School Movement			

Table 4.3: Actors and Issues in Privatization Era, continued.

Privatization Era (late 1960s-)	
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition/ eventually supported hunger lobby
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production
Education	State vs. Federal Control/Eventually supported hunger lobby
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby	Access for poor and hungry children/Aligned with private food industry
Private Food Industry	Getting access to school food environment/Paying for free lunch mandate
Farm to School Movement	

*This period of time for the NSLP policy domain lacked distinctive contestation between actors. The actors during this time period remained the same as before, and the program continued to grow and develop.

A. Key Actors

In the privatization era, a powerful actor emerged in the NSLP policy negotiation process: the private food industry. While historically states had used student fees to cover the gap between the costs of the program and federal funding, when Nixon mandated that all schools establish free and reduced price meal programs, the cost of full price meals was increased. This, combined with the increased perception of school lunch as a welfare program, meant that participation among full price paying students quickly dropped. This decline in student participation led to a subsequent budget shortfall for the program, as well as the return of stigma for poor children in the lunchroom.⁵ The situation was made more difficult as inflation rose and food and operating costs increased, putting school food administrators in a bind. In response to this fiscal crisis, both school food administrators and liberal reformers began to look to privatization as a solution to budgetary problems associated with the institutionalization of the free lunch mandate (Levine 2008: 151).

B. Issues

Other historically important actors, specifically agricultural interests, nutritionists, the hunger lobby, as well as those working in education, remained active in the NSLP policy domain during this time. The entry of the private food industry brought about a period of contestation between these key actors, and therefore important debates for the NSLP. This contestation and debate did not begin, however, until after the food industry

⁵ Please see Chapter 3 for additional historical information regarding the decline in program participation.

had entered into the school food environment.⁶ It was not until later in the 1970s and beyond that privatization really became ‘contested’ and debated.

The position of the food industry during the privatization era was clear: they wanted access to the school food environment. The school food environment provided a captive audience of future consumers who had significant purchasing power (Nestle 2003: 188). While the food industry had long been interested in entering schools, until the call for increased access for low income students, and the subsequent lack of state and federal financial support for the new legislation, there was no legitimate reason to allow the food industry to enter into schools (Levine 2008). This changed in light of the success of the hunger lobby.

Early on, nutritionists were some of the most outspoken critics of the privatization of the school food environment. The impacts of the free-lunch mandate extended beyond changing the demographics of who ate school lunch, as well as who provided the lunch. What foods were served and how they were prepared also changed, which was upsetting to many nutrition advocates (New York Times 1973a). Some nutritionists, as well as some school food operators, were concerned that, although fast food type meals were fortified, and therefore meeting federal nutritional requirements, they were flawed because “bad eating habits [were] being reinforced, and the students will not learn what a balanced meal consists of because the nutrients are hidden behind a familiar façade”(Sheraton 1978). Nutrition advocates were concerned that children would not be

⁶ Throughout the late 1960s and the early 1970s, it is difficult to find information on any debate regarding the privatization of the lunchroom. These changes were made ‘under the radar’ (Levine 2008). A review of the legislative hearings and newspaper articles during the time demonstrates that the hunger lobby remained dominant and overshadowed the entrance of the food industry into the school food environment. There were only four articles in the New York Times, previous to 1973, that mentioned competitive foods in general, or the 1972 legislation in particular (New York Times 1972b; New York Times 1972a); (Ennis 1971); (New York Times 1969b).

able to understand that a fortified food item was nutritious, while a non fortified version of the same item was not nutritious (New York Times 1973a). These concerns fueled the desire of nutrition advocates to increase nutrition education in schools (New York Times 1973a). Nutrition advocates were further concerned that the food industry was benefiting financially at the cost of children's health (New York Times 1973a).

Despite their outspoken criticism early on, eventually, many nutrition advocates conceded that the role of the food industry was irreversible. Because of this, nutrition organizations like the American Dietetics Association (ADA) increasingly supported and worked with the food industry. Despite the fact that many nutritionists were against the entry of private industry into the school food environment initially, the food industry successfully co-opted nutrition experts as an 'explicit corporate strategy' (Nestle 2003: 111).

Many social actors advocating for access for low income children applauded the move towards allowing the private industry into the school food environment. While in some regards it seems like an unlikely coalition, the anti-poverty movement made a significant alliance with the food industry in the 1970s. The alliance was based on the idea that the food industry had greater ability to provide food to the poor. Anti-hunger activists, such as John Kramer, the executive director of the National Council on Hunger and Malnutrition, saw the government, specifically the USDA, as being too slow at responding to the needs of poor and hungry students, and hoped that private industry could bring greater efficiency and access to the program. Some access advocates further hoped that by bringing the food industry into poor neighborhoods through the schools, their reach would then extend into the greater community (Levine 2008).

Similar to nutrition advocates, many school food operators were more critical about the role of the food industry early on. The American School Food Service Association (ASFSA), for example, strongly opposed the entry of the private industry into the school food environment in the 1970s. Initially, school food operator advocates were most concerned with providing nutrition education and nutritious foods for all children (testimony Josephine Martin (1973a)). Similar to nutrition advocates, they were concerned that “normal use of the machines would ‘result in exploitation of children’s nutritional needs by people whose interest is profits” and that “pressures by special interests combined with the need for funds to operate schools will make it impossible for many school boards to make decisions regarding competitive foods in favor of child nutrition”(New York Times 1973b). These sentiments were echoed by school food operators and advocates from across the country (New York Times 1973a).

While school food operators and supervisors might have at one time been wary of allowing the food industry access into the lunchroom, many eventually became more interested in utilizing competitive foods and the fast food model to increase participation in their programs. “Faced with dwindling budgets and increased per child lunch costs due to decreased participation in the NSLP, now school foodservice directors are using alternative programs” (Price and Kuhn 1996). For example, the ASFSA became a complicit partner when it came to allowing the food industry access to the school lunchroom (Levine 2008). They “regularly consulted with food-service companies and advised them on how to bring their products into compliance with USDA nutrition guidelines” (Levine 2008: 183). Nutrition education programs and materials were an effective way to win the loyalty and compliance of school food operators and

nutritionists. The food industry stepped in to fill in the gaping hole of nutrition education, an element of the NSLP which had been legislated, but never appropriately funded.

C. Outcomes

The first step towards allowing the private industry into the school food environment occurred in 1969 when Freeman, nearing his departure as Secretary of Agriculture, instituted new regulations allowing private companies to run, operate and manage school meal programs (Levine 2008). It became even easier for the food industry to enter the school lunchroom when the USDA adjusted the nutrition standards for school meals in 1970. While on the surface the changes appeared nutritionally progressive, these changes in fact, “allowed for the introduction of fast foods, snacks, and “a la carte” offerings that easily added up to a less than nutritious meal” (Levine 2008: 164).⁷

While the original intention of these new regulations was to be limited to the preparation and delivery of food, within three years, the National Soft Drink Association (NSDA) secured an amendment in the 1972 reauthorization process allowing their entry into the school food environment (Levine 2008). Although the 1946 legislation clearly stated that the sale of competitive foods were not allowed in schools, the original legislation was changed to favor the food industry.

Further changes were made in 1977, when Congress directed the USDA “To issue regulations relating to the service of foods in competition with the NSLP” (US Congress 2001). The USDA followed through in 1979. The nutrition standards declined, however,

⁷ Type B and C meals were eliminated, ensuring that all schools served a Type A meal, which required that student receive 1/3 of their daily nutrition needs from the school meal.

when these new guidelines for competitive foods were instituted by the Department of Agriculture. These guidelines required that a food must supply more than five percent of the RDA of one nutrient in a 100 calorie serving to qualify for sale during school lunch. However, there were no limits to the amount of fat, sugar or salt that products could contain; any type of food could be sold, therefore, so long as it was fortified (King 1979). The USDA in fact legitimized the role of the food industry by allowing them to label their foods as nutritionally adequate (New York Times 1980).

The USDA made further changes in nutrition regulations specifically for the school lunch in 1980 (Price and Kuhn 1996). Shortly thereafter, a number of changes occurred under the Reagan administration, the most memorable being the provision that ketchup and pickle relish could count as vegetable servings (Pears 1982). Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, further changes occurred, largely favoring the food industry. For example, a major victory occurred for the food industry on November 15, 1983, when federal level lawsuits between the USDA and the private food industry culminated in the overturning of regulations which prohibited selling competitive foods anywhere in schools from the start of the school day until the end of the last meal period (US Congress 2001).

The food industry continued to be favored by the USDA as well, in large part because of their long standing relationships with legislators and the agency, and because they continued to operate the NSLP efficiently (Levine 2008). While the private food industry was a new actor in the NSLP policy domain, they were not new to federal level politics, and had in fact been influential in forming USDA policy since early in the 20th century (Nestle 2003). Despite the fact that throughout the 1990s, the foods offered by

private companies consistently did not meet the minimal nutrition requirements established by the USDA, the USDA did not show concern for this fact, but rather emphasized that nutrition requirements needed to be met over the course of a week (Levine 2008). Further, the USDA invited participation of private industry in other ways. For example, in the 1990s, the USDA utilized the Disney Company in designing “Team Nutrition” a program intended to “shape and modify children’s food habits” (Levine 2008: 188; Price and Kuhn 1996). The privatization era resulted in “a public/private partnership shaped fundamentally by business concerns such as profitability and efficiency. Nutrition, health, and education all became subsumed into a model of consumer choice and market share” (Levine 2008: 152).

D. Operation of Power

During the privatization era, the food industry successfully utilized the three layers of power in order to achieve favorable policy outcomes. Other key actors utilized the three layers of power less successfully and they did not achieve their interests in the policy making process. The private food industry was able to establish dispositional power, and then impact structural and relational power, which impacted the structure of the NSLP as well as the positions and actions of other actors.

Structural Power

The food industry was able to utilize structural power in the policy making process to achieve advantageous policy outcomes. As was mentioned above and in Chapter 3, the food industry was able to solve the problems associated with the free lunch mandate by providing school lunches within the budgetary confines of the program. Further, the American public was concerned with feeding poor children, but was not

willing to foot the bill. Congressional representatives were not willing to mandate increased federal, state, or district funding. The food industry could provide school lunches within these economic constraints in a way that other actors could not. They therefore utilized structural power.

Further still, American attitudes about food and diet were changing. “Fast food and ‘convenience’ foods transformed the form and the content of American meals, whether at home or at school” (Levine 2008: 166). It was increasingly popular for the broad public to eat lunch in institutional settings as well as fast food establishments (Hollie 1978). Thus, the food industry was able to enter into the NSLP policy domain by utilizing changing social ideas about what, where and how to eat.

Relational Power

The food industry also utilized relational power in order to enter into the NSLP policy domain, and become dominant in the policy making process. First, the food industry utilized intransitive relational power by aligning with the hunger lobby, which enabled them to quickly achieve dispositional power.

Over time, the food industry also aligned with nutrition experts (Nestle 2003: 93). The food industry further used nutrition expertise to justify their products in the school food environment. For example, in congressional testimony the NSDA stated that “there is more to nutrition than vitamins. Quick energy, assimilation of liquid, enjoyment and acceptability, all characteristics of soft drinks, can of themselves or together contribute to the total well-being of the student”(Lyons 1973). Such arguments increased their relational power by proving that their foods were nutritionally adequate.

