



Tips for Success

Rural Programs

There are special challenges involved in operating the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) in rural areas. During the school year, children in rural areas are frequently bused to schools which draw attendance from a large geographic area. When school is not in session, it is far more difficult to transport these children to central locations in rural areas for summer meals.

Because rural sites frequently have problems assembling a large number of children, financial difficulties arise from relatively low attendance at sites. That is the primary reason that per meal administrative rates for meals served at rural sites are slightly higher than rates for meals served at many other Program sites to recover/supplement some of those costs. Nevertheless, sponsors of rural sites often find that this rate adjustment does not sufficient to cover their higher costs unless they take steps to address the special challenges they face.

There are two keys to success for rural SFSPs:

- Solving the transportation problem; and
- Maintaining participation at a high enough level to hold down per unit costs.

Placement of Rural Sites

Naturally, you want a site to be in an eligible area with the highest concentration of children. Although there are some successful rural sites that do not have activity programs, a rural site is much more likely to succeed if it is tied to a program that provides interesting activities for the children.

• **Where is the need?** Although school data may be useful, an analysis of census data set is frequently more accurate in identifying concentrations of low-income children in rural areas. Rural schools generally draw children from a much larger area (sometimes, an entire county) than you will serve at your SFSP site. Your State agency is able to help you identify rural areas with high concentrations of unmet need.

• **Find out where there are existing programs that attracts children.** Check area organizations' and facilities' plans for summer activities for children. Organizations which already plan to run activity programs could be approached to either offer SFSP meals or provide activities at your meal site.

Organizations that Might Operate a Summer Activity Program

- Libraries
- Schools
- Religious Organizations
- 4-H
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Town, Village, or County Recreation
- Community Action Agency
- Public Housing Authority / Resident Councils
- Other Civic Organizations

For more information on how to operate a Summer Food Service Program site please visit:

www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/summer/Managing.htm

If there is not an organization operating a summer activities program, you can recruit volunteers to operate your own activities program. You may also be able to piece together an activity program at your site by getting different organizations to operate an activity one or more days a week. Be creative!

- **Create a reason for children to come to a site.**

If there aren't ongoing activity programs that can be linked to a site, then it may be necessary to create an activity program. Arts and crafts, sports and tutorial programs are probably the most common type of summer activity programs.

- **Find good partners.** If both preparing meals and running an activity program is too much for one organization, perhaps two or more organizations working together can accomplish the job. Consider organizations that work with children and families; they are likely to be good partners.

Transportation

Most rural sites need to either transport children to sites or food to children, an issue that most urban sites do not need to consider. Transportation costs, as well as the generally higher per meal costs associated with serving fewer children per site, require rural SFSP administrators to be particularly creative in order to make their sites financially sustainable.

Remember: Transportation of food to any site is an allowable operating cost. Transportation of children to a site is also an allowable cost for rural sites. Although transportation adds to the cost of any Program, it may be needed to make a rural site a reality.

- **Bringing children to a site.** During the school year, rural school districts usually transport children by bus. These buses may be available to bring children to a Program site during the summertime.

Other organizations—such as churches, local governments, community action agencies and other social service agencies—may have vehicles that could be used to transport children to a site. If these organizations cannot provide free transportation services as a partner in support of a Summer Program, perhaps they would be willing to rent a vehicle, at cost, to help the Program. Car pooling of children to a site is another option to consider.

- **Mobile Feeding.** Some smaller rural sites can be supported through a meal delivery system. A “site” is simply the place where the children come to eat their meal. But the food, the site supervisor and even the table and chairs might arrive at the site each day on a bus that stops at a number of places along a designated route.

- **Bringing the food to children.** A full-service mobile canteen, with a site supervisor and tables and chairs, might stop at a site and have the children come on board to eat before moving on to another site.

Another approach might be to have a site supervisor located at each site, with a mobile canteen quickly dropping off the food at a series of sites. Some fire departments and Salvation Army units operate mobile canteens for emergency feeding operations and are willing to help SFSP by serving or delivering food to a number of rural sites.

Non-traditional approaches to meal service, such as discussed above must be discussed in advance with the State agency.

For more ideas on how you can operate the Summer Food Service Program in rural areas please visit our SFSP Training Videos webpage where you can view webcasts and videos on how you can become a SFSP site, sponsor, or advocate or to enhance your existing activities.

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



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