



Implement Summer Food Standards of Excellence in Your Community

As an anti-hunger advocate, you understand the clear link between the food served at summer food sites and participation rates. Simply put, if children do not find the meals appealing, they will not eat them and may not come to the site. Food often draws children into summer programs and results in more consistent attendance.

The goal of evaluating summer food sites and encouraging them to meet high standards is to improve the food quality served and better the program's environment. Programs that follow high standards will increase participation and ensure that more hungry children receive nutritious meals when school is out, in an atmosphere that promotes healthy lifestyle choices.

Ways to Use the Summer Food Standards

The attached checklist is used to highlight the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and positively reinforce quality at sites. Use it to evaluate sites serving breakfast, lunch, and/or suppers. The checklist criteria can be used for any of the following:

- Evaluate what works and does not work at summer food sites in your area.
- Ask site coordinators to perform a self-evaluation of their site.
- Conduct city or county-wide evaluations of the Summer Food Service Program.
- Determine high-quality sites and recognize them for their work.
- Identify what areas need improvement and encourage sites to strive for a higher level of program excellence.

Some of the questions need to be answered by the site coordinators, and the person conducting the review may need to examine a monthly menu to accurately evaluate the meal patterns. If possible, the reviewer should purchase a meal at each site (they will need to pay, since federal funds for meals can only be claimed for children 18 years of age and under) and eat with the children. This offers a better understanding of the quality of the food and the experience of eating at the site. During this process be sure to clearly explain to site staff that you are not the state agency monitoring staff.

Levels of Excellence

FRAC identifies three levels of quality summer food sites - bronze, silver and gold. In addition to meeting the state's nutrition, health and safety requirements, these sites strive to encourage children to participate in the summer food program, offer quality sites and healthy, child-friendly food.

Bronze sites go beyond the minimum requirements for a summer food site. They serve a variety of food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, throughout the menu cycle; the food is appealing; the site is welcoming to children of all ages and backgrounds; and the site staff conducts basic outreach activities to promote summer meals.

Silver sites exceed the requirements of a bronze site. They include a greater variety of fruits and vegetables; incorporate low fat dairy products and whole grains into the meals; offer opportunities for nutrition education and physical activity; conduct stronger outreach that is culturally appropriate; and maximize the number of meals allowable under SFSP.

Gold sites surpass bronze and silver requirements. They offer children choices of meal components, additional servings of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains; offer more variety in the menu; operate the majority of days that school is out; offer nutrition education once a week; provide daily opportunities for physical activity; and conduct extensive community outreach by targeting children of all ages, canvassing neighborhoods and using all possible community resources.

Evaluate Sites

To evaluate summer food sites, a surveyor should visit each site, review the Standards of Excellence criteria and confirm that it is met by the site. FRAC recommends that a site meet all criteria for that category in order to qualify as bronze, silver or gold. However, if the criteria are not realistic for your community, you may modify the standards or require a certain percentage of compliance for each category. Again, be sure to explain to site staff that you are not with the state agency.

Acknowledge Quality Sites

Give quality summer food sites special recognition for their hard work or an award such as the USDA Summer Sunshine Award. Contact your state child nutrition agency to learn if your state offers these awards and get more information. Acknowledge quality sites with an award ceremony, a mention in the local newspaper or give a modest monetary reward for use at the site.

Build on Success: Take Summer Food Sites to the Next Level

For sites that already meet the Standards of Excellence, encourage them to advance their program by incorporating some of the following ideas:

- Incorporate additional educational and recreational programming opportunities.
- Expand publicity efforts and encourage other sites to use the Standards of Excellence.
- Invite public officials and members of Congress to visit the summer food site to gain support for summer feeding programs.
- Host theme weeks throughout the summer and highlight different types of food.
- Include additional games, sports, movies, events and activities to draw children to the site and keep them coming back.
- Start a school or community garden, and if possible, serve some of the produce with the meals.
- Encourage children to try every meal component.
- Hold taste tests each week to feature fruits and vegetables and introduce children to new types of produce.
- Involve children in food preparation activities on a regular basis.
- Invite guest speakers such as a chef, farmer, police officer, firefighter, nurse, doctor or a “local celebrity” to the site.
- Package meals in colorful bags or boxes to make them more attractive; or let the children decorate the bags as an art project and then package the meals inside.
- Use food to teach children about cultural diversity and local history.