The food industry also increased their relational power by aligning with education interests. For example, in 1973 congressional testimony, the NSDA played on the sympathies of educators by focusing on state and local decision making. They asserted that they wanted control delegated to local decision makers because “competitive foods significant nutritionally to one food service department may be insufficiently nutritional to another” (Lyons 1973). They further played on the interests of education proponents by developing pouring rights contracts and providing money to schools through sponsorships and vending machines (Nestle 2003).

The food industry had substantial relational power because of their economic resources. In 1998, the soft drink industry made \$54 billion dollars in sales (Nestle 2000). This wealth enabled the private food industry to do things which further increased their relational power, such as hiring their own experts to act as witnesses and provide research and public testimony. Their monetary resources also enabled them to utilize the media, which could impact public opinion. For example, Joseph A. Marshall Jr., the president and CEO of Ward Foods Inc. wrote an editorial in August of 3, 1980, asserting that there was, in fact, little difference between nutritious foods and junk food in many instances (Marshall 1980).

The food industry further increased their relational power by developing relationships with legislators (Nestle 2003: 93). Much of their congressional support came from legislators who had advocated for access, such as Roman Pucinski of Illinois and George McGovern of South Dakota. During this time, McGovern became increasingly concerned that middle and lower middle class families were being priced out of the program as the cost of the program for full price students was rising to cover the

expanding gap between program costs and federal appropriations. He therefore saw incentive to make the program more affordable and accessible to a greater number of students, and saw privatization as an opportunity to increase the participation of paying students (Lyons 1973).

The food industry also increased their relational power by creating relationships with the USDA. The USDA was clearly supportive of privatization: they were the primary agents in allowing industry access in the first place. They were further complacent in increasing access to the food industry over time as was made evident in the above section on the outcomes of this time period.

Reaction of Other Actors to Industry Power

Nutrition advocates lacked structural and relational power during this period of NSLP policy making. Social norms and values about nutrition and economics largely favored the food industry. Nutrition advocates concerns, which expanded beyond the consumption of adequate nutrients, had not been sufficiently defined as a problem, and therefore this was not a compelling argument for change in the school lunch program.

In terms of relational power, while many nutrition advocates did have relationships with the USDA and legislators, their expertise and interests did not address the serious financial problems that the program was facing at the time. Nutrition advocates lacked resources such as convincing expert testimony: the research being conducted demonstrated that fast food lunches were meeting the federal nutrition requirements. Nutrition advocates further lacked adequate relational power like finances and human resources, which would have enabled them to broadcast their research and impact social ideas about health and welfare. Critics of the privatization of the school

food environment were further damaged when organizations like the American Dietetics Association (ADA) became increasingly supportive of the food industry. Similar to the free lunch mandate era, nutrition advocates reacted to the dispositional power of the food industry by turning once again to use of intransitive power, in order to maintain some degree of dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain.

The hunger lobby continued to have structural power during this time because the issue of childhood hunger and poverty had become such a great concern for the American public, and therefore embedded their dispositional power. Those advocating for access utilized structural ideals about economics to support the role of the food industry in the school food environment. For example, the head of the Children's Foundation, Rodney Leonard, asserted that private companies had the efficiency and technology to run school meals within the budget constraints as well as in areas that were underserved (Levine 2008). Their dispositional power meant that the hunger lobby continued to have relational power, specifically in terms of access to legislators, the USDA, and financial and human resources. By aligning with the food industry, the two actors were able to establish tremendous dispositional power in the NSLP policy making process.

Similar to nutrition advocates, structural conditions did not favor school food operators. Despite their strong assertions against the entry of private industry into the school food environment, the deregulation of the 1980s, and the simultaneous lack of financial support meant that the NSLP continued to be under-funded. As discussed above, the food industry was able to provide school lunches more economically and more efficiently, and even managed to make profits in institutional settings (Hollie 1978). School food operators were concerned about the role of the food industry in the school

food environment, but were perhaps more concerned with the budgetary dilemmas they were operating under. Because of these conditions, school food operators were not able to utilize structural power in the NSLP policy making process. Structural power resided with the food industry, given their resources and political access.

School food operators also lacked sufficient relational power to achieve their desired outcomes in the NSLP policy making process; the power of the food industry was just too great. Eventually, school food operators turned to utilizing intransitive relational power in reaction to the dispositional power of the food industry. School food operators saw the fast food model as their only way to increase participation in the lunchroom, and therefore continue their programs (Levine 2008: 170).

E. Conclusion

By utilizing structural power and relational power, the food industry was able to establish dispositional power in the NSLP policy making process. This position in turn enabled them to utilize transitive relational power; they were able to achieve their desires despite the wishes of others. This, in turn, forced other key actors, like nutritionists, to adjust their negotiation strategies, and become more supportive of the food industry. Further, the establishment of the private food industry as a powerful actor in the NSLP policy domain has had lasting impacts on the school food environment and on the formation of actors within the NSLP policy domain.

V: The Turn to Nutrition Era

In more recent times, those advocating for nutrition in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) policy domain have experienced increased power. In this section, I discuss two recent policy negotiations which demonstrate that nutrition was of increasing concern in the 1990s and into the 2000s. I discuss how the issue of nutrition was negotiated by key actors, what the subsequent outcomes were, and how power was operationalized in the negotiation process.

Table 4.4: Actors and Issues in the Turn to Nutrition Era

	Policy Formation Era (leading up to 1946)	1946-1960s*	Hunger Lobby Era
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production
Education	State versus federal control	State versus federal control	State versus federal control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby		Hunger lobby not yet formed/hunger concerns focused internationally	Access for poor and hungry children
Private Food Industry			
Farm to School Movement			

* This period of time for the NSLP policy domain lacked distinctive contestation between actors. The actors involved during this time period remained the same as before, and the program continued to grow and develop.

Table 4.4: Actors and Issues in the Turn to Nutrition Era, continued.

	Privatization Era (late 1960s-)	Nutrition Era (1990s-)
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition/ eventually supported hunger lobby	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition and obesity
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production
Education	State vs. Federal Control/Eventually supported hunger lobby	State vs. Federal control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	
Hunger Lobby	Access for poor and hungry children/Aligned with private food industry	Access for poor and hungry children
Private Food Industry	Getting access to school food environment/Paying for free lunch mandate	Maintaining & increasing access to school food environment/avoiding federal regulation
Farm to School Movement		

A. New Nutrition Guidelines of 1995

Key Actors

In the 1990s, President Clinton appointed Ellen Haas to the position of Under Secretary of the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNS). Her primary task was to watch over nutrition programs in the USDA. “Clinton hoped that Haas would use her energy [and non insider status] to reform the system from the inside” (Yeoman 2003). This appointment meant a change for the role of nutrition in the NSLP policy making process. Other historical actors remained active in the NSLP policy making process during this time.

Issues

The key issue being negotiated during this time involved the measurement of nutrition for school lunches. As opposed to directly attacking commodity programs, Haas proposed that schools turn towards measuring nutrition through nutrients, rather than whole foods, as had been done since the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) was originally passed. Despite the fact that Haas’ proposal was therefore a sort of compromise, in response to the several actors in the policy domain who were “concerned about the good food/bad food approach,” her proposal still received tremendous criticism from a variety of key actors (New York Times 1994a).

While many key actors in the NSLP policy domain supported the overarching goals of improving nutrition, most were upset with Haas’ proposal, and actively worked to ensure that she did not achieve her interests. Particularly concerned were commodity groups, who were troubled that these new rules would mean less consumption of their products. For example, representatives of the wheat, fruit and vegetable industries

asserted that “the high protein power bar would qualify for a nutrient standard approach [which would] leave out traditional foods” (New York Times 1994a). The National Cattlemen’s Association was concerned with the focus on decreasing fat consumption, and perpetuating the idea that reduction in beef consumption would solve the problem of too much fat in children’s diets. The National Milk Producers Federation did not support the proposed changes for fear of decreasing the long standing commodity support of the milk industry (New York Times 1994a).

School food service groups, such as the ASFSA, also opposed Haas’ proposal, asserting that “The policy goal was absolutely right on target [...] but it’s a big, diverse country, and a system that will work in Los Angeles or New York, which have a lot of resources, will not necessarily work in rural South Dakota” (Marshall Matz, quoted in Yeoman 2003: 5). This concern was echoed by some promoting nutrition; they asserted that Haas’ proposal would not provide adequate nutrition, specifically for low income children. Further, a large group of key actors, spanning nutrition, access, and education were concerned that the new regulations required expensive equipment and a knowledge base that many school districts did not have (New York Times 1994a).

Outcomes

Despite serious contestation, Haas achieved a sort of victory, and “in 1994 Congress required the USDA to bring school meals into compliance with the *Dietary Guidelines*, which meant that the agency would need to propose new rules to reduce the amounts of fat and sugar in school meals—and therefore in the use of foods that contain them” (Nestle 2003: 193). It is not surprising, however, that shortly after the proposal passed Congress, it was amended. As Nestle (2003) states:

The proposals were enacted over such protests but quickly amended to grant significant concessions to the food industry. For example, although federal surveys indicated that 50% of children's fat intake comes from whole milk, the former rules required school lunches to offer it and the dairy industry was able to block any change in that rule. Soft drink producers also blocked proposed restrictions on sales from vending machines, and fast-food companies won the right to continue selling items that had to meet nutritional standards only if they were sold as part of the reimbursable school meals" (193).

Essentially, Haas all but lost (Yeoman 2003). After experiencing the thrust of the power from so many interests, even Clinton, who had appointed Haas and asked her to develop the proposal, in effect backed down. While limits on fat and salt were set, they had little to no teeth, resulting in the continued domination of unhealthy foods in the nation's school lunchrooms.

Operation of Power

These outcomes suggest that the food industry still had significant dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain in the mid 1990s. Despite the fact that Clinton was the first president in 15 years who had not proposed cuts to the NSLP, this time period was used to fight a new individual actor, Haas, who wanted to come and create changes to the nutritional aspects of the program.

According to Yeoman (2003), the ASFSA was largely to blame. He asserts that the organization in general, and Matz, their lobbyist in particular, had strong ties to the food industry, and strong interests in not changing the status quo of school meals. Therefore, the ASFSA and the food industry were able to work together and utilize transitive relational power in order to ensure that Haas' policy proposals did not effectively change the NSLP. Despite the dispositional power that an agency spokesperson like Haas has, the relational power of the food industry prevailed.

Structural changes regarding the importance of nutrition were partially responsible in getting Haas appointed, and change in school lunch nutrition policy prompted. But, at that time, this structural power was not sufficient to overcome the embedded interests and dispositional power of others, specifically the food industry. While Haas was able to utilize her dispositional power to have her proposal passed initially, her power was not sufficient in getting the legislation to have any teeth, or to avoid modification.

B. 2004 Child Nutrition Reauthorization

Key Actors

The issue of nutrition was a primary concern during the 2004 Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization. The 2004 reauthorization did not involve the introduction of any new actors. Debates in the 2004 Child Nutrition Reauthorization process still involved the primary categories of key actors (nutrition, access, education, agriculture, private food industry), and still involved many of the same specific organizations that have been historically involved in the program (ASFSA, now SNA; the PTA; FRAC; CBPP; CSPI; NSDA, etc). However, changes in the dispositional power of actors who have been involved in the NSLP policy making process for many years occurred, and some began to frame their concerns differently. Most notably, those promoting nutrition began to frame their interests as being more about obesity prevention, rather than malnutrition. Further, other actors also began to change how they framed their own interest, in reaction to the dispositional power of nutrition advocates.

