



# Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program to Help the Economy of the Community in Bintang Bayu District, Serdang Bedagai Regency

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## Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of the free nutritious food program, evaluate the economic situation of residents, and analyze improvements in social welfare in the Bintang Bayu District. The approach adopted was qualitative with a descriptive research design. Data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation studies were then processed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Research indicates that initiatives to provide free nutritious food have a positive impact on reducing household expenses, improving access to adequate nutrition, and stimulating the local economy by engaging farmers and micro-entrepreneurs. Furthermore, these initiatives contribute to improving human resource capabilities, which in turn impacts the community's economic competitiveness. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen collaboration, enhance human resource capabilities, and implement efficient monitoring mechanisms to optimize the sustainable success of these initiatives. Providing free nutritious food not only provides economic benefits but also makes a significant contribution to improving the social well-being of the community.

## INTRODUCTION

Nutrition and poverty are interrelated issues that remain challenges to economic development in Indonesia. Poor nutrition and poverty are interrelated issues that continue to hinder Indonesia's economic development. Limited access to nutritious food impacts public health and human resource productivity (Nango et al., 2025). This situation ultimately leads to low economic competitiveness in society, especially among low-income groups. Therefore, policies that focus not only on meeting food needs but also provide direct and indirect economic impacts on the community are essential (Rahmatika et al., 2024).

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The government provides free nutritious food. This initiative is designed to ensure adequate nutrition for the population, with a particular focus on children and families (Ahsan & Alfaries, 2025). This program can serve as a form of social assistance and a means for qualitative economic research. Data collected through observation, dialogue, and document preparation are then analyzed through stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing (H. Yanti et al., 2025).

Overall, the implementation of the free nutritious meal program showed quite positive results in increasing community access to nutritious food (Amanda et al., 2026). This program also reflects the government's commitment to implementing policies for the community, particularly in efforts to improve the community's quality of life through an integrated approach between social and economic aspects (Adila et al., 2024). This is because the program involves various sectors, such as farmers, food businesses, and distribution service providers, thus creating economic circulation at the local level (Handini et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the free nutritious meal program also plays a role in reducing household expenditures (Ramadhani et al., 2026). By meeting some of the food consumption needs, people can allocate their income to other productive needs, such as education, healthcare, and small businesses. This impact demonstrates that the program is not solely consumption-oriented but also contributes to the sustainable improvement of community economic well-being (Muchlashin, 2026).

The purpose of this study was to determine how the free nutritious meal program was used in Bintang Bayu District, to determine the economic conditions of the community before and after the program, and to determine how the program impacted the community's economy, affecting productivity and the quality of human resources (Dwi et al., 2023). This situation ultimately leads to low economic competitiveness in society, especially among low-income groups. Therefore, policies that focus not only on meeting food needs but also have direct and indirect economic impacts on the community are crucial.

From a public policy perspective, the implementation of the free nutritious meal program reflects the role of the state in ensuring the social and economic welfare of the community (Rahayu, 2025). However, the success of this program is highly dependent on the effectiveness of its implementation in the field, including aspects of distribution, food quality, and the involvement of various related parties (Fadillah et al., 2026).

## **METHODS**

This study applies qualitative methods to comprehensively examine how the free nutritious meal program contributes to the economic well-being of the community. As described by Creswell, qualitative methods are designed to explore and understand a phenomenon and conditions related to the research subject through dialogue (Rohanita & Aizah, 2025). The chosen research method is descriptive qualitative, which emphasizes the presentation of empirical findings and factual conditions on the ground surrounding the program's implementation. Data collection is based on in-depth interviews, visual observation, and document review with stakeholders, including program organizers and beneficiaries (Soamole et al., 2024).

All information collected comes from direct interviews conducted with Evander as the Head of SPPG, Tri Fia Akmalia as the Field Assistant of SPPG, M. Yunus as the Partner Leader, Natsrul and Misliani as volunteers, beneficiary educational institutions, and community members.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program in the Community

The implementation of the free nutritious meal program is part of a social policy that aims to improve welfare and meet the nutritional needs of the community by fulfilling basic food needs (Kiftiyah et al., 2025). With this program, the nutritional needs of every school child increase, thereby increasing intelligence, activity and focus in learning (Tambunan et al., 2025). This can also help the family economy by reducing the allowance given by each parent. Policy implementation is an activity that occurs after a valid directive is issued for a policy, which includes efforts to manage the school *input* to produce *output* for society (Eyes, 2025).

Increased community productivity, especially among children and adolescents who are beneficiaries. Adequate nutritional intake contributes to improved health and learning abilities, which in the long term can improve the quality of human resources (Mu'tafi et al., 2024). Community involvement in program implementation processes, such as food provision and distribution, can increase program effectiveness while providing direct economic benefits (Lendra et al., 2025). In addition, synergy between the government and the private sector can also strengthen program sustainability through resource support and innovation in program management (Jahudin et al., 2025).