Summer Food Standards of Excellence

BRONZE LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all of the following criteria, all federal and state SFSP requirements and food safety regulations.

Food Quality

- Offer, at least, a two week menu cycle, which includes a variety of food.
- Serve fresh produce throughout the menu cycle.
- Serve food in an appealing manner. (Food is not crushed, soggy, frozen or damaged. Fruits and vegetables are ripe and in good condition.)
- Ensure that kids like the food and eat all components.
- Serve food at the right temperature. (Serve cold foods, cold and not frozen. Serve hot foods, hot and not burnt or overcooked.)
- Offer alternative menu items for children who cannot eat a component of the meal due to religious, cultural reasons or because of food allergies.

Environment

- Offer an attractive and welcoming environment for children to eat.
- Ensure that the site is accessible to all participants.
- Provide a safe well-lit entrance and path to the food service area.
- Display a summer meals banner outside of the building to clearly indicate that free summer meals are available at the site.
- List the correct address for the site on all outreach and promotional materials.
- Ensure that all staff are aware of the summer meals program; they welcome all children from the community and assist them in accessing the program.
- Operate the site five days a week, for at least six weeks when school is out.
- Offer a “sharing table” (if permitted by the state agency) where children can place non-perishable food items they do not want and other students can take them.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites.”

- Promote the summer meal program by distributing flyers and hanging a poster or banner at the site.
- Convey accurate program information on all promotional materials (e.g. free meals are offered at the site).
- Work with area schools to promote the summer meals program.

SILVER LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all bronze criteria and the following.

Food Quality

- Offer two different fruits and three different vegetables (canned, frozen or fresh) each week for lunch.
- Offer fresh fruits or raw vegetables three or more days of the week for lunch.
- Provide whole grain foods during the week.
- Serve Low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk daily.
- Exclude deep fat fried food from the menu (food cooked by total immersion into hot oil or fat, pre-fried or flash fried). Stir fried or sautéed foods are acceptable.
- Offer vegetarian options.

Environment

- Offer two meals each day (three meals a day for a migrant site.)
- Provide nutrition education throughout the summer.
- Offer opportunities for physical activity throughout the summer.
- Make vending machines inaccessible during the meal service.
- Operate for eight weeks, leaving a minimal gap between the beginning and end of NSLP and summer food.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites”

- Conduct outreach to local businesses and organizations.
- Host a kick-off event.
- Target a diverse group of children with your outreach.

GOLD LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site and staff must meet all bronze and silver criteria plus the following.

Food Quality

- Offer children choices of meal components (e.g. a choice between yogurt or a cheese stick; an apple or banana).
- Serve low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk daily. Whole milk is not offered.
- Offer additional servings of fruits and vegetables (exceed USDA required amounts).
- Hold a food tasting event or survey the children to learn which foods they want to eat during the summer.
- Offer four different entrees or meat/meat alternates throughout each week.
- Serve the main entrée two times or less on the monthly lunch menu (excluding substitute meal for children with special dietary restrictions).
- Offer three different fruits and five different vegetables (canned, fresh or frozen) each week on the lunch menu.
- Serve fresh fruits or raw vegetables five days a week.
- Provide whole-grain foods three or more times a week.

Environment

- Operate for the entire summer, leaving no gap between the beginning and end of NSLP and summer food.
- Maintain steady participation rates throughout summer.
- Offer nutrition education several times a week.
- Offer opportunities for physical activity every day.
- Make vending machines inaccessible.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites”

- Conduct outreach specifically targeted to older children.
- Visit the surrounding neighborhood to tell children and families about the free summer meals program.
- List the site with a widely used community hotline service (e.g. the United Way’s 211 service) as a place where children receive free meals throughout the summer.
- Promote the program using radio, TV, newspaper, community or church newsletter.