Issues

In the debate about how to improve nutrition in the school food environment, nutrition advocates clearly wanted to see stricter nutrition regulations; those promoting access also wanted to see improved nutrition, but not at the cost of providing meals for poor and hungry children. Those representing education interests also desired improvements in nutrition, but wanted to see this occur without decreasing local control. The food industry wanted to continue their influence in schools by having their products available. Agricultural producers wanted to continue seeing their products offered in schools as well.

The 2004 negotiation process involved debate about how to improve nutrition while maintaining the above interests, and continued to be embedded in larger, historical debates about state versus local control. Such debates continued to fall along traditional party lines. An exchange between Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa and Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky in 1994 is quite telling of the divide:

McConnell: “Researchers have made great strides over the last few years in discovering the impact that various foods or food components have on our health. We now know that consuming too much fat and saturated fat can lead to heart disease, too much salt is bad for your blood pressure, but more fruits, vegetables and fibers can help prevent health-related disease’s. The question we face as Members of this committee is how do we work this knowledge, this scientifically valid information we have, in our Federal nutrition programs. [...] As we consider ways to improve the Programs and the nutritional well-being of our Nation’s children, two thoughts come to mind. First, we have all heard the old Chinese proverb, give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for life. [...] If we teach our children and adults the tenants of healthy eating [...] then we will build a healthy population. Nutrition education is not a new concept and both public and private educational efforts have been effective. [...] I know there are people that need to be reached, and our efforts at the school level will continue as new classes come through the doors. The second point I want to make is that we, as the Federal Government, have a role to play and a responsibility to all citizens but I firmly believe that the Government should leave consumption and behavioral decisions in the hands of the individual, not of a

Federal bureaucracy. Nutrition programs are some of the few Government programs that, as a Republican, I like, but it concerns me that Big Brother could start to control our eating habits. The next thing you know, a fat tax could be the new way to help fund these programs. We should be providing the education---

Harkin: "It sounds like a good idea to me.

McConnell: I knew you would like that, Tom.

Leahy: Tom and I were making notes over here

Harkin: Thanks for the idea

McConnell: You guys would go with a Twinkie tax

Harkin: Keep talking

McConnell: Old Tom never met a tax he didn't like

Harkin: Especially upon the kind of people that we are talking about here that push fat upon kids; they would to be taxed

McConnell: We should be providing the education, the knowledge and the means for giving the individual to make his or her own food choices (US Congress 1994b).

This partisan debate also involves the role of personal responsibility. As stated in a New York Times article, while one side of the debate "insists that government must use its legislative power to slim down an increasingly obese nation [...] the other side argues that government cannot legislate eating less or exercising more. How much people weigh [...] is a product of personal choice and responsibility, and cannot be dictated by what it calls the Twinkie police" (Zernike 2003).

Outcomes

Two primary outcomes of the 2004 reauthorization process demonstrate that nutrition was of primary concern, and that the above debates were of serious consideration in the negotiation process. These outcomes were (1) local wellness policies

and (2) the authorization to continue and expand the fruit and vegetable pilot program. The Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program was developed in an effort to deliver more fruits and vegetables into children's diets. This program, in partnership with the Department of Defense, provides fruits and vegetables as snacks for school children in most states in the nation. While important in expanding consumption of nutritious foods, what is more important for this research is the development of the local wellness policies.

Local wellness policies require that every school which participates in the NSLP develop a local school wellness policy, which is "an opportunity to address obesity and promote healthy eating and physical activity through changes in school environments" (January 2008). Schools are required to develop goals for (1) nutritional standards of foods available in schools, (2) nutrition education, (3) physical activity, and (4) additional school-based activities which promote wellness for students (Food Research Action Council 2006). Legislation for this program required that the design of these local initiatives be done by diverse local stakeholders, including "members of the school board, school administrators, representatives of the school food authority, parents, students, and members of the public" (Food Research Action Council 2006). These local wellness policies maintained local, rather than federal, decision making.

Operation of Power

We can explain how the issue of nutrition became more prominent in the 2004 policy making process by examining the layers of power utilized by various actors. Nutrition advocacy organizations experienced increased structural power throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, as scientific experts continued to provide evidence that obesity in the childhood population was on the rise. Further, the school lunch was increasingly

viewed as a culprit in the obesity epidemic, and therefore as an important location for change. The issue of childhood obesity is meaningful because children are seen as lacking agency, especially in relation to the issue of obesity, which is often seen as an individual problem, and a problem of self control.

Changes in structural concerns about health and welfare, and increased expertise through data and research, helped increase the relational power of nutrition advocates. This in turn increased their access to government officials, who were simultaneously feeling the pressure to address the issue of childhood nutrition, and were therefore open to new ideas. Increased relationships with the UDSA were achieved for similar reasons. The mass media increasingly covered the issues of nutrition, which both demonstrates the increased relational and structural power of nutrition advocates, and then reinforced this increased power as well.

Nutrition advocates therefore achieved increased structural power, as well as increased relational power, both of which have impacted their ability to increase their dispositional power. Like the hunger lobby time period, the evidence regarding the issue of malnutrition (which includes over and under nutrition) is becoming so alarming the structural power of the food industry is decreasing, and the structural power of nutrition advocates is increasing.

However, these changes in dispositional power are relatively new, which therefore impacts the ability of nutrition advocates to in turn impact relational and structural power. Therefore, the issues of nutrition and nutrition education are only starting to be addressed in the NSLP policy making process. The results of the 2004 reauthorization period demonstrate a continued unwillingness to legislate change that

interferes with the ability of states or school boards to regulate certain aspects of the school food environment. In review of what is happening in the current reauthorization process, we will see that this, too, is changing, largely due to the increased power of nutrition advocates, who continue to work intransitively with those concerned with access, and with the food industry as well.

C. Conclusion

Review of the key actors and issues involved during periods of contestation for the NSLP demonstrates that the dynamic operation of power has been highly important for actors to achieve favorable policy outcomes. Throughout the history of the NSLP, power has been redistributed and renegotiated based on the interplay between relational, structural, and dispositional power. Early on, relational and structural power determined dispositional power, which, in turn, impacted relational and structural power, which influenced how actors ‘played the game’ of NSLP policy negotiation. It is because of this interplay between types of power that actors like the hunger lobby and nutrition advocates were able to achieve power in the policy domain despite the economic power of those promoting agricultural commodities or the private food industry. Next, we move to analysis of the current NSLP policy making process, in order to understand how power is being distributed and negotiated now.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Analysis

I. Introduction

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) policy domain is presently in the process of reauthorization, with the current Child Nutrition Act set to expire on September 30, 2009. In this section, I discuss the key actors and current issues engaged in reauthorization. I then move to discussing how analysis of power can help explain the policy making process underway at this time. I argue that the dynamic model of power utilized for this research helps explain why the economically powerful food industry is currently forming coalitions and making compromises with other, less financially powerful actors like nutrition advocates.

Table 5.1: Actors and Issues During Periods of Contestation for the NSLP

	Policy Formation Era (leading up to 1946)	1946-1960s*	Hunger Lobby Era
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support for Commodity Production
Education	State versus federal control	State versus federal control	State versus federal control
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation	Maintaining segregation
Hunger Lobby		Hunger lobby not yet formed/hunger concerns focused internationally	Access for poor and hungry children
Private Food Industry			
Farm to School Movement			

* This period of time for the NSLP policy domain lacked distinctive contestation between actors. The actors involved during this time period remained the same as before, and the program continued to grow and develop.

Table 5.1: Actors and Issues During Periods of Contestation for the NSLP,
continued.

	Privatization Era (late 1960s-)	Nutrition Era (1990s-)	Current Day
Nutritionists & Home Economists	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition/ eventually supported hunger lobby	Nutrition for all children/addressing malnutrition and obesity	Nutrition for all children/Addressing malnutrition and obesity
Agriculture	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production	Disposal of agricultural surplus/Support of commodity production
Education	State vs. Federal Control/Eventually supported hunger lobby	State vs. Federal control	State vs. Federal Control/moving toward concern re: obesity
Southern Democrats	Maintaining segregation		
Hunger Lobby	Access for poor and hungry children/Aligned with private food industry	Access for poor and hungry children	Access for poor and hungry children/moving toward concern re: obesity
Private Food Industry	Getting access to school food environment/Paying for free lunch mandate	Maintaining & increasing access to school food environment/avoiding federal regulation	Maintaining & increasing access to school food environment/asserting more concern for nutrition/obesity
Farm to School Movement			Improving health of children by supporting local agriculture

II. Key Actors

Many of the organizations I spoke with who are engaged in the current NSLP policy making process have had a historical role in the NSLP policy domain. For example, the School Nutrition Authority (SNA, previously ASFSA), continues to be active in the NSLP policy domain, as does the American Dietetic Association (ADA), the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Food Research and Action Council (FRAC), the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), and the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). I spoke with two organizations who are not perceived as particularly influential by other actors in the policy domain, but who have a specific and unique voice in the policy making process: the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) and the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). I interviewed Nora with the National Education Associations' non-profit, the Health Information Network (NEA/HIN), Bill and Sam (name changed for anonymity), who are two former USDA career employees, Roger, who is a lawyer representing the American Commodities Business Association (ACBA), and Derek Miller, a policy staffer for Senator Harkin, who sits on the Agriculture and Forestry Committee.⁸

On a general level, the interests and agendas of these actors are related to their constituency. For example, Roger's organization works to promote the use of commodities in school meals. Derek represents the interests of Senator Harkin of Iowa and helps put together legislation that benefits constituents and is politically beneficial. The retired USDA officials provided information on the role of the USDA, the interests of the USDA, as well as how the USDA operates in the policy making process.

⁸ See Appendix 1 for a complete list of interview respondents.

There are still organizations which focus largely on nutrition and nutrition education, such as the ADA, who, according to Jennifer, encourages the provisioning of meals that are in line with dietary guidelines, that are “acceptable and appealing to students”, and also encourages nutrition education so that children can see “what healthy meals look like.” According to Alex, CSPI focuses on improving “the healthfulness and well-being of children and adults across the spectrum of food and physical activity and alcohol.”

Other organizations remain more focused on access. According to Madeleine, FRAC’s mission is “to end hunger in the United States.” They work to do this “through better federal programs and better implementation of the ones that already exist.”

According to Zoe, the strategy for school meals for the CBPP, which generally works on budget policy, tax policy and program policy, with an emphasis on how low and moderate income people are affected, is: “to focus on issues related to making sure there’s adequate funding for programs, making sure that low-income kids get access to the benefits they qualify for, and that the process is as simple as possible for them.”

Still other organizations, primarily with an educational interest, are less clearly distinguished between the issues of nutrition and access. James with the PTA stated that their mission related to school meals was to ensure that hungry children are fed and that food offerings are nutritious to all, across the nation. The NEA/HIN similarly stated that their “work has to do with assuring that as part of a great public school, every child has access to healthy food that they and their families can afford.” They are concerned with food that is “healthy, affordable, and edible”, as well as appealing.

