

# Summer Meals - Meeting Families Where They Are

ROUND ROCK, TEXAS, USA, February 15, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced two new permanent summer nutrition programs to help combat child hunger when school is out!

Summer is a time of great uncertainty for many children who experience food insecurity. During the school year more than 30 million children receive breakfast and/or lunch at school, but during summer break children lose access to these daily meals. This is where the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Summer Electronic Benefit Transfers (EBT) come into play.



The SFSP provides funds to summer meal sites to serve up to two meals or snacks to children in low-income areas. The SFSP has historically been the main source of nutritional meals for children during the summer.

However, only 1 in every 6 children who receive free or reduced price meals during the school year participate in CACFP. This disparity is due to the fact that the SFSP previously required children to come together at a congregate site and eat their meals together. Many children have difficulty getting to summer meal sites, mainly due to the distance of the site from their home or limited transportation options. These challenges are particularly true for rural areas.

To address this summer nutrition gap, USDA launched a rural non-congregate option for SFSP. This option allows SFSP sites in rural areas where there are no near-by congregate sites available to have children receive meals without having to stay at the site to eat. These sites are now able to deliver meals directly to families' homes or to have children/parents pick up meals from the site.

During the pandemic and the 2023 pilot program, this summer meals on-the-go method increased the number of meals served over the summer. In rural areas, where sites are far away, parents are working during the day, and there is no reliable transportation, the non-congregate option offered the flexibilities for these children to gain access to summer meals that they weren't able to get before.

While the SFSP non-congregate option expands access to meals for many children, USDA recognized that there would still be a nutrition gap. Some communities may not know about summer meal sites in their area, or they still don't have the time or transportation to pick-up meals. Plus, even if children are receiving two meals a day from SFSP sites, that still leaves one meal unaccounted for.

In response, USDA launched the Summer EBT program to work in combination with SFSP-provided meals. This program provides families with \$120 per eligible child to buy groceries over the summer – similar to SNAP benefits.

Thirty-five states, all U.S. territories, and four tribes plan to participate in the Summer EBT program in summer 2024. This means that nearly 21 million children are eligible to receive grocery benefits this upcoming summer.

The Summer Meal Service Program and Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer are intended to complement each other and work in tandem to increase access to nutritious meals over the summer. These two programs are two great steps in closing the summer meal gap.

Learn more about USDA's summer nutrition programs at [www.fns.usda.gov/summer](https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer).

Since 1986, the [National CACFP Sponsors Association](#) (NCA) is the leading national organization for sponsors who administer the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). We provide education and support to thousands of members in the CACFP community and to sponsors of all sizes from across the country. We strive to improve communication between families, care givers, sponsors, and their supervising government agencies.

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