

# In Miss., summer can increase risk of hunger for 3 in 4 kids who rely on in-school meals

Mississippi Today  
by Sophia Paffenroth

For the third year in a row, Gov. Tate Reeves opted out of a state-federal partnership that would have given summer grocery benefits to roughly 320,000 Mississippi children who rely on free meals during the school year.

Thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia are enrolled in the program, called SUN Bucks, which doles out \$120 for each eligible child during the months when school is not in session. By opting not to participate, Reeves turned down about \$38 million in federal funding.

Statewide, nearly three-quarters of students rely on free or reduced-cost school meals for consistent nutrition, according to the Mississippi Department of Education. In the summer, many of those children go hungry. On an average day in the summer of 2023, only 1 in 4 Mississippi children who depend on free or reduced-cost school meals made it to an in-person meal site, according to a national study conducted by the Food Research and Action Center.

Shelby Wilcher, the governor's spokesperson, told Mississippi Today that Reeves opted out of SUN Bucks because it was a

pandemic-era program that was never meant to be permanent.

"This program was originally intended to be a COVID-era policy to help bridge the gap during summer months while schools were forced to close," Wilcher said in an email to Mississippi Today.

However, Congress established the SUN Bucks program in 2024, long after the pandemic began. A brief released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture calls the program permanent. Wilcher then said that the program is "essentially the permanent continuation of Pandemic EBT."

# 10 Baking Ingredients That Turn Toxic Past Their Expiration Date

**Brown Sugar: The Bacteria Breeding Ground**

Brown sugar might seem like one of those ingredients that lasts forever, but that moisture content that gives it that perfect texture also makes it a perfect breeding ground for bacteria and mold when it goes bad. Unlike white sugar, brown sugar contains molasses, which creates an environment where harmful microorganisms can thrive once the protective packaging is compromised or the expiration date passes.

The danger with expired brown sugar isn't just about clumping or hardening. When moisture gets in and bacterial growth begins, you're looking at potential foodborne illnesses that can cause severe digestive distress. The molasses content actually feeds harmful bacteria, creating a toxic cocktail that can wreak havoc on your digestive system.

What makes this particularly dangerous is that brown sugar often looks fine even when it's harboring harmful bacteria. The dark color can mask early signs of contamination, and the natural variations in texture might hide the telltale signs that something's gone wrong. Many bakers continue using brown sugar well past its prime without realizing they're potentially poisoning their families.

**Vanilla Extract: The Alcohol Trap**

Vanilla extract is at least 35% alcohol by volume, so

you don't have to worry too much about bacterial contamination if it's been stored properly (cap firmly on and undamaged, in a cool dry place, the usual). But here's where things get tricky with expired vanilla extract. While the alcohol content acts as a natural preservative, chemical changes can occur over time that alter its safety profile.

However, potency and flavor may diminish over time. If the extract appears discolored or has an off odor, it's best to avoid consumption. The real danger comes when the extract has been improperly stored or the container has been compromised, allowing contamination to occur despite the alcohol content.

Vanilla extract may contain up to 35% ABV, which is the equivalent of a short of hard liquor like vodka or bourbon. When vanilla extract goes bad, chemical reactions can produce harmful compounds that your body isn't equipped to handle, especially when consumed in the concentrated amounts often used in baking. The alcohol that was supposed to protect you might actually be carrying these toxic compounds directly into your bloodstream.

**Cocoa Powder: The Mold Magnet**

Here's something that might surprise you about cocoa powder. The team's taste testers couldn't tell a difference between cookies baked with fresh cocoa

powder and cocoa powder that was a year or two old. But when the team tried out six-year-old cocoa powder, the taste testers did notice the difference. However, the real danger isn't in the taste change.

If you see any small black, green, or gray specks in the flour, it could be mold. This is rare but can happen if flour is stored in a damp environment. Moldy flour can be dangerous, so if you see anything unusual, it's best to err on the side of caution and dispose of it. The same principle applies to cocoa powder, which can develop dangerous mold growth when exposed to moisture.

However, its quality can deteriorate over time due to factors such as exposure to air, light, and moisture. Cocoa powder is hygroscopic, meaning it readily absorbs moisture from the air. When exposed to air, it can clump and lose its powdery texture. This moisture absorption creates the perfect environment for toxic mold growth that can contaminate your entire baking project and potentially cause serious respiratory problems.

**Old Spices and Extracts: The Chemical Time Bombs**

Beyond vanilla extract, other flavoring agents and spices used in baking can become toxic over time. Expired almond extract, lemon extract, and artificial flavorings can undergo chemical changes that produce harmful compounds. The alcohol base in many extracts can

## \*Patriotic

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tight crowds seemed to bring out the best in people rather than testing their patience.