The SNA is similarly concerned with what they call the three-legged stool. The three legs include ensuring that meals are healthy and nutritious, taste preferences, which includes “what students are coming to the school with a desire for...not just in terms of taste and what they’re used to and accustomed to, but also those ethnic—culturally appropriate needs”, and “the financial pressure”, or the economic realities, of school meals. It is important to note that the direct constituents of most of these organizations are not school children, but rather school employees, the food industry, dieticians, etc. So, while they may say that the above are their priorities, they also have the responsibility of meeting the needs of their direct constituents.

III. Issues

There are a number of specific issues which are being debated in the current reauthorization process, such as increasing reimbursement rates, improving nutrition in the school food environment, universal free meals/collapsing free and reduced price lunches, as well as the role of farm to school programs.

A. Reimbursement Rates

A common goal for many key actors in the current NSLP policy making process is increasing reimbursement rates. The term reimbursement rates refers to the subsidy that schools receive for each meal they serve, and varies based on the income of students.⁹ Reimbursement rates are compelling to a number of organizations for several reasons. First, it has been a long time since reimbursement rates have increased. Further, food costs are rising, as are other costs associated with the program, like staffing. These costs increase further when more fresh foods are integrated into the program. Alex with CSPI stated that:

⁹ Please see Chapter 3 for further explanation of current reimbursement rates.

Essentially, the cost to produce a meal is larger than the reimbursement rate. [...] And one of the things that we talk about is the increasing indirect costs. So like labor, energy, as well as rising food costs. And we also – you can't hide the fact that healthier meals cost more. So as schools try to do a better job of one, meeting the school meal standards and two, providing healthier meals, it just costs more. So increasing reimbursement rate is the first [priority for CSPI].

These sentiments were echoed by the PTA, the ADA, and the SNA. Roger asserted that the commodities association was also supportive of raising the reimbursement rate: “the commodity groups understand and support an adequate reimbursement rate because they know the reality that if they want to continue sales in this program, the school's gotta have enough money to pay or you're going to have some vendors simply deciding not to participate in the program.”

Derek Miller demonstrated legislative support for this issue, stating that “I mean, one thing would be to provide, simply to provide a higher reimbursement rate. If meal costs are going up, it would stand to reason that increasing the reimbursement would result in, um, nutritional improvement.” In other words, if healthy foods are costing more, increasing the reimbursement rate would make it possible for school food operators to purchase these foods. But, he asserted that from Harkin's point of view, “a more effective approach would be to provide a reimbursement rate increase, but also tie it to some sort of performance standards. Um, that way at least, you know you're getting something for your money.” In other words, Harkin sees it as politically beneficial to raise reimbursement rates if he can have something to show for it.

While a number of key actors are willing to support increased reimbursement rates, others more concerned with access issues are less willing to make reimbursement rates their top priority. They do not see raising reimbursement rates solving the problems they are concerned with; therefore, it is not a top priority for them. Some, like Cooney,

simply state that “If there's enough money I'd like to see the school lunch reimbursements raised, [but] it's less of a priority for me in terms of the advocacy points.” The CBPP takes a slightly stronger stance:

I guess the other area that's likely to be very much sort of on the agenda for discussion during this reauthorization process is reimbursement rates, as you probably heard. We haven't really weighed in at this point on the merits of increases versus other potential changes that could be made in the program. A couple of things though from some of the recent research have jumped out at us. One is that it appears that basically, the reimbursements for the free and reduced-price meals are sort of cost subsidizing, what's known as the paid meal, as well as competitive foods. And both of those, for different reasons, are a concern for us. We certainly want to see the resources that are designated for low-income kids actually going to low-income kids (Zoe).

The former USDA employees reinforced the divided nature of this issue when they stated that “That's one of the major issues, right this minute, for reauthorization, is reimbursement rate changes.” They see the food industry and the SNA as the major proponents of raising reimbursement rates, with FRAC and other access organizations less supportive.

B. Nutrition

In the NSLP policy domain, the issue of improving nutrition is currently addressed in conversations about competitive foods, wellness policies and dietary standards. Both nutrition advocates and those concerned with access are voicing concern on this issue. Nutrition advocates have an obvious reason to be concerned: not only do competitive foods offer low nutritional value, but they also undermine nutrition education. Competitive foods also increase stigma in the lunchroom. They further degrade the influence of the school meals because they reduce the consumption of the NSLP meals, which are nutritionally regulated. These are two issues which are of great concern for those advocating for low income students.

However, it was not only nutrition advocates that are concerned about nutrition for the NSLP. In fact, all of the actors I spoke with expressed concern about the state of nutrition and obesity in the childhood population. For example, Eric with SNA stated that:

Most [school food operators] have looked at the situation, and seen that okay, we are feeding kids who are coming in now, at 5 years old, already, a lot of them, with weight issues. So we're having to switch gears, at least a little bit, from a program that—because it's not all kids, but for those kids—a program that offers healthy options, and really, to maintain weight, to a program that almost needs to help kids lose weight already.

Madeleine from FRAC echoed Eric's concern when she asserted that, "I mean, I think that child obesity is really [...] it's so alarming." Jennifer with the ADA commented on the unity of actors on the overarching concern, when she commented that "I would just say, for nutrition in general, no one is against it."

But actors often focus on the issue of nutrition within the framework of their organizational mission. For example, Jennifer with the ADA stated that, "For us it's not about obesity. That's sort of the buzzword. But for us, it's about healthy diets for children." And Madeleine with FRAC asserted that, "people are starting to understand that when you're poor, you eat low nutritional density, high calorie foods and that unfortunately, things that are very nutritionally dense often are not very filling and don't give you enough calories per penny, to get you through the night."

In general, there is widespread acknowledgement across organizations that nutrition in the school food environment needs to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. These organizations see an opportunity for addressing nutrition concerns in the regulation of competitive foods, through wellness policies, and improved dietary

standards for school meals. But, not all actors agree on how nutrition should be addressed, which impacts the policy negotiation process.

C. Competitive Foods

As stated above, the competitive food environment is a concern for many actors involved in the NSLP policy domain.¹⁰ The competitive food environment refers to food offerings that compete both economically and nutritionally with the NSLP. The retired USDA interviewees stated that the historic efforts to regulate competitive foods have been largely unproductive, and that this is still a ‘huge’ issue. Many actors spoke to the fact that school meals are healthier than competitive foods. For example, Alex with CSPI stated that “[competitive foods are] one of CSPI’s top priorities [...] school meals are clearly healthier than the current competitive food environment.” Jennifer with the ADA stated that “Competitive foods are something which we actually see as a greater concern right now than the school meals.” Not only do competitive foods lack the nutrition of school meals because they are not held to the level of nutrition standards that school meals are. They further are a problem because they “undermine the little nutrition education that we have in the schools” (Jennifer, ADA). James with the PTA stated that competitive foods are undermining federal standards, nutrition education, as well as parental lessons, and that children are receiving mixed messages.

These concerns have evolved into specific proposals, such as Ed Cooney’s desire “to see the nutrition standards, the establishment of nutrition standards for foods that “compete” with the National School Lunch Program.” These sentiments were echoed by a number of other actors. For example, Derek Miller stated that meal quality is a big

¹⁰ Please see Chapters 2 and 3 for more detailed information on competitive foods and how they operate in the school food environment.

issue, and that specifically he would “like to see the Secretary of Agriculture have authority to regulate the nutritional quality of any food sold on campus at any point in time of the day.”

Even the food industry is getting on board with changing the standards for the school food environment. Recent compromises between the food industry, nutrition advocates, and those concerned with access have in fact made it easier for the food industry to support federal standards for competitive foods. For example, Nora from NEA/HIN stated that “six years ago when the surgeon general’s report came out, the conversation was to get vending out of schools. Now it’s, get the marketing out. Get the healthier products in. Take the pictures of the Coke bottle off the machine, but make them sell water. At least let them keep the machine.” This compromise is not only to appease industry, but also to appease school food directors who have come to rely on the income from competitive foods.

In addition to industry, school food directors are perhaps the least likely to have incentive to change competitive food policy, specifically a la carte lines. While vending is a more obvious concern for them because it directly competes fiscally and nutritionally with their offerings, the a la carte line often subsidizes the NSLP meals, and in fact enables them to continue their programs. The USDA retired employees put it this way: “the pressure on the schools is really, really heavy – from students, from manufacturers, and interestingly enough, right from within the school system because they see it as a way of generating income without having to go to the tax base. [...] But everybody’s tiptoeing around an issue that, really, in the end, is small amounts of money.” The NEA also speaks to the reason that competitive foods have been so compelling by stating that

“the competitive foods exist in the cafeteria because the food program needs them to break even. They’re not allowed to run a deficit. They exist outside the school cafeteria because other people need resources.” School food programs are required to be fiscally self-sufficient. Further, as was stated in Chapter 3, competitive foods offer important financial resources for schools to operate extra programs like sports. Despite these pressures to maintain competitive foods, school food directors are increasingly getting behind competitive food policy change. As Eric with SNA stated, “Everyone realized [...] that you’re basically shooting yourself in the foot if you’re offering—you’re selling something that doesn’t meet nutritional guidelines to make money.”

Despite some differences of opinion, all organizations are supporting changes for the competitive foods policies. It helps that two very influential key actors (the food industry and school food directors) are both willing to now compromise in the negotiation process. The food industry can provide products that are more nutritionally beneficial, rather than having vending totally eliminated, and school food directors still gather necessary funding.

D. Wellness Policies

One policy negotiation which demonstrates the position of actors in relation to the topic of nutrition and competitive foods is wellness policies, which were developed in the 2004 reauthorization process.¹¹ The local wellness policies legislation asserted that all local educational agencies participating in the NSLP must set these policies by the 2006 school year. According to the USDA FNS webpage on local wellness policies, “school districts must set goals for nutrition education, physical activity, campus food provision, and other school-based activities designed to promote student wellness.” Many actors in

¹¹ Please refer to Chapter 3 for more information on the local wellness policies.

the NSLP policy domain feel that these policies have helped make some improvement in the health of the school food environment. For example, Eric with SNA stated that “a la carte has changed dramatically [...] through local wellness policy standards.” He is referring to the fact that some schools have used the local wellness policy mandate to set stricter nutritional guidelines on a la carte lines. Almost all organizations I spoke with were supportive of the concept of wellness policies because they are attempting to address the health of the school food environment, and many saw them as a good starting point. But as Alex with CSPI stated, while they were a good first step, “it was a first step.”

During the early 2000s, the debates about the competitive food environment were heated, and resulted in a policy full of compromises and concessions. As Jennifer with ADA stated:

The education groups did not want [federal] standards [for competitive foods]. They argued it was a local control issue, education being local. We, of course, think that federal feeding programs are federal, so school feeds are federal. The food and beverage industry did not want standards. So there were very different opinions about what should happen, and sort of, the compromise was the local wellness policies, where there had to be something done on all food sold in schools, but it was left to the discretion of the local community.

Nora with NEA/HIN also speaks about the fact that the 2004 local wellness policies were a compromise: “You have, for better or worse, the local wellness policy mandate, which means that you will have 15,000 or more different sets of competitive food standards. That was a political compromise. We all agree on that. Great example of the law of unintended consequences.” According to Alex with CSPI, “what we’ve seen is a fragmented outcome in the sense that you’ll have one school that has a policy that collects dust on a shelf and another school that has a policy and they’re like gung-ho

about getting it implemented and it's a strong policy." CSPI wants to see that the policy is 'stronger across the board' and they want to make sure that there is some way to ensure that they are actually implemented.

