



Successfully Operating a Congregate Feeding Site

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is by design a congregate feeding program and requires all meals to be consumed on the summer site. Congregate feeding makes summer sites a great place for children to spend time with friends and receive a free and nutritious meal.

What is Congregate Feeding?

Congregate feeding is when meals are provided in a group setting. This type of meal service allows children to eat a nutritious meal while enjoying the companionship of their friends and other members of the community.

Benefits of Congregate Feeding

There are many benefits to providing meals through congregate feeding. It can:

- Increases children's daily nutrient intake;
- Encourages healthy habits by seeing other children try new foods;
- Provides an enjoyable, neighborly eating environment;
- Ensures food safety- meals kept on-site are kept at regulated temperatures and are less likely to get contaminated;
- Promotes community engagement.

Encourage On-Site Consumption of Meals

Here are a few ways that you can encourage children to come and stay for meals at your summer site, including:

- Create a welcoming, friendly 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;
- Allow plenty of time for children to eat their meals;
- Help younger children serve and eat their meal, if needed; and
- Plan other fun activities to keep children engaged and excited to come.

Off-Site Consumption of Meals

To be eligible for reimbursement, all meals must be consumed on the summer site (e.g. congregate feeding). A meal may be consumed off-site only if the meal is served on a State agency approved field trip or offsite consumption is otherwise permitted through Department of Agriculture funded demonstration projects.

However, there are a few scenarios when off-site consumption is allowed:





1. In extenuating circumstances, a sponsor may allow a child to eat a meal off-site, but that meal cannot be claimed for reimbursement.
2. Sponsors may allow children to take one fruit, vegetable or grain item off-site to eat later and still claim reimbursement for the meal. The food item taken offsite must be from the child's own meal or left on a "share table" by another child who did not want it. The sponsor must make sure this is in compliance with State and local health and safety codes. Sponsors should only use this option if they believe they have enough staff to properly administer and monitor the site, and to ensure that issues, particularly related to food safety and Program integrity, do not occur.

USDA Resources:

Regulations and Policies

- **SFSP Regulations: Meal service requirements, 7 CFR 225.16**
http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=d87b1089e455f65409bd1dbf463b3686&node=pt7.4.225&rgn=div5#se7.4.225_116
- **Meal Service Requirements, SP 13-2015 (v.2), SFSP 05-2015 (v.2), Summer Meal Programs Meal Service Requirements Revised Q&As- Revised, January 12, 2015**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/summer-meal-programs-meal-service-requirements-qas-revised>

Handbooks and Other Tools

- **Administrative Guidance for Sponsors**
This guide provides useful information on how to operate a summer site, including congregate feeding and off-site consumption of meals.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/AdminGuideSponsors.pdf>
- **Innovative Strategies: Meal Service Issues**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Meals.pdf>

Toolkit pages

- **How to Establish Meal Service Times**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-MealServiceTimes.pdf>
- **How to Use Offer Versus Serve**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-OfferVersusServe.pdf>
- **Family Style Meals: A New Way to Teach Healthy Eating Habits**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-FamilyStyleMeals.pdf>
- **Serving Adults: What You Need to Know**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-AdultMeals.pdf>





- **What to Do with Leftover Meals**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-LeftoverMeals.pdf>

Additional Information

Sponsors and the general public should contact the appropriate State agency for additional guidance. State agencies should contact their FNS Regional Office for additional guidance.

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>

USDA and its recipient institutions share responsibility for compliance and oversight to ensure good stewardship of Federal Funds.