A woman named Judy drove with her family from Connecticut to support the state after officials withdrew support prior to the fair opening. (Fox News Digital)

"It is amazingly crowded, [and] the people are amazingly nice," one couple said. "We're making friends!"

They gestured to another couple next to them, whom they had just met while waiting in line for the Ferris wheel.

Despite hailing from different parts of the country — Tennessee and New Jersey — the new friends had quickly bonded over their shared patriotism and holiday spirit.

evaporate over time, concentrating potentially dangerous chemicals that were once diluted to safe levels.

Ground spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger lose their potency over time, but that's not the worst part. These ground spices can develop aflatoxins, which are among the most carcinogenic substances known to science. When spices are stored improperly or kept well past their expiration dates, these mycotoxins can reach dangerous levels that pose serious health risks.

The frightening reality is that many of these expired extracts and spices might not show obvious signs of spoilage. They might just seem less potent or flavorful, leading bakers to use more to compensate. This means you could be concentrating toxic compounds to dangerous levels without even realizing it. Some chemical changes in expired extracts can even create entirely new toxic compounds that weren't present in the original product.

**Nuts and Nut Flours: The Rancidity Danger Zone**

Here's something that'll make you rethink that bag of almond flour sitting in your pantry for months. Nuts and nut-based flours contain high levels of unsaturated fats, which sounds healthy until you realize these fats go rancid faster than almost any other baking ingredient. When nuts turn rancid, they don't just taste bad — they produce harmful compounds called peroxides and aldehydes that can damage your cells and increase inflammation throughout your body. What's truly alarming is that rancid nuts have been linked to increased oxidative stress, which accelerates aging and has been associated with serious conditions like heart disease and cancer. The scary part?



## Back-to-Back Miss. Match 5 Jackpots Hit

**Tuesday's Mega Millions Jackpot Climbs to Estimated \$576 Million**

JACKSON, MISS. —

The Fourth of July weekend started off with a bang for two Mississippi Match 5 players, as back-to-back jackpot-winning tickets were sold in the July 2nd and 3rd drawings.

A ticket purchased for the Thursday, July 2nd drawing at Murphy Oil USA #6784 in Horn Lake matched all five winning numbers (13-15-25-26-30) to win a

\$310,000 jackpot.

The excitement continued in the following drawing when another ticket, purchased at Midway Food Mart in Moss Point for the Friday, July 3rd drawing, matched all five winning numbers (19-25-28-30-33) to claim a \$50,000 jackpot.

The estimated jackpot for tonight's drawing, Monday, July 6, is \$54,000.

Mississippi Match 5 drawings are held nightly at 9:30 p.m. Players have 180 days from the drawing date to claim prizes.



**Make Your Case, and Don't Worry About the Other Guy**

Dear Dave,

What's your advice on asking for a raise in a delicate workplace situation? I've been with my company almost six years, and I make the same money as one of my co-workers, who has been with the company for an equal amount of time and holds the same title. I have no problem, all things being equal, but in my mind they're not equal. During our tenure with the company, I have consistently taken on more responsibility—asked for it, even—and produced bigger and better results than he has. All things considered, at this point I feel I have the right to complain about the situation, because I think I should be making more money than he does.

Jacob

Dear Jacob,

Believe me, I understand how you feel right now. But

You might not even taste the rancidity if you're mixing these nuts into cookies or brownies with strong flavors like chocolate. Ground nut flours are even more vulnerable because grinding exposes more surface area to oxygen, speeding up the oxidation process dramatically. That innocent-looking bag of pecan pieces or hazelnut flour could be slowly poisoning your baked goods, and most people would never know until it's too late.

no, you don't have the right to complain. You agreed on your pay when you took the job, and you should perform your duties with integrity and character. What someone else does, or in this case doesn't do, has nothing to do with your title or personal compensation.

Now, if you honestly feel like you deserve a raise because of your effort and performance on the job, that's fine. It's sounds like it may even be understandable, given the situation. So, if that's the case, sit down with your leader and make a logical, objective and reasonable argument for why you deserve more money. I wouldn't mention your co-worker, and especially don't bad-mouth him, because it's not relevant. Taking that approach could also make it come off as just a case of sour grapes to your boss. As a leader, I can tell you that's not an attractive look on anyone. What's relevant here is the value you bring to the company. Period.

Do you hear what I'm saying, Jacob? If you think you deserve a raise, and you've got the results to prove it, sit down and have a respectful conversation with your leader. Make your case. Show him or her the numbers in black and white, the value you bring to the company and explain why you feel you should get more money. I really think you'll have a better chance of getting your work recognized and rewarded if you'll approach things this way.

Good luck! — Dave