These fragmented outcomes of the 2004 wellness policies have made a number of actors reconsider their previous positions regarding competitive foods. For example, while some debate about the relationship between state and federal control remains, key actors have seen that increased federal level regulation of competitive foods needs to occur. For example, when I asked Alex if CSPI would like to see a federal standard for wellness policies, she replied by stating that:

I guess standard is probably the wrong term. I think a series of requirements for schools. But the nice part about the wellness policies is their flexibility. So there are certain issues that there's no reason for them to differ, like nutrition standards. There's really no reason why child X and child Y should have a different set of school meal standards or nutrition standards for competitive foods. There are differences around school environments because it's so contextualized.

FRAC sees local control as inconsistent and problematic. Regarding the topic of wellness policies and state versus local control, Madeleine stated that "what's more problematic are the state – the weird systems at the state level and the different state governments because it's all implemented through state government, and that's where a lot of it can make the federal government look like a sleek machine, when you look at some of the state governments. And there's huge variation, and this is across many programs in the country." And we can recall that, in the previous section, other actors such as the ADA, Harkin, and Cooney asserted that they would like to see federal regulations on nutrition standards.

According to the former USDA officials, the food industry is also increasingly supportive of federal standards for competitive foods, in part because of the consequences of the local wellness policies for them. They stated that:

And actually, [the food industry is] beginning to want standards, whereas if you go back, even four or five years ago, it was anathema to them. [...] A lot of that comes out of the mandated wellness policies. All of a sudden, industry says, in any one state, they may have ten different big school districts wanting somewhat different product. [...] It turned out to be [...] a disaster. Nobody saw it coming. So I think the [...] effect of the wellness policies is gonna drive an awful lot of policy, in the next few years, dealing with competitive foods.

Bill and Sam are quick to point out that leaving the federal government out of the local wellness policies was very intentional. Bill stated that:

They didn't want USDA to have any authority over them. And the whole point was to keep the federal government out of local nutrition policy [...] [The Republican administration] did not want federal government to be responsible for regulating local nutrition policy.

The realities of the 2004 legislation have therefore been influential in getting the support of private industry, as well as a number of key organizations, on the side of tightening federal standards for the wellness policies.

E. IOM Reports/Dietary Standards

All the actors I spoke with were concerned about the nutritional issues associated with competitive foods, but were less concerned with the nutritional value of school meals. Data has demonstrated that school meals are much healthier than both competitive foods as well as meals brought from home.¹² There is, nevertheless, a universally held desire to have school meals healthy and appealing, and in line with the latest nutritional data.

¹² Please refer to the literature review in Chapter 2 for more information on the research and data on nutrition of school lunches versus competitive foods.

A substantial amount of dialogue has taken place in the policy domain related to nutrition and dietary standards, and a report was recently commissioned by Congress, with the research being conducted by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), a non profit organization under the charter of the National Academy of Sciences. The IOM has been asked to do two primary things: (1) to determine what the best nutrition standards can be within the current reimbursement rates, and (2) to determine what the ideal nutrition standards are for school meals, outside of the reimbursement rate.

While some organizations have concerns about things like the timing of the report, which will not come out until well after the current Child Nutrition Act expires, others say this is less of a concern, because the USDA implements dietary guidelines for the program outside of the legislation. And almost all want to keep it that way: they feel that permanently legislating dietary guidelines prevents the guidelines from keeping up with changing scientific knowledge on nutrition and health.

Organizations across the board were supportive of the IOM report, and were anticipating its completion and its integration into federal regulation. Jennifer with the ADA stated that “We are really supportive of the study that’s going on. They tend to do really good work and have good recommendations. We also, though, want to make sure that when they issue their report, that USDA quickly implements it and does so in a sound science way.” Madeleine with FRAC stated that “We’re supportive of having more regulation of those foods, and I think that in general we’ll be supportive of the IOM recommendations that come out.” Ed Cooney stated that he “would like to see the Institute of Medicine Standards, which were developed and the taxpayers paid for, implemented. I’d like USDA to publish them by rulemaking, so that people would have

an opportunity to comment on them. I do not want to see them in the statute because science changes and I'm not in favor of that.”

Ed and Madeleine, both access advocates, clearly demonstrate their support for the study. Jennifer, who is representing the nutrition side of things, was also supportive of the study, and she spoke to the legitimacy of the IOM, and their research, which is “independent, objective, and evidence-based” (IOM 2009). Finally, Derek stated that “in terms of meal quality, I’m not sure what to do about meal quality. I mean, the Institute of Medicine is currently reviewing school meal standards, uh, for reimbursable meals, and I don’t think that Congress wants to do anything that would get in the way of that scientific process.” There is strong legislative support for this study, and the study’s findings will be influential in regulating dietary guidelines for the school food environment in the near future.

F. Universal Free Meals/Collapsing Free and Reduced Price

Another issue receiving some attention in the current reauthorization process is collapsing free and reduced price meal categories, and moving towards universal free meals. SNA as an organization is currently, and has historically, advocated for universal free meals. Eric stated that “It’s been the position since Day 1, really, of the association, for that [universal free lunches]. It’s always been a long-term goal. Sometimes it’s—I think we’re getting back to a place where it’s more realistic than it has been in the past. For the last couple decades, really, it just hasn’t been a political possibility.”

One of the ways that SNA is promoting their position is by pointing to the issue of stigma in the lunchroom. “A universal program would eliminate a lot of those [stigma] issues. We see that in schools that are in Provision 2, where they feed all of the students

due to the financial status of the district, that participation is excellent because everyone gets the same meal. There's not stigma." Provision 2 is a program which enables schools with high percentages of free and reduced price students to establish a universal free program. While it means more food costs, it decreases administrative costs and hassles, and also brings about the benefits stated above. Organizations supporting Provision 2 and universal free meals argue for this tactic by stating that the "amount of paperwork in counting and claiming procedures that have to go into the program when, in school buildings where the vast majority of kids are eligible, seems like a real waste of effort."

Some see universal free meals as a great idea, but as an unrealistic policy goal. Ed Cooney stated that "[universal free meals are] a great idea. I would certainly support it [but] I don't see that happening in terms of the available money at this point in time. But there's no reason why – there's no – it's an eminently supportable prudent course to recommend. And I would certainly support it [...] I just don't see it happening."

The PTA was clearly not an advocate for universal free meals, stating that it is "not the correct strategy." The PTA sees the status quo of sliding scale reimbursement rates as more effective in achieving their policy goals. The CBPP, who is very concerned about low-income access to school meals, had a somewhat surprising stance. Zoe stated that:

[W]e don't support universal meals. There are a lot of anti-hunger advocates who, again, we work closely with who would support them. I think for us, it all comes down to recognizing that we're gonna be operating in a policy environment where there are limited resources for these programs, and that we would rather see the next dollar go into another much needed service for a low-income family before going into universal meals.

The fact that CBPP is not supportive of this issue, and that they are an organization primarily concerned with access, is detrimental to the issues ability to obtain support in

the policy making process because they are very powerful in the NSLP policy domain, which will be explained further below.

Similar attitudes are seen in the topic of collapsing free and reduced price meals. Some, such as the SNA, see this as a positive step towards universal free meals. Jennifer with the ADA was not supportive of this idea, stating that “That’s not a high priority for us. It’s not to say it’s not – we appreciate the recommendations for it, and the streamlining of it. That’s, and so, we’re not against it. It’s just not high on our list of recommendations.” Other actors speak strongly against this issue, and are even more forcefully against it than universal free meals, perhaps because it is viewed as more politically achievable, more likely to occur, and therefore more threatening. For example, Alex with CSPI stated that “It’s not something we support.” This is, again, an issue that is not supported by CBPP because it is not practical, and gets in the way of their other priorities. Zoe stated that “In 2004, there was a lot of interest in that, and unfortunately, sort of the only way to pay for it was this increase in verification, which was clear to us that we would not support. I think the issue for us is always that it’s a relatively costly proposal in the context of the school meals programs.” The retired USDA employees stated that supporters “simply see that as an intermediate step to all free meals because that’s what they really want. If you eliminate reduced price, you don’t eliminate any of the program complexity. You still have to do applications for the free children.” This issue clearly remains contentious, and there is no unity across actors.

G. Certification and Verification

Another issue receiving attention in the reauthorization process is certification and verification. Direct certification refers to how students qualify for free or reduced price

meals. There has been a recent push to utilize other income measures, like whether a family participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)¹³, to allow automatic qualification for free or reduced price school lunches. The CBPP is concerned that, despite the fact that progressive changes encouraging direct certification have occurred, they have had limited success. Zoe stated that “what we’ve found is that in many instances, even where it’s being done, it’s not reaching a lot of the kids who could be reached. [...] So that’s been a big concern of ours.” CBPP is focused on ensuring that as many kids who are eligible for free and reduced price lunches receive them as possible, and because of this certification has recently been their ‘big focus’, their ‘main focus.’ This topic was also one of Derek Miller’s top priorities. He stated that “program modernization, streamlining ease of administration” were top priorities, and that he’d “like to see more direct certification, more cross-program certification.”

The CBPP is also very concerned with tightening verification standards, and they spent a lot of their resources in the 2004 reauthorization process on this topic. Verification standards refer to ensuring that those who qualify for free and reduced price meals receive them, and that there is not misuse of the program. Zoe stated that “our concern with any of these expansions [of verification] was that, along with some of the kids who really shouldn’t be getting benefits, you would end up dropping from the program a lot of kids who really qualify for benefits based on their income, and it seemed like an inappropriate sort of step.” Her concerns were echoed by the retired USDA respondents, who stated that “the more you try to tighten [up verification standards], the more you discourage people that really are eligible. You do eliminate some of the people that aren’t – that are cheating – but you also discourage those people that don’t

¹³ Previously referred to as food stamps.

effectively deal with the bureaucracy. It could be because of language issues; it could be any number of issues.” The issues of certification and verification are top priorities for CBPP as well as Harkin and the USDA, but were rarely mentioned by other actors in the policy making process.

H. Farm to School

An issue gaining some momentum in the NSLP policy domain is the farm to school movement. In 2004, the CFSC was able to secure legislation which would have allowed funding for the movement. But, the legislation was never appropriated. Key actors in the NSLP policy making process similarly see the farm to school movement as currently unimportant. For example, Bill and Sam, the former USDA officials, were skeptical of farm to school’s impact, stating that “the farm to school – kind of a mom to apple pie thing. [...] They have a small, very small voice.”

While a number of key actors think that farm to school is promoting issues that they agree with, they do not see them as being influential in increasing their own interests, and are therefore not actively supporting the movement. For example, when I asked Eric about the farm to school movement, he stated that “We don’t see those groups [farm to school, Alice Waters, etc] as opponents because we have the same goals.” But, they essentially do not actively support the movement because they see them as competing for the funding that they need to accomplish their own goals.