Based on the results of the research that at the local level, the Ujung Negeri Kahan Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) is the first Free Nutritional Meal Kitchen located in Dusun I, Ujung Negeri Kahan Village, Bintang Bayu District, which is managed by the Tathya Dharaka Sejati Foundation. Mr. Evander Maulani Sipayung, S.T as the head of the kitchen is responsible for the process of running all kitchen activities assisted by Nutrition supervisors, Accounting, and Field Assistants and there are several teams, namely the preparation team, processing team, portioning team, ompreng washing team, distribution team, security. The total number of volunteers is 50 people. This program has reached 29 schools from kindergarten, junior high, and high school levels as direct beneficiaries. The number of beneficiaries to be served around the SPPG, 12 kindergartens, 12 elementary schools, 3 junior high schools / MTs, 2 senior high schools / vocational schools, 47 toddlers, 7 pregnant women, 10 breastfeeding mothers and a total target of 3,500 beneficiaries (Evander, 2026).



The SPPG Ujung Negeri Kahan Structure

The following details the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program at the Ujung Negeri Kahan SPPG, Bintang Bayu, Serdang Bedagai. The SPPG activity begins with the receipt of raw materials the day before the distribution process. Before starting work, all volunteers are required to prepare themselves by using work equipment in accordance with the SOPs established by the National Nutrition Agency, such as masks, gloves, head coverings, and other necessary equipment.

The preparation team is tasked with mixing vegetables and preparing raw materials for side dishes as well as vegetables, fish, fruit, and other ingredients that

will be cooked the next day. The food processing process begins at 1:00 a.m. WIB by the processing team, cooking all the prepared ingredients and according to the predetermined menu. The portioning team continues at 3:00 a.m. WIB, packing the menu into ompreng, ensuring neat and clean packaging. At 6:30 a.m., the distribution team begins delivering food to 29 schools with the furthest distance reaching 7 km from the SPPG kitchen location. In the delivery to schools, two cars are used and have a predetermined schedule. Exactly at 12:00 p.m. WIB, the ompreng washing team is ready to wash the empty ompreng that has been brought back by the distribution team. During the washing of the ompreng, attention is always paid when drying the ompreng because there must be no water left in the ompreng, this can affect the quality of the food menu inside (Akmala, 2026).

### **Impact of the Program on the Community Economy**

Based on interviews, the implementation of this program involves various parties, including the central government, local governments, and surrounding MSMEs. Most of the raw materials, such as vegetables, fruit, chips, and other items, are sourced from farmers and MSMEs in the Bintang Bayu District. This not only ensures the freshness and quality of the food but also provides economic opportunities for the surrounding community. Therefore, this program serves not only as social assistance but also as an economic empowerment strategy (Yunus, 2026).

Furthermore, this program also has an indirect impact by increasing local economic activity. The involvement of small businesses, farmers, and distributors in the program's supply chain creates job opportunities and increases community income (Andriyanty, 2025). For example, the increased demand for food from this program encourages local production and strengthens the agricultural sector. This program acts as an economic stimulus that can stimulate the local economy. This improvement in human resource quality will positively impact overall economic growth, as communities become more productive and competitive (Setyawan et al., 2025).

However, the economic impact of this program has not been evenly distributed across all regions. Some regions still face obstacles in program implementation, such as a lack of infrastructure and distribution access. This has resulted in suboptimal economic benefits. Therefore, efforts are needed to ensure equitable program implementation so that its positive impact can be felt more widely by the community.

Furthermore, there are supporting and inhibiting factors for the program. Various supporting factors significantly influence the success of the free nutritious meal program. The primary factor is strong government policy support through regulations and budgeting (Febryanti et al., 2025). Clear and targeted policies will facilitate program implementation in the field and ensure that the program runs according to its stated objectives. Furthermore, commitment from local governments is also a crucial factor in supporting the program's successful implementation. Another supporting factor is community participation and local business actors (Namsa, 2026).

However, several obstacles remain in its implementation, such as budget limitations, uneven distribution, and inconsistent food quality across regions. These factors pose challenges to ensuring the program's overall effectiveness. Therefore, better coordination and ongoing monitoring are needed to ensure the program's success in meeting its stated objectives (Agustini, 2025).

By understanding these supporting and inhibiting factors, it is hoped that the implementation of the free nutritious meal program can continue to be improved so that it can provide optimal benefits for the community's economy. Continuous evaluation and improvement of the implementation system are the main keys to achieving program goals effectively and efficiently.

