



Summer Meals Myths Busted

What do you know about the Summer Meals programs? With so much information out there, sometimes things can get confusing. Let's clear up some of the common misconceptions about summer meals!

For Potential Program Operators

1. **Myth:** Summer meals are only for young children.

Fact: Anyone 18 and under can receive meals through our Summer Meals programs! Teens face the same risks of food insecurity in the summer, so sponsors should promote meals to both kids AND teens!

2. **Myth:** Summer meal sites have to be indoors.

Fact: Summer meal sites can be located just about anywhere, as long as they meet Federal eligibility requirements. Talk to your State agency to see what options work best in your community.

3. **Myth:** Sites must provide an activity that is approved by the State agency.

Fact: There is no Federal requirement that sites provide an activity, but it is an effective way to bring children to your site, and keep them coming back! While offering good food in an appealing manner will attract children, equally important, is offering an activity or program that is fun and provides children with opportunities to learn and grow. Site operators can be creative when planning these activities, and can develop programs that cater to the age group of children attending their site.

4. **Myth:** Mobile feeding is only permitted in rural areas.

Fact: The mobile feeding model may be used in any community -- rural, urban, and even suburban areas! Each 'stop' on a mobile feeding route is considered a site, and has to be area eligible, just like any other open site in the program and the children must remain at the site while they eat their meals. Work with your State agency if you want to participate under this model to effectively design your route, prepare menus and schedule meal service times.

5. **Myth:** This program has too many paperwork requirements. It's too complicated for small summer programs to administer.



Fact: Even the smallest summer operations can participate and benefit from the USDA Summer Meal Programs. These organizations can operate as sites under existing sponsors, which eliminates many of the administrative responsibilities of the program.

6. **Myth:** The reimbursement my organization would receive as a sponsor is not worth the work it takes to apply and participate in the Program.

Fact: In recent years, many Program requirements including applications, monitoring and claiming, have been streamlined to make it easier than ever to serve summer meals. Existing sponsors and organizations that participate in other Child Nutrition Programs have new simplified application procedures and monitoring requirements.

7. **Myth:** To claim meals, sponsors have to submit complex documentation that compares total meals claimed against the actual costs or the budgeted costs in determining reimbursements to the State agency, before receiving reimbursements for meals served.

Fact: Simplified procedures, which became effective January 1, 2008, allow reimbursement based on the number of meals served multiplied by the reimbursement rates. Sponsors can use this reimbursement to pay for any allowable cost, whether operating or administrative. This means that costs do not have to be specifically categorized as “operational” or “administrative” and sponsors do not have to report their costs or submit documentation to the State agency! Sponsors must however, continue to document costs and maintain such records for the State agency’s review.

8. **Myth:** Only Program funds can be used to purchase meals for the Program. Meals made using donated foods are not reimbursable.

Fact: If your organization receives funds or donated foods from an outside source, they are permitted to use those resources to improve their operation of their summer meals program. While Summer Meal Program funds must be used on approved allowable costs, as stated in Federal guidance, outside resources may be used at the discretion of the sponsor. For example, if a local food bank donates milk to a sponsor, the sponsor may use the milk, and spend the meal reimbursement on higher quality ingredients on the rest of the meal or other allowable administrative costs.

9. **Myth:** If a sponsor has funds left over at the end of the year, they cannot be used, and must be returned to the State agency.



Fact: With instruction given by the State agency, excess reimbursements may be used to improve the Summer Meal Program the following year or can be applied to other Child Nutrition Programs operated by the sponsor, including the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Excess reimbursements only need to be returned if you do not operate any other Child Nutrition Programs and do not intend to participate in the Summer Meal Programs the following summer. Please note, cost documentation is very important when tracking excess reimbursements.

For Families

1. **Myth:** USDA Summer Meal Programs are only for young children.

Fact: Anyone 18 and under can receive meals through our Summer Meal Programs! Teens face the same risks of food insecurity in the summer, so make sure your teens are taking advantage of free summer meals too!

2. **Myth:** To get a meal, I have to sign my children up at the site ahead of time.

Fact: Most Summer Meal Program sites are 'open sites,' which means they are open to the community and do not require that children sign up in advance or even 'check-in' at the site. Children and teens must simply show up at the site to get their meal. Remember, the meal has to be eaten at the site! Most residential and day camps do require that you sign up for their program in advance in order to receive free meals.

3. **Myth:** I already receive benefits from SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), so my children can't receive meals from this Program.

Fact: USDA Summer Meal Programs supplement the meals that your children receive during the school year. Regardless of what other assistance your family may receive, open Summer Meal Program sites will provide meals for your children.

4. **Myth:** I should not send my children to a summer meals site because we're doing better than some other families and I don't want to take a meal away from someone who needs it more.

Fact: Sponsors prepare and distribute meals based on the number of children and teens that come to their sites. They are reimbursed by USDA for



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these meals, so if there is an increase in attendance at the site, the sponsors can plan to provide more meals the next day.

5. **Myth:** I have to submit income information, legal status, or other personal information about my family, in order for my child to be welcomed to a summer meals site.

Fact: Summer Meal Program 'open sites' are open to the community. Parents are not required to give any personal information about their children to site operators in order for the child to receive a free meal.

Partner Resources

Share Our Strength's Summer Meals Survey Findings

To help inform strategies for increasing access to summer meals, Share Our Strength partnered with APCO Insights in 2013 to conduct a national survey to learn more about what low-income families' lives are like during the summer and their interest in summer meals programs. Check it out: <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/summer-meals-survey-findings>

Share Our Strength's Focus Group Findings

Share Our Strength partnered with research firm Global Strategy Group to conduct focus groups with low-income parents on summer meals programs to learn about awareness, or lack thereof, among eligible families and barriers or incentives to participating. Check it out: <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/summer-meals-focus-group-findings>

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>



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