CSPI had a similar stance, stating that “I don’t think we – we’re not against it. In theory, it’s really a nice idea but scaling up is a problem. Our goal is, obviously, to provide nutritious meals for kids.” But, for them, the issue is not compelling enough to get behind. For CSPI, “if that apple comes from California or if the apple comes from

New York, CSPI – that’s not something we focus on.” The PTA also took a similar stance, stating that farm to school is not contrary to what they are trying to achieve, and that while local fresh fruits and veggies are good they also are not cheap. James stated that canned foods are less expensive, and that while they are supportive of the Department of Defense (DOD) fruit and veggie program, and that gardens in schools are good, they are not realistic in every school.

Some organizations associate the farm to school movement with radical activists who are critical of the NSLP, and this prevents them from forming coalitions with the movement. For example, Alex with CSPI stated that “I think, sometimes, not [CFSC], but some folks who work on sustainability, local foods, sort of the food system piece, can lose sight of the value of the school meal programs. And I think sometimes the misperception around commodities comes in there.” The powerful actors in the NSLP policy domain have been around for a long time, and have been working hard to improve the program and integrate their interests for many years. They feel that they know what is really going on in the program and in the federal level policy making, while others, such as sustainable agriculture activists, speculate and make assumptions about the policy making without truly understanding the program or the process. This therefore impacts how the farm to school movement is perceived in the policy domain.

Outside of my interview with Megan from the CSFC, Ed Cooney was by far the most supportive of aligning with the farm to school movement. He was going to the CFSC conference in Portland, and he seemed disappointed that the major NSLP coalitions were not attaching to the issue. He stated that “neither [CNF or NANA have] grabbed onto Farm to School and put it in their platform in a real way. They're not

opposed to it, but it's kind of like when they're in a room talking to people, they don't mention it. And I cannot understand that. [...] They're missing the boat because it's too small and they have other priorities.”

According to Ed, the farm to school movement will not become important until they get congressional support, and until they do that, they will not get the interest of the key actors in the NSLP policy domain. Ed stated the following: “Let me be specific, FRAC and the School Nutrition Association have not done enough on Farm to School, and nor has NANA, and it's just because it's little not big. Well – and it'll remain little until someone issues the four or the six most feared words in the English language. [...] Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment. Once those words are issued, everything changes. Everything changes.” This reflects back on Burstein’s factors which impact whether an issue can become a part of the policy agenda. Until an organization can get the support of politicians and government agencies, they will not be successful in the policy domain.

While Ed was disappointed in NANA and the CNF for not supporting farm to school, he also thought that the farm to school movement needed to do more. “So it's a responsibility since they're small, it's their responsibility to find that Senator or that member of the House to issue those words. And if they do, they will be successful, and if they don't, they will not.” For Ed, the farm to school movement will increase their influence by finding an advocate in the legislature: a leader who is willing to make the farm to school movement one of their top five priorities. The ability of the farm to school movement to make change in the NSLP policy domain is directly related to the importance of power in the policy making process, which I describe in further detail in the next section.

IV. Operation of Power

The use of power is very much at play in the current reauthorization process. Organizations actively use relational power, both transitive and intransitive, as well as structural power to advance interests in the NSLP policy making process. Both relational and structural power impact dispositional power, which in turn continues to impact the ability of organizations to shape and utilize relational and structural power in an advantageous way.

A. Intransitive Relational Power

My interviews revealed that organizations are actively utilizing intransitive relational power in order to achieve favorable legislative outcomes. For example, organizations are forming large coalitions, and are finding common ground in setting their top legislative priorities, specifically around issues such as competitive foods, wellness policies, and nutrition standards. Because many organizations are similarly concerned with these issues, finding common ground is not necessarily difficult, especially in the early stages of the policy making process. There are two primary coalitions which are involved in the NSLP policy making process, and one other that is involved, but much less influential. One is the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA), which is primarily led by CSPI, and focuses primarily on nutrition concerns. NANA includes more than 300 organizations, and their principal concerns for reauthorization are (1) competitive foods, (2) improvement of nutritional quality of meals, and (3) increasing the reimbursement rates. The other major coalition is the Child Nutrition Forum, which is co-chaired by FRAC and SNA. While their statement of purpose for the 2009 reauthorization asserts that the coalition's mission is to "help create

legislation that promotes access to healthy food for all children,” their focus has traditionally been more on access issues for low income children. Their primary concerns for reauthorization are (1) increasing funding (raising reimbursement rate) and (2) improvement of nutrition standards, both in the competitive food environment and in the school meals. Most organizations involved in the NSLP policy domain belong to one, if not both, of these coalitions. It should be noted, however, that while they do work together at times, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities is not a part of the Child Nutrition Forum.

A third coalition is newer, and more ‘fringe’: the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). This organization asserts that it has similar concerns as NANA and the CNF, with their mission stating that “improving the quality of school meals and making them accessible to all children is essential to our nation’s future.” But, they primarily advocate for farm to school programs. The CFSC is generally pushing for mandatory funding for farm to school efforts, and they are currently asking for 50 million over 5 years to promote these programs.

The top priorities of NANA and CNF demonstrate remarkably similar concerns. While they differ slightly in the details (for example, while the CNF specifically asks for a 35 cent increase in the reimbursement rate, NANA does not set a specific number) the two are asking for very similar things in reauthorization. This demonstrates that there is (1) intransitive power at work through the formation of coalitions, and (2) that the coalitions themselves are also participating in intransitive power by sharing similar reauthorization objectives.

Most of the actors I spoke with communicated that their current coalition activity was in the form of collaboration, and was not based on coercion. However, the powerful organizations I interviewed were most often the head of these coalitions, which allowed them to practice coercion over smaller and less powerful coalition members. For these large, powerful organizations, I assert that in fact the use of intransitive power is nevertheless strategic in that it is allowing many to remain active in the NSLP as nutrition concerns become more influential. We will come back to this in the discussion of structural power.

There was a definite sense that the use of intransitive power is greater during the current reauthorization process. Jennifer with the ADA stated that “I would say we’re [...] much more cohesive this time around, than we have been in the past.” The increasing use of intransitive power is not only attributed to similar ideas about how the policy should be changed. Some organizations rely on partners to deal with issues they see as important but not in their realm of expertise. For example, Zoe with CBPP stated that they have limited human resources and when it comes to access issues they pick their priorities. They feel okay with this: “because there are other organizations that work on those programs, we felt comfortable skipping out.” With nutrition issues, they skip out because they lack expertise on those issues. “Not being nutritionists, we feel like that’s kinda beyond our scope.” I followed up by asking, “So you’re not necessarily then opposed to nutrition interests?” Zoe replied “No. [...] If you care about access, you should also care about *what* kids have access to. And that does matter to us. I wouldn’t say we’re agnostic on the quality of the meals [...] it’s just not something that we focus on enough to consider ourselves enough experts and to weigh in on.”

Having partners in the NSLP policy making process was seen as vital in accomplishing change in the reauthorization process. For example, Alex with CSPI spoke to the benefits of working together by stating that “If you work as part of a coalition, it goes a lot farther than if you’re just one organization.” As Ed Cooney stated “how do you get your goal unless you have a partner? So these groups partner together, and that's how things change.” He further spoke to the decreased tension during this reauthorization by stating that “It seems to be relatively missing this year, in the sense that people seem to be working together, which I think is great. [...] The end goals are the same. We want all children to have access to the highest quality lunch, breakfast that they can get.” The use of intransitive power helps all organizations achieve their broad end goals.

B. Transitive Relational Power

Despite the assertion of actors that intransitive power is increasingly utilized in the NSLP policy domain, the use of transitive power certainly still occurs. This is illustrated by examination of issues such as increasing reimbursement rates, universal free meals/collapsing the free and reduced price meal categories, the issue of certification and verification, details of the wellness policies, and actions related to the farm to school movement. Further, history has demonstrated that there is often little money to go around for the NSLP, and transitive power is often utilized in order to achieve specific goals.

In the current reauthorization process, there is evidence of transitive relational power in the conversations about collapsing the free and reduced price meal categories. Organizations like CSPI and the CBPP clearly feel that this idea is counter-productive to their own goals for the reauthorization process. If this issue was to come to the forefront

of policy negotiation, I believe that such organizations would attempt to exercise transitive relational power in order to secure their own interests, which are currently focused on certification and verification. This is, in fact, what happened in the previous time periods, for example, when nutrition education was shot down in the original policy making process, or those advocating for nutrition for all were overtaken by the hunger lobby. Further, I would suggest that organizations like the CBPP practice transitive relational power even in occasions like my interview; when they speak out against such issues, they are making it known that they do not support such initiatives. This is important because the CBPP in particular does have a high level of dispositional power in the policy making process, which will be further discussed below

Transitive relational power was also demonstrated in conversations about local wellness policies. While there seems to be universal concern about the need to improve these policies, and universal acknowledgment that the policies of 2004 were flawed and have not been effective, concerns about maintaining or diminishing local control still remains, and federal mandates are still against the wishes of some powerful actors, such as those promoting education interest (e.g. the PTA). When it comes down to making policy decisions about what should be specifically changed about wellness policies, organizations might have very different ideas about what should be done. Organizations would then utilize transitive power to achieve their interests in the policy making process by advocating for their individual interests above the coalition interests. This is exactly what happened in the 2004 reauthorization process, when the food industry and education advocates managed to avoid federal mandates in nutrition regulations in the wellness policies.

We can also look to how the farm to school movement has been treated in the NSLP policy domain. By not acknowledging the presence of this new actor, established actors are in effect practicing transitive relational power. These established actors know that so long as they don't include this new actor in a meaningful way in their own policy goals, they will be more likely to have increased control and say over how money which is allotted to the NSLP policy domain is distributed. When it comes down to it, and there are limited funds, organizations are less likely to compromise, and more likely to fight for their own interests. "When push comes to shove, organizations still do have specific goals which differ and sometimes contradict each other, and if there's a little bit of money, we may all fight over it" (Madeleine with FRAC). Eric echoed this assertion when he stated that while there are no "opponents [...] because everybody, again, wants kids to be healthy, wants kids to have a good, healthy meal" there are "different interpretations of what changes should be made, and what should be done." In summary, intransitive power might be utilized more in the planning stage, but when the actual policy negotiations get under way, transitive power is likely utilized. Burstein speaks to this when he discusses the factors which lead to issues moving up the policy agenda. Intransitive power is utilized by engaging factors such as relationships with legislators and government agencies, as well as using events such as crises or disasters, in order to achieve specific interests in policy outcomes.

Examination of these issues all demonstrate that transitive relational power is at play. But how is relational power developed and maintained? Relational power, whether transitive or intransitive, is influenced by other layers of power, and specific factors, such

as developing relationships with politicians, with the USDA, or with other powerful actors.

C. Increasing Relational Power: Relationships with Legislators & USDA

In line with other time periods of policy making in the NSLP, my interviews revealed that having a relationship with politicians is very important in achieving favorable policy outcomes. Many actors discussed the importance of having legislative champions in order to get an issue addressed in the policy making process. For example, when Ed Cooney discussed the farm to school movement, he made it clear that they would only achieve power in the policy domain if they found strong legislative support. Jennifer with ADA agreed, and stated that “I think the biggest thing is just having it not be something everyone agrees with, but having it be something that you’ve got people that are passionate champions about in Congress. That’s the big struggle to me.”

