



The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals and snacks to low-income children 18 and under when school is not in session. When school lets out, millions of low-income children lose access to school breakfast, lunch, and afterschool meals that are available during the regular school year. SFSP fills this gap by providing free meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry. Currently, the program is underutilized. Nationally, only one out of seven children who receive free or reduced-price meals during the school year continues to receive meals during the summer months.

Summer Food Today

- [Nationally, just over 3 million children receive a summer lunch on an average day.](#)
- Local governments, school districts, and nonprofits can sponsor summer food sites, which may be located at schools, parks, recreation centers, housing projects, migrant centers, Indian reservations, YMCAs, Boys & Girls Clubs, houses of worship, summer camps, and other places where children congregate when school is out.
- A site qualifies either as an open or an enrolled site. An open site is located in a low-income area where 50 percent or more of all of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. The site is then open to all of the children in the community (open restricted sites are open sites that limit or restrict participation for reasons of safety, security, or control). An enrolled site only provides meals to children enrolled in the program. An enrolled site qualifies if it is located in a low-income area or if at least half of the children enrolled in the program are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Schools also can provide summer meals through the National School Lunch Program under the Seamless Summer Option, which operates similar to SFSP, but with less administrative work.

Summer Meals Benefit Low-Income Children and Families

- SFSP contributes to the healthy growth and development of low-income children by providing them with nutritious snacks and meals, often alongside recreational activities, to help address growing evidence of the risk of children gaining weight over the summer months. Reimbursable summer meals must meet federal nutrition standards and can provide an opportunity for children to access fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to support a healthy diet.
- Many SFSP sites also provide educational and enrichment activities in addition to meals, which enables children to learn and stay safe when school is out, mitigating the harmful effects of summer learning loss and ensuring that children are better able to learn when they return to school.
- The meals served through SFSP draw children to the activities offered at sites and maintain their participation in a structured summer learning program.
- Summer meals help parents stretch their food dollars at home during the summer months. Food budgets often increase due to the lack of access to school meals, but summer meal programs can also help mitigate child care costs due to the programming offered.

It Pays to Serve Summer Meals

- The SFSP reimbursements provide essential financial support to programs that serve low-income children when school is not in session.
- Sponsors receive a reimbursement for every breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack served. Sponsors located in rural areas or those that prepare their own meals on-site receive a higher reimbursement. Lunch and supper cannot be reimbursed for the same day by the same site, except for camp and migrant sites.
- Summer nutrition funding can add up. For example, a summer program serving breakfast and lunch to up to 50 children for eight weeks (or a 40-day program) would receive over \$12,000 in federal funding through SFSP. Rural or self-prep sites would receive even more. By decreasing the costs per meal as the number of meals being served increases, a sponsor can maximize the total amount they can receive in federal funding to help support their overall program. For the current SFSP reimbursement rates and to see how the funding adds up, [click here](#).
- Programs that have been providing meals and snacks, but have not received federal funding through SFSP, can be reimbursed and use the money previously spent on food to serve additional children, offer more activities, or hire additional staff.
- School Food Authorities already participating in the School Breakfast Program, or the National School Lunch Program, and sponsors of the CACFP Afterschool Meal Program can use the federal reimbursement funding from any other child nutrition program to support their operation of summer meals and vice versa.

USDA Guidance Makes the Program Easier to Operate

- States can create a simplified SFSP application and training process for afterschool programs that already participate in the CACFP Afterschool Meal Program and for School Food Authorities that already participate in the School Breakfast Program or the National School Lunch Program.

- Sponsors sign a permanent agreement with the state SFSP agency or an addendum to their existing agreement if they are already sponsoring the CACFP Afterschool Meal Program.
- Private nonprofit sponsors can operate under the same rules as all other sponsors — there is no longer a cap on the number of sites or children served, and sites do not have to be otherwise affiliated with the sponsor.
- Sponsors can use eligibility for reduced-price and free meals data from any month of the previous school year to qualify sites, in addition to annually updated census data — the American Community Survey.
- Sponsors are no longer required to keep records and accounts separate from administrative and operating costs. Instead, sponsors simply follow a “meals times rates” formula that allows them to claim the maximum reimbursement. This change in accounting procedures dramatically reduces the paperwork involved in operating SFSP.

Get Started

- Summer meals provide nutritious food to hungry children when school is out. To get started, [contact the state child nutrition agency](#).
- The state agency can provide potential sponsors with more information about the program, an application, and SFSP training dates.

FRAC Resources Available at frac.org

- FRAC’s Summer Nutrition Program Implementation Calendar and Guide was created to encourage year-round planning for summer meals for both sponsors and community partners.
- [FRAC’s Summer Food Standards of Excellence](#) can be used to evaluate existing summer meal programs in your community, recognizing high-quality programs and identifying areas for improvement.
- [FRAC’s Summer Food Mapper](#) is accepted by all state agencies to qualify summer meal sites.