### **The Role of Programs in Improving Social Welfare**

The free nutritious meal program not only has an economic impact but also improves the community's social welfare. In this case, social welfare includes meeting basic community needs such as food, healthcare, and education. People who previously struggled to meet their nutritional needs now enjoy a better quality of life thanks to this program (Sujud, 2026). This demonstrates that the program serves as an effective social protection instrument in reducing people's vulnerability to poverty. As Allah explains in Surah Al-Isra, verse 26:

وَاتِذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَلَا تَبْذُرْ نَبْذِيرًا

*"Give to the near of kin their due, (also to) the poor, and the wayfarer. And do not squander (your wealth) wastefully." (Q.S Al Isra : 26).*

This verse emphasizes a Muslim's social obligation to fulfill the rights of relatives, assist the poor, and assist those in need. This giving is not merely a moral imperative, but rather part of the Islamic social system aimed at creating collective well-being for the community.

Furthermore, the free nutritious meal program improves overall public health, especially for children, the nation's future generation. Adequate nutrition will enhance immune system and learning ability (Putri & Yanti, 2026). This program also seeks to reduce social disparities. Meeting basic needs is now accessible to groups previously unable to access healthy food. Because the free nutritious meal program reflects the principle of social justice in public policy, it can be a solution to address social inequality in Indonesia. This is because the government is striving to create a more equitable distribution of wealth.

However, achieving optimal social welfare requires synergy between various parties, including the government, the community, and the private sector. Without effective cooperation, this program will not run effectively. Therefore, it is crucial for all parties to play an active role in supporting the program's sustainability so that its benefits can be felt widely by the community (Riyanto & Kovalenko, 2023).

The extent to which a free nutritious meal program achieves its stated objectives indicates its effectiveness from a public policy perspective. One indicator of effectiveness is the level of program reach among its target population, namely those in need (Sarjito, 2024). Based on the analysis, the program has successfully reached most of its target groups, although several challenges remain in distribution and implementation. The success of a program can be assessed by its impact, both in the short and long term. Initially, the program proved successful in easing the financial burden on the community and expanding access to nutritious food consumption. The program is expected to improve individual competency and stimulate economic development. This indicates that the free nutritious meal program has significant potential as a sustainable initiative.

However, the results and processes of program implementation determine their effectiveness. Ineffective implementation processes, such as lack of coordination between agencies and inadequate oversight, can hinder the achievement

of program objectives. Therefore, to ensure that programs run according to plan, an effective management system and ongoing evaluation mechanisms are required.

Furthermore, transparency and accountability in program implementation are also crucial factors in determining policy effectiveness. A transparent program will increase public trust in the government, thereby encouraging more active community participation. To ensure the sustainability of the free nutritious meal program, an appropriate and sustainable development strategy is required. One strategy is to strengthen the local economic base by empowering farmers and small businesses (Harudin, 2025). By involving them in the program's supply chain, the government not only meets food needs but also creates sustainable economic opportunities for the community.

Furthermore, innovation in program management is key to increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of program implementation. The use of information technology, for example, can assist in data collection, distribution, and program monitoring. With an integrated system, the government can ensure that aid reaches its intended target and reaches its intended recipient on time. This will improve service quality and reduce the potential for irregularities in program implementation (S. N. Yanti et al., 2024).

The sustainability of any initiative depends heavily on the government's dedication to allocating sufficient funds. A lack of adequate financial support will hinder the program's full implementation. Therefore, the government should prioritize the provision of free nutritious food on the nation's development agenda to ensure the program's sustainability and long-term impact on the public. Through the implementation of appropriate development strategies, it is hoped that the free nutritious food program will continue to grow and make a significant contribution to improving the standard of living and economic conditions of the community. This initiative serves not only as a temporary solution to a problem but also as a long-term investment in the development of human capabilities and the nation's economy.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of the research, it was concluded that the implementation of the free nutritious meal program has a very good role in helping the community's economy, especially for low-income groups. This program not only functions as an effort to fulfill nutritional needs, but also as a social policy instrument that can reduce the burden of household expenses. The Ujung Negeri Kahan Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit (SPPG) is the first Free Nutritional Meal Kitchen located in Dusun I, Ujung Negeri Kahan Village, Bintang Bayu District, managed by the Tathya Dharaka Sejati Foundation. This program has reached 29 schools from kindergarten, junior high, and high school levels as direct beneficiaries. The number of beneficiaries to be served around the SPPG, 12 kindergartens, 12 elementary schools, 3 junior high schools/Islamic junior high schools, 2 senior high schools/vocational schools, 47 toddlers, 7 pregnant women, 10 breastfeeding mothers and a total target of 3,500 beneficiaries.

The government's involvement in this program, including local MSMEs, also involves the program. Most of the raw materials, such as vegetables, fruit, chips, and other items, are sourced from farmers and MSMEs in the Bintang Bayu District. This not only ensures the freshness and quality of the food but also provides economic opportunities for the surrounding community and improves social welfare. Social welfare includes meeting basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education.

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