

Summer Meals 2026

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Response Required: No

Attention: Superintendents, Child Nutrition Directors, and Managers

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Summer Meal Programs are established to ensure that children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Nutrition Services (NS) continues to offer options for schools and institutions to feed students after the regular school year ends. A list of summer meal programs may be found on the USDA website: [Summer Meals Site Finder](#).

Regular Summer Meals Program:

Regular summer meals program serves as a continuation of the regular school meal programs. Any child nutrition programs (breakfast, lunch, or afterschool snack) may be served as part of the summer educational programs operated by the school district. In the regular summer meals program, the collection procedure approved in the current 2025-2026 Agreement and Policy Statement must be used to collect money and count/claim the students by eligibility category or updated to meet summer collection and meal count procedures. The regular summer meals program may be operated by any public or private school regardless of the percentage of children receiving free and reduced-price meals.

To participate in regular summer please email dates of operation and any updates to ADE.CNU-A-PS@ade.arkansas.gov

Seamless Summer Option (SSO):

SSO serves a combination of two of the following programs: breakfast, lunch, supper, or snack. If offering lunch, supper may not also be provided. There are several types of sites that a district may operate:

- a. **Open:** On a first come, first serve basis serves all children aged 18 and under at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible.
- b. **Restricted Open:** On a first come, first serve basis serve a limited number of children aged 18 and under at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible. Attendance is limited for reasons of security, safety, and control.

- c. Closed Enrolled: Serves only an enrolled group of children aged 18 and under. These children are participating in a specific program or activity at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible.
- d. Camps: Serves enrolled children during a regularly scheduled food service period as part of an organized program. These programs may be residential or non-residential.
 - a. Area eligibility cannot be used to establish camp site eligibility under SSO. Eligibility may be determined for each enrolled student. This information can be determined by obtaining information from their school, submitting applications or direct certification.
- e. Migrant: Primarily serve children of migrant families aged 18 and under, as certified by a migrant coordinator. Eligibility is determined based on information from migrant organizations.

To participate in SSO the SFA will be required to complete and submit a [Schedule C-26](#) application for Seamless Summer Meals for each meal site. Please submit all schedule Cs to ADE.CNU-A-PS@ade.arkansas.gov a minimum of two weeks prior to start of SSO operation. The schedule C must be approved by NS prior to serving and claiming summer meals for reimbursement.

During operation of SSO the SFA is required to complete the [SSO On-Site Monitoring Form](#), regardless of the type of service being implemented. This helps ensure the site is in compliance with Federal and State Requirements. SSO is an extension of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), all regulatory guidelines of NSLP must be followed when utilizing SSO.

NS will review each school district that had an Administrative Review and operates SSO. NS is also required to monitor each new non-congregate site. These reviews consist of reviewing meal counting and claiming, meal pattern, and other general program requirements.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

SFSP serves a combination of two of the following programs: breakfast, lunch, supper, or snack. If you offer lunch, supper may not also be provided. Camps may offer up to three meals per day. There are several types of sites that a district may operate:

- a. Open: On a first come, first serve basis serves all children aged 18 and under at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible.
- b. Restricted Open: On a first come, first serve basis serve a limited number of children aged 18 and under at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible. Attendance is limited for reasons of security, safety, and control.
- c. Closed Enrolled: Serves only an enrolled group of children aged 18 and under. These children are participating recreational, cultural, religious, or other types of organized activities at a site that is located in an area that is considered area eligible.
- d. Day Camps: A nonresidential day camp is a meal site that offers a regularly scheduled meal service as part of an organized program for enrolled children. The camp must provide a continuous schedule of organized cultural or recreational programs for enrolled children between meal services.
 - a. Area eligibility cannot be used to establish camp site eligibility under SFSP. Eligibility may be determined for each enrolled student. This information can be determined by obtaining information from their school, submitting applications or direct certification.

- e. **Residential Camps:** In residential camps, children spend the duration of the organized program in a 24-hour supervised care setting and receive regularly scheduled meal services. A residential camp site provides meals as part of an organized program for enrolled children.
 - a. Area eligibility cannot be used to establish camp site eligibility under SFSP. Eligibility may be determined for each enrolled student. This information can be determined by obtaining information from their school, submitting applications or direct certification.
- f. **Migrant:** Primarily serve children of migrant families aged 18 and under, as certified by a migrant coordinator. Eligibility is determined based on information from migrant organizations.
- g. **National Youth Sports Programs (NYSP):** Provides meals to enrolled children as part of a national program that gives children, ages 9 through 16, the opportunity to receive daily sports and educational instruction at universities and colleges.
 - a. Children are automatically eligible for free SFSP meals at colleges and universities that offer NYSP with individual eligibility requirements that are as strict or stricter than the SFSP income guidelines.

To participate in SFSP please complete the [potential sponsor pre-screen questionnaire](#) to determine if your district is eligible to participate in SFSP. If eligible, your district will be assigned an application coordinator to aid through the application process. The application opens for school districts on February 13, 2026 and will close on May 29, 2026.

Prior to the operation of SFSP the district must complete annual SFSP training. During the operation of SFSP the district must complete monitoring to ensure that all sites are operating in compliance with SFSP regulations including recordkeeping, providing meals that meet meal pattern ([7 CFR 225.16](#)), civil rights, and health and sanitation requirements. Additional information about operating SFSP can be found in the [SFSP Administration Guide](#).

Establishing Area Eligibility

- a. **School site free/reduced data:** School data submitted on the Cycle 2 report to DESE will be used to establish area eligibility for SSO/SFSP, excluding camps. Area eligibility must indicate that the proposed meal location is within a school attendance area where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- b. **Census data:** SFAs may document the area eligibility of their proposed open or restricted open sites based on census data. SSO/SFSP sites that choose to establish eligibility using census data are required to use the most recent data available (Census Bureau or Area Eligibility Map).
 - a. **Census Bureau data** visit <http://www.census.gov/acs>. Under the Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS), new five-year estimates are made available each year. The duration of determinations or site eligibility based on census data is 5 years.
 - b. **Area Eligibility Map** using census data visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/area-eligibility>.
 - i. The area eligibility map can be used to see if a potential site is in an area where it can be an open site. Census Block Groups are the geographical unit used to access eligibility for SSO/SFSP when using census data. 50 percent or more of the children in a census block group must be eligible for free/reduced price school meals to establish area eligibility.

Establishing Rural Sites

- a. Metropolitan Statistical Area: A Rural Designation Map to assist in determining sites that are considered rural.
 - a. For FNS Rural Designation Map visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/rural-designation>.
 - b. Rural Pockets: DESE with the concurrence of FNS regional office have parameters to assist in determining sites that are located within a Metropolitan Statistical Area but are geographically isolated.

The non-congregate meal service option is only available in rural areas where there is no congregate meal service available. This option is available to sites who are operating under SSO or SFSP. A rural area is defined as any area in a county which is not a part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area. Or any “pocket” within a Metropolitan Statistical Area which is determined to be geographically isolated from urban areas.

Non-congregate style meal service includes options such as meal pick up or home delivery. Non-congregate sites may choose to serve up to five (5) days of unitized meals or five (5) days of bulk meals if using home delivery and/or meal pick up options. While utilizing this option, sites may only prepare and distribute up to two meals per child per day. Sites must ensure they are able to maintain program integrity and meet state and local health and safety requirements.

Contact your Area Specialist via email or at 501-324-9502 for further details.