According to Eric with SNA, “There are members of Congress who are tremendous heroes and champions for this—for additional resources, for funding, for a lot of our priorities.” Specific champions for SNA are Senator Lugar from Indiana, and John Boehner from Ohio. Zoe with CBPP spoke to the importance of having a relationship with the hill, and stated that “We do have close relationships with many congressional offices built sometimes around school lunch specifically, but often around the many other areas that we work on. So in my work, I kinda get the benefit of all that.” Alex with CSPI, who said that Representative Woosley was their ‘champion of competitive food’, also spoke to the importance of being close with legislators when she asserted that “I’m very close with the Hill. I’m there every day.” By developing and maintaining close relationships with legislators, it is much easier to get your priorities on

the legislative agenda, and in legislative proposals. It is also vital to have such relationships in order to get priorities funded.

Actors also expressed the importance of having a good relationship with the USDA. Derek, for example, said that “I have always worked pretty closely with the USDA, with the food and nutrition service, with the career staff.” Alex with CSPI stated that “We work with the USDA a lot [...] They’re really helpful.” Further evidence that a close relationship with the USDA is perceived as a way to increase relational power is found in the fact that the CSFC is advocating for a local food czar position in the USDA. By aligning in a supportive way with the USDA, the relational power of such actors is increased, and their dispositional power, in turn, is heightened. Further, when dispositional power is established, it becomes easier to develop these important relationships, and influence the priorities of decision makers.

One of the best examples of how having a close relationship with the USDA and politicians can increase power is found with the CBPP. A number of times in my interviews, it was made clear that the CBPP has a high level of dispositional power. Bill and Sam stated that the CBPP ‘is huge’ and that “their influence outweighs everybody else’s.” Their dispositional power can in part be explained because of the relationships they have with other important key actors. Bill and Sam explained to me that “Bob Greenstein, who heads up the Center [CBPP], used to be our boss, during the Carter administration, and going back even further than that, we worked with Bob Greenstein in the early ‘70s on the whole structure of the child and adult care food program.” So part of the dispositional power of CBPP can be explained by their leadership’s close relationship with the USDA.

D. Increasing Relational Power through Credible Research

It was demonstrated in Chapter 4 that producing credible research can lead to increased power in the policy making process. For example, over time, as their research had become more reliable, nutrition scientists have been more able to achieve relational power in the NSLP policy domain. In conversations about CBPP, it was revealed that having access to credible research also remains important in developing and maintaining relational power. Bill stated that “[legislators] know [CBPP’s] data is reliable [...] they know their analysis is reliable.” They asserted that the belief in the reliability of CBPP’s data and analysis gives them tremendous legitimacy. Bill and Sam stated that “both the Republicans and the Democrats respect them. The Democrats mostly agree with them. The Republicans don’t necessarily agree with them, but they respect their perspective, and they understand they have to deal with it.” CBPP is well respected by Derek Miller, as well as by other organizations, specifically because of their focus on research and analysis. Alex from CSPI claimed “It’s a very well respected organization that does more, like, economic analysis and quantitative analysis of these more qualitative issues. But they are definitely an organization that’s well respected.” It is not only important to have close relationships with politicians and the USDA. It is also important to have credible research and analysis which backs up your positions, and provides you legitimacy.

E. Increasing Relational Power through Relationships with the Food Industry

As was made evident during the hunger lobby’s reign of power, being close to the most powerful actor in the policy domain is also a way of increasing relational power. In the current reauthorization process, the food industry remains a powerful actor in the

NSLP policy domain, and because of this, working with or against them can impact the relational and dispositional power of key actors. As Ed Cooney stated, the food industry plays a “pre-eminent role” in the NSLP policy making process. Cooney spoke directly to the relational power of the food industry when he stated that “They have access to members because they have money and influence and power.”

Many organizations in fact asserted that they increase their own dispositional power by creating relationships and aligning with industry. Cooney stated that the food industry, “are valued partners in this effort. I'm not anti-business, nor is anyone else that I know that wants to achieve success. [...] I mean you gotta have them – you gotta talk to these people [...] They're big time players. If you don't have them in the room or their viewpoint in the room and you haven't thought about it, you haven't dealt with it, you're gonna lose.”

Access organizations in particular have found it important to align with industry. And while access groups have more recently aligned with nutrition advocates, and acknowledge the importance of nutrition, they are still first primarily concerned with making sure that poor children are fed. Cooney stated that the “bottom line is I'm an advocate for low-income people.” Madeleine with FRAC also expressed her support of industry, if it encourages more access to healthy foods for low income children. She stated that “They're now vending reimbursable meals out of the machine where kids can punch in their number or put in their card and they get a meal out of it. [...] So I think we can take these mechanisms that appeal to kids and still give them healthy food and equalize the access to the food for kids, whatever their income level is. So we're open to different ways.”

The SNA has also historically had a close relationship with industry. In fact, Derek Miller stated that “The School Nutrition Association is a trade group pretending to be a child health non-profit. [...] So its very industry biased.” Given that, it is not surprising that the SNA had mostly positive things to say about the food industry. While Eric did claim that at times, the private food industry erected barriers to SNA’s agenda, like the beverage industry, overall, SNA sees working with the food industry as a way of achieving their goals of feeding children nutritious food while satisfying children’s food preferences and staying on budget.

Some are far more skeptical of the food industry, and view them as powerful and problematic. For example, Nora with NEA/HIN stated that in 2004, “Industry supported [wellness policies] because they thought it meant the districts wouldn’t do anything. Now industry thinks, “Isn’t it nice if we had one national competitive food standard?” However, HIN is new to the NSLP policy domain, and therefore has less at stake in terms of maintaining relationships with the food industry. Katie with PCRM was also somewhat critical of the food industry, but again, they have had historically very little power in the NSLP, and therefore have less to lose by being critical, and not aligning, with the food industry, specifically powerful organizations like the dairy industry.

It is therefore evident that the dispositional power of the food industry has in turn impacted the relational power of other actors. But, the industry is also changing their stance on issues, because “there’s acknowledgment from many food and beverage companies that nutrition standards will happen and should happen. And that the train’s going and they can jump on it if they want and if not, they won’t.” (Alex, CSPI). In other words, the dispositional power of the food industry is decreasing in light of changes in

societal norms, beliefs and values about health and nutrition. These changes are giving rise to the structural power of nutrition advocates, which increases their dispositional power, and enables them to in turn impact relational and structural power in the policy domain. The food industry can maintain their dispositional power if they can adjust to the changing times by changing their products and practices. And those interested in access, as well as those representing food service directors, are increasingly aligning with nutrition interests, which means that their support for the food industry is tempered by these additional concerns.

The food industry can continue to increase or maintain its dispositional power by improving access and decreasing stigma for low income children, and by nutritionally improving the foods they offer. Other organizations increase their relational, and thus dispositional power, by aligning with industry as well. When the food industry utilizes transitive relational power, organizations are critical of them. But, when the food industry compromises, and moves towards utilizing intransitive relational power, they are less criticized by other key actors. In a time when structural change is forcing nutritional improvements in the school food environment, it is strategic for the food industry to compromise, in order to maintain their dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain.

F. Structural Power

Structural power remains important in determining how social actors can engage in the NSLP policy domain. Structural conditions can be used to improve the power of actors in the policy domain, making it easier for them to achieve goals. For example, as mentioned above, when social ideas about health and nutrition change, achieving nutrition improvements in the NSLP policy domain is made easier. But, there are also a

number of structural conditions which make it more difficult for actors to achieve favorable outcomes in the NSLP policy making process.

G. Structural Power and Improving Nutrition

One of the large structural conditions which either enables or constrains key actors in the NSLP policy domain are societal norms, beliefs, values and practices about health and nutrition. A number of actors were concerned that the school food environment was being overemphasized as a location for change, and they suggested that society needs to change before the school lunch environment can really change. For example, Nora with NEA stated that “The big barrier [to improving health through changing the foods that children consume] is something that Congress can’t legislate, and that is outside of the school. That is gonna take society as a whole. It’s gonna take people looking at—it’s gonna take a huge, monumental shift.” A number of key actors emphasized that societal change is important because food habits are shaped by “the greater food society that we’re in now” and that school meals “don’t operate in a vacuum.” Nora with NEA stated that “while there has been so much focus on the role that schools play in the childhood obesity epidemic, it’s really important to recognize that schools only play a very small role. For some percentage of kids, schools are where they’re getting the majority of their calories, but those kids aren’t the majority of kids.” And Eric and Arianne pointed out that if a child eats school lunch every day, they are only consuming 16 percent of their meals at school.

However, Jennifer, along with a number of key actors, such as Alex with CSPI and James with the PTA, recognized that increased concern about health and nutrition, and increased prevalence of obesity were enabling the issue of nutrition to receive more

attention in the NSLP policy making process. Others further suggested that in light of the current economic conditions, the school lunch is once again being seen as an important location for helping low income children. Nora stated that “the combination of the childhood obesity epidemic and the current economic crisis just sharpen the issues because this is an incredibly critical safety net for kids in very tough economic times. There is no money, but these kids need to eat.”

Actors concerned about nutrition in the NSLP are able to engage structural power because the issues of obesity and nutrition in general are increasingly of broad national concern. And the school food environment is still seen as a location for change. By linking their arguments to structural issues, social actors in the NSLP increase their structural power in the policy making process.

H. Structural Power and Kids as Consumers

The rise in viewing kids as consumers is also changing societal ideals, and thus the structural power of actors in the NSLP policy domain. American society increasingly views children as consumers and as customers, and the school food environment now offers not just food, but consumer products. This impacts the perceived role of school food operators and the lunchroom, and also significantly increases the structural power of the food industry. Eric with SNA stated that:

[School food operators are] also looking at who their customers are—who the students are, and what their students are eating outside of school [...] and they say, okay, this is what kids are used to. This is what kids are accustomed to. *This is what kids are wanting to eat.* What can we offer that—how can we re-make—make over these meals in a way that kids are gonna consumer, and yet, that are gonna meet our federal nutrition guidelines and be healthy food kids.

This theme of viewing children as customers in the school food environment was echoed by Roger, who stated that “if you get a product that they're not going to like, they're

gonna be turned off by it. They're not gonna buy it.” Madeleine with FRAC stated that school food directors “have customers and the customers are the kids and what do they want to eat?”

There is a clear idea that kids have certain food preferences, and that schools should be catering to these preferences. Children are now seen as being active and powerful agents in the school food environment. This is a significant change from earlier times. This societal ideal again shapes the structure in which the NSLP policy making process is working within because school food operators specifically, but the NSLP policy domain more generally, has customers that they are feeding. By viewing children as consumers, actors, specifically the food industry and school food operators, increase their structural power, and thus their dispositional power.

I. Structural Power and Administrative Changes

A major structural condition which the NSLP operates under are administrative conditions of the federal government. As the politics of Washington DC change, so too do the possibilities and options for the NSLP policy making process. A number of key actors spoke about the recent change in administration, and asserted that they are hopeful that having an administration which has stated that child hunger and nutrition are priorities will enable them to make more change. It is not only about having an administration that cares about the issues; it is about having an administration that will appropriate funds in order to make change a possibility,

For example, the CFSC sees the openness of the new administration as one way to increase their dispositional power. We can recall that Burstein asserts that the openness of politicians to new ideas is an important factor in getting an issue to move up the

political agenda. Megan is hopeful that with the change of administration, and with the farm to school movement now getting more attention, they can finally get appropriations for their initiatives. This will allow them to maintain and even gain momentum, and increase their dispositional power in the NSLP policy making process.

