



Meal Service Issues

Several meal service issues at Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites frequently cause concern for Program operators and participants. While sponsors can be denied reimbursement because of violations of rules governing the meal service, the sponsor's biggest concern is usually community relations. Adults who bring children to the summer food site may become upset because they cannot eat with the child or because the child cannot have a second apple without taking an entire second meal.

Sponsors should make sure the rules are clear; post signs explaining the rules; and explain "why" the rules exist when people disagree with them. Other sponsors may have suggestions to deal with these issues. By sticking to the rules and explaining the rules, sponsors can avoid negative feelings in the community and help control their expenses at the same time.

Leftover Meals and Food Waste

All sponsors must plan, prepare, and order meals with the objective of providing one meal per child at each meal service. However, because it is impossible to predict all variations in site attendance levels, sites will occasionally have excess meals. Keep in mind that food should always be kept at the proper temperature and under sanitary conditions during preparation, service and storage. When in doubt, check with your health department. Some options to use to minimize food waste are:

- **Serving Seconds**

Sponsors may claim some second meals for reimbursement—up to 2 percent of first meals served by the sponsor for all sites during the claiming period. These must be complete second meals served to children.

- **Transferring Meals**

Extra meals can be transferred from a site with too many meals to a site with a shortage of meals, if the sponsor has a way to store and transfer meals at the proper temperature.

- **Sharing Tables**

Designate a "sharing table" where children may return whole items that they choose not to eat. These items can be made available to children who want additional servings.

- **Store Extra Meals**

If the sponsor has adequate refrigeration, excess meals can be stored and served the next day.

- **Donation of Food**

Despite a sponsor's best efforts to plan properly and to utilize excess food to the benefit of the Program, there are sometimes excess meals or components which cannot be used again. This is most likely to occur on Fridays or on the last day of the Program. In these cases, the food should be donated to homeless shelters, food pantries, or other types of facilities which serve meals or distribute food to needy persons. If you wish to do this, first consult with your State agency and your local health department.

Encouraging On-Site Consumption

• Positive Meal Service Environment

Provide an environment that encourages a relaxed meal service and good eating habits. Provide adequate seating for children and allow them to quietly interact with each other while eating. Children should not be rushed through their meal or encouraged by others to stop eating to play games or leave the site.

• Assist Younger Children

Younger children in particular may need help with their meal, both to get the meal from the serving line to the table and while eating. Encourage parents or older siblings to provide assistance.

• Off-Site Consumption

Some States and sponsors may have a policy that allows children to take the vegetable/fruit component of the meals off-site for later consumption. The food must have been from the child's own meal or left on a "sharing table" by another child who did not want it. It is important that you contact your State agency or sponsor to determine if this policy is available.

Adult Meals

The primary purpose of the SFSP is to provide food service to CHILDREN from needy areas during periods when area schools are closed. The Program makes a distinction between "Program adults" (who are regularly scheduled to work at the site, either as volunteers or paid site employees) and other "non-Program adults."

SFSP operates on cost accounting principles. A sponsor is reimbursed for the lesser of: the number of meals served to children, multiplied by the per meal rate of reimbursement; or actual operating costs. The cost of obtaining meals served to Program adults is a legitimate operating cost, but such meals are not "reimbursable". Meals served to non-Program adults are neither reimbursable nor counted as operating costs; therefore, some sponsors elect to sell meals, at cost, to these adults.

Some low-income parents who bring their children to the site may believe that they, too, should be able to receive a meal. Sponsors may choose not to serve them meals or may wish to provide low-cost meals to non-Program adults. If meals are served to non-Program adults, sponsors must take certain actions to protect the safety of the children at the site and the integrity of the SFSP, including:

- If the number of meals available is limited, all children must be fed first.
- Non-Program adults must either be charged the FULL COST of the meal (including food and nonfood supplies, labor, and the value of commodities) or the sponsor must have non-Program funds to cover the cost of the meals.
- Income from the sale of adult meals must be reported as income to the Program on the claim form.
- Separate meal counts must be taken and recorded for children, Program adults, and non-Program adults.
- Adequate site staff must be present to ensure safety and Program integrity.

If non-Program adults insist on receiving free meals, the site supervisor should ask the sponsor to visit the site to talk to uncooperative adults. The sponsor may wish to: (1) refer the adult to other sources of assistance for low-income adults (e.g., the Food Stamp Program, local food pantries or, in some cases, the WIC Program); or, if necessary, (2) limit adult access to the site; or, (3) establish a parent waiting area for adults while their children eat.

Be sure to register your summer feeding sites for the National Hunger Hotline at:

www.whyhunger.org/findfood

Watch the SFSP Training Videos to learn more:

www.fns.usda.gov/outreach/webinars/summer.htm



Summer Food Service Program
Tips for Success