J. Structural Power and Finances

The NSLP is also one policy domain and one program among many, and over all, has very little power in the broad landscape of the federal government. In my interviews, it was universally acknowledged that there is a limited amount of money to work with in the legislative process, and those with the most dispositional power are most likely to get access to that money for their priorities. Jennifer speaks to this when she states that “a lot of things that we’re asking for require money. [...] But money gets found when it’s an important issue. So money is an issue.”

Many predict that money will be the biggest barrier in achieving their goals with the upcoming reauthorization. Zoe with CBPP stated that “The obstacles, clearly in my mind, the biggest is funding. In 2004, it was completely determined of what ended up in the bill and what didn’t, and I think it’s likely to be that way again.” Nora with NEA stated that “Finances will, fundamentally, continue to be the biggest barrier.” Alex with CSPI stated that the biggest barrier is “Money, obviously.” Madeleine with FRAC stated that “having adequate funding is, obviously, everyone’s going to say that it’s a barrier. We would like to have universal meals, and it would cost a lot of money, so it’s always a barrier.” Ed Cooney stated that “the major barrier is money. And it's not just money, the source, where do you get it, who do you have to hurt?” And Derek Miller stated that “Well the big, the big issue is money. Are we going to have money to spend or not? I

mean, if we've got money, we can do some good things, if we don't, we probably, it's going to be a relatively minor reauthorization.”

There is hope with this reauthorization because money has been promised. And as the USDA retired interviewees stated, “Our past two reauthorizations were budget neutral, so for any – now, we did get a little money, in the end, but basically, the things that were put forward, you had to have a cost savings to offset any expense that you had. So this time around, there is some money available.” But, it is always important to recognize that the greatest structural constraint for the NSLP policy domain is lack of sufficient funds.

V. Conclusion

In the current reauthorization process, we can see that the model of power described in Chapter 2 is at play. The dispositional power of key actors continues to be largely determined by relational and structural power, but this dispositional power still, in turn, impacts relational and structural power, which influences how successful actors are in achieving their policy goals. Based on the information I was able to gather through interviews and documents which have been recently published, it appears that the most dispositional power is held by the CBPP, the food industry, and the large coalitions which have formed around nutrition and access. Increasingly, those promoting nutrition are increasing their dispositional power, which is allowing them to impact structural and relational power. For example, other actors, specifically the private food industry and those promoting access, are being forced to frame their interests in terms of nutrition. They are increasingly forming coalitions with nutrition advocates, and are making compromises with nutrition advocates in the NSLP policy domain.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I. Introduction

In Chapter 1, I raised three questions: (a) who are the key actors in the historical and current process of developing and transforming the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in the United States? (b) What key issues were/are important for these social actors (or how did/do they frame the issue of school lunch), and (c) whose interests were/are represented in policy outcomes? In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyzed the key actors and issues involved in negotiating the NSLP, in order to understand why certain actors were able to achieve favorable policy outcomes in the policy making process.

In this chapter, I first review how my data answered the above research questions, and argue that the application of my theoretical model to this data revealed that relational power and structural power enable actors to form dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain, and that this dispositional power subsequently impacts relational and structural power. Next, I assert that this model of power helps explain when and how actors engage in compromises and form coalitions in order to use power as a mechanism for social change. Specifically, this model shows that actors with the most financial resources (e.g. the food industry) form alliances with other actors (e.g. nutrition advocates), and adjust their agenda (e.g. provide more nutritious food offerings in the school food environment), because of the use of other forms of power (e.g. relational or structural) by other, economically weaker actors. For instance, while the food industry is the most economically powerful actor in the NSLP policy domain, changing social norms and values about food consumption have given rise to the relational and structural power of

others, and encouraged change in the actions of the food industry. Finally, I conclude by discussing how this information can inform policy making decisions for actors in the NSLP policy domain.

II. Findings

My historical analysis revealed important information about my first research question. The key actors in the original policy making process leading up to 1946 included those promoting agricultural interests, those interested in improving access for poor children, and nutrition advocates, as well as southern Democrats. In the next era of change, which occurred in the 1960s and into the 1970s, no new actors emerged, but those promoting access increased their power. In the privatization era, which began in the late 1960s, the private food industry became a dominant actor in the NSLP policy domain. In the turn to nutrition era, which became significant in the 1990s, those promoting nutrition increased their power and reframed their issue of concern by turning their focus to obesity prevention. My contemporary data demonstrated that all of these actors remain active in the NSLP policy domain, and that the farm to school movement has recently entered into the policy making process.

My data also answered my second and third questions, and demonstrated that while during each time period, key actors pushed for specific interests in the policy making process, actors also often supported the interests of other actors when the power dynamic forced them to make compromises and form coalitions. Therefore, legislative outcomes reflected the interests of actors who achieved the most dispositional power, either on their own or with the support of other influential actors.

My model of power in the policy domain, with the aid of Burstein's information regarding the factors which get an issue on and moving up the political agenda, helps us understand why this happens. The ability of actors to achieve dispositional power initially is directly related to their relational and structural power. For example, the private food industry was able to enter the school food environment in part because of relational and structural power, provided through their financial wealth, their relationships with politicians, and their expertise in offering foods in institutional environments. This established dispositional power is not stagnant, however, but is dynamic and changing. Once established, in fact, this dispositional power directly influences relational and structural power. One way that dispositional power informs relational and structural power is that when an actor becomes powerful, others react to them in new ways. For example, after the private food industry achieved dispositional power in the NSLP policy domain, they reshaped relationships between other actors in the NSLP policy domain. For instance, nutritionists became more supportive of the private food industry when it was clear that the private food industry had greater dispositional power. By working with, rather than against, the private food industry, nutritionists were able to increase their relational power with this powerful actor, which provided them with benefit of increased financial resources.

Another way that dispositional power impacts relational and structural power is that dispositional power influences the 'rules of the game'. When an actor becomes the most powerful in the policy domain, they are able to control how issues are defined, and how they are regulated in policy outcomes. For example, the hunger lobby achieved tremendous power by the early 1970s and successfully instituted the free lunch mandate

with their dispositional power, which subsequently reshaped the overarching mission of the NSLP program: the constituent changed, how lunches were served changed, and the free lunch mandate impacted who provided lunches and what types of foods were offered and consumed.

III. Discussion

I assert that the theoretical model presented here illustrates the dynamic relationships between actors in the NSLP and informs our sociological understanding as to why powerful actors need to form alliances and make compromises. Once an actor achieves dispositional power, they become a greater force in NSLP policy negotiation. However, this established dispositional power is not permanent, but is changing and dynamic: dispositional power is constantly being renegotiated. Dispositional power informs how other actors relate and align in the legislative process. This dispositional power also impacts the 'rules of the game', which influences how the program is designed, which actors benefit from the program, which in turn impacts how other actors can engage in the policy domain.

This discussion can be clarified by turning to the work of Burstein (1991). Burstein provides a list of factors which determine whether an issue becomes a part of a policy domain, and whether an issue moves up the policy agenda. The dispositional power of actors impacts how these factors are utilized. For example, Burstein asserts that one factor which allows an issue to move up the agenda is the use of focusing events like crises or disasters. Currently, the issue of nutrition receives increased public attention, as overarching American social norms and values about food consumption are changing in the wake of the obesity crisis. This has provided increased dispositional power for

nutritionists, and allowed them to influence the other layers of power. For this reason, the food industry, while powerful economically, is currently aligning with nutrition advocates, and are changing the products they offer in the school food environment to meet the agenda of the now more powerful nutrition interests.

IV. Recommendations and Conclusion

The most important finding that has come out of this research is that it is not necessarily the actor with the most money that ‘gets their way’ in the policy making process. Rather, actors who are not economically powerful can achieve change in the NSLP policy domain if they are able to utilize other forms of power. I suggest that actors who are not economically powerful can create change in NSLP policy by increasing their dispositional power by looking to Burstein’s factors. Once dispositional power is then established, these actors can then impact structural and relational power, redefining what the NSLP program looks like. For example, if the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) can increase their dispositional power by increasing their relationships with politicians, the USDA, and utilizing the crises of the childhood obesity epidemic to frame their interests, they could then go and help shape a new definition of what healthy, quality food looks like.

As stated in the introduction, the goals of the NSLP are to provide nutritionally balanced meals, subsidized partially or completely for children who qualify. Because this goal/mission is so brief, and without description beyond the nutrition recommendations, actors with varied interests have been allowed to shape and reshape the program. Because of this, I additionally suggest that future research should examine more closely how actors in the policy domain define quality food. This is important because how

actors define quality food impacts what they push for in the policy domain, and has broad implications for the health and well-being of society.

Appendix 1: List of Interview Subjects

Name	Organization	Interview Category
Derek Miller	Staffer for Tom Harkin on the US Senate Agriculture Committee	Legislative Representative
Roger Szemraj	Counsel for American Commodity Distribution Association	Industry
Jennifer Weber	American Dietetic Association	Nutrition and Health
Madeleine Levin	Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)	Access
Erik Peterson	School Nutrition Association	Industry
Arianne Corbett	School Nutrition Association	Industry
Zoe Neuberger	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Access
Nora Howley	National Education Association/Health Information Association	Education
Katie Strong	Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine	Nutrition and Health
James Vanderhook	National Parent Teacher Association	Education
Anonymous	USDA retired career Employee	Government Agency
Anonymous	USDA retired career Employee	Government Agency
Alex Lewin	Center for Science in the Public Interest/NANA	Nutrition and Health
Ed Cooney	Congressional Hunger Center	Access
Megan Elsner	Community Food Security Coalition	Sustainable Agriculture

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

- 1) What is your organizations mission in general, and what is your organization's mission specifically for the NSLP?
- 2) What does your organization like and/or dislike about current national school lunch policy?
- 3) What changes does your organization aim to achieve in regard to school lunch policy?
- 4) How does your organization view the changes that have occurred in school lunch programs over the years?
- 5) Who does your organization see as the most important key players in school lunch programs?
- 6) What does your organization see as the future of school lunch programs? What does your organization *hope* to see as the future of school lunch programs?
- 7) Does your organization feel satisfied with the foods offered in the NSLP, or does your organization hope to see change in these offerings?
- 8) Does your organization see the increased concern about diet and nutrition as impacting school lunch programs in recent times?
- 9) What are barriers your organization faces when it comes to making policy change which you view as favorable?

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Vita
Rebecca Som Castellano

Date and Place of Birth
April 30, 1980
Tacoma, Washington

Education

B.A. *Social Change, Sustainability, and Renewable Food Production*,
Fairhaven College, Western Washington University, 2002.

Professional Positions

Teaching Assistant,
Sociology 302, Social Research Methods
Fall 2007-
Spring 2008

Research Assistant,
Department of Community and Leadership Development
Dr. Keiko Tanaka
July 2008-
June 2009

Assistant Market Manager.
Pike Place Market. Seattle, WA.
2004-2007

Community Garden Program Assistant
Oregon Food Bank., Portland Oregon
2002-2003.

Scholastic and Professional Honors

Rural Sociological Society Master's Thesis and Dissertation
Award. Funded for \$3,125 for thesis research project.
Awarded
Spring 2008