



## Rural Challenges and Summer Meals

Reaching children through the summer meal programs is a priority for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). To be successful in achieving this goal, strong partnerships are needed between rural communities, their stakeholders, and their respective State agencies. These partnerships include State agencies working closely with rural communities to identify resources to support summer meals for children. Together, these partnerships can focus on retaining experienced sponsors to operate the Program through outreach efforts aimed at sponsor and site recruitment, and other efforts related to maintaining a strong and sustainable summer meals programs in rural communities.

FNS continues to find ways to improve the participation of rural areas in community meal programs for children. FNS has developed partnerships with State agencies and State-based USDA agencies, such as Rural Development, to identify community partners willing to sponsor meal sites. As part of their annual Program Management and Administration Plan (MAP), State agencies are required to actively seek eligible applicant sponsors to serve in these areas (7 CFR 225.6(a)(2)) and provide technical assistance and training (7 CFR 225.4(d)(d)).

### The Challenges of Rural Areas

Rural areas face specific challenges that are not felt by more developed areas. Among these challenges are high poverty rates and more widely dispersed populations with fewer public services. A few key indicators of rural challenges include:

- **Poverty.** Most (81 percent) of the high poverty counties in America are in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Over a quarter of children in non-metro areas are living in poverty.<sup>2</sup>
- **Widely dispersed.** Rural counties make up 15 percent of the U.S. population and are spread across 72 percent of the U.S. land area.<sup>3</sup> There are also fewer public services, such as internet or transportation.<sup>4</sup>
- **Higher unemployment rates.** Non-metro areas experience poverty rates 2.7 percent higher than the national average. Available employment tends to be more concentrated in low-wage industries, and education levels are lower.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eb-economic-brief/eb24.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-poverty-well-being/poverty-overview.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/rural\\_america/20130524\\_rural\\_america\\_slides\\_2.pdf](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/rural_america/20130524_rural_america_slides_2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> USDA. Economic Research Service. Robert Gibbs, L. Kusmin. Low-Skill Employment

and the Changing Economy of Rural America. ERR-10. October 2005.

<sup>5</sup> USDA. Economic Research Service. Leslie A. Whitener, R. Gibbs, and L. Kusmin.

Rural Welfare Reform: Lessons Learned. Amber Waves. June 2003.



- **Population decline.** For the first time, rural areas are experiencing declines in populations, reducing demand for jobs, diminishing the quality of the workforce, and raising the per capita costs of providing services.
- **Food insecurity.** An estimated 15.5 percent of all rural households, or 3.1 million households, are food insecure.<sup>6</sup>

## Programs for Summer Meals in Rural Areas

During the summer, when school is out making sure that children have the food they need can be a challenge, particularly in rural areas where families can be isolated and transportation costs can reinforce the challenges of budgeting for food. Summer meal programs also face similar challenges with transportation costs – either getting meals to children or transporting children to meal sites.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is one program that can be engaged to provide summer meals to children. This Program can provide up to two meals and one snack per day to children up through age 18.

With the SFSP, there are two key options for providing summer meals. One is the traditional SFSP which non-profit organizations and schools can administer. Another program, that only schools can operate, is the Summer Seamless Option (SSO). The SSO allows school food authorities (SFA) to provide free summer meals in low-income areas during the traditional summer vacation periods and, for year-round schools, school vacation periods longer than 10 school days. The SSO is designed to encourage more SFAs to provide meals during summer and other school vacation periods. This option combines features of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and SFSP.

The NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO) offers a streamlined approach to feeding children in the summer. SFAs participating in the NSLP and SBP may offer meals through the SSO. Once approved, schools located in eligible areas may serve free meals to children, age 18 years and under. The same NSLP and SBP rules apply to meal services provided through the SSO. Meals served under the SSO are reimbursed at the “free” rates prescribed by USDA for school meals and snacks. Suppers are reimbursed at the NSLP free rate.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/rural-hunger.aspx>



## Eligibility for Summer Meals

Eligibility is established when census data indicate that at least 50 percent of the children residing in the area are members of households that meet the income standards for free and reduced-price meals. Rural areas sometimes are not area eligible based on school data – so local partners may need to look for pockets of poverty and establish area eligibility using other methods. SFSP and SSO sites are considered area eligible if:

- 50 percent or more of the children in a Census Block Group (CBG) are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals;
- 50 percent or more of the children in a Census Tract are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals; or
- The percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals in up to 3 adjacent CBGs when averaged is 50 percent or more, provided that at least 40 percent of children in each of the combined CBGs are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, as described above.

Census Tract and CBG data are now available through the FNS Area Eligibility Mapper:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>.

Instructions for determining eligibility using these data are provided in the same folder as the data.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/area-eligibility-using-census-data-0>.

## Mobile Feeding

This model is used where populations of children are scattered, and a single location to serve meals would not reach all the children in need. A sponsor delivers meals to an area, using a route with stops at approved sites in the community. Each site is approved as an area-eligible open site. The meal service takes place on approved days and the sponsor serves reimbursable meals during approved service times. The meal service is supervised and all meals are consumed at the site, on the bus or near the drop-off location.

For more information, check out the Mobile Feeding page of the toolkit here:

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



The challenges presented by rural hunger may mean that additional approaches need to be employed to address the need. Other models for bringing food to the community include [tailgate food giveaways](#) and [food trucks](#), [mobile pantries](#) which distribute free food, [mobile markets](#) which sell food, [community owned stores](#), and corner stores. Here are links to examples of other programs:

### **Hunger Free Colorado**

*Your Neighborhood Food Truck*

<http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/your-neighborhood-food-truck.html>

### **Feeding America**

*Mobile Food Pantry*

<http://feedingamerica.org/how-we-fight-hunger/programs-and-services/network-programs/mobile-pantry-program.aspx>

### **Rural Resources**

*Connecting Farms, Food, and Families*

<http://fromthefarm.net/>

### **Kansas State University Rural Grocery Initiative**

*Thinking Outside the Big Box: Community-Owned Stores*

[http://www.ruralgrocery.org/bestpractices/What\\_is\\_a\\_Community\\_Store.pdf](http://www.ruralgrocery.org/bestpractices/What_is_a_Community_Store.pdf)

### **Living Well in Wabash County**

<http://www.livingwellinwabashcounty.org/community-cupboard/>

## **Rural Development**

Developing local partnerships that can support meal sites is a key to implementing this program. The Rural Development (RD) agency is focused on improving the quality of life in rural areas and can be a resource for summer meal programs. Its staff know the communities throughout their respective States well, and can provide access to community stakeholders.

In partnership with non-profits, Indian tribes, state and federal government agencies and local communities. RD provides technical assistance and financial support to rural communities. Housing and Community Facilities Programs help rural communities and individuals by providing loans and grants as well as housing for low-income families and farm laborers. RD provides funding for fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, child care centers, and much more.



RD's multi-family housing may be a possible location for meal sites. These sites often have community rooms that can be used for meal service, have resident children and may also be a source of volunteers. Multi-family sites that are senior-only have, in some cases, provided both community facility rooms for meal service and dedicated volunteers.

RD's [Community Facilities Loan and Grant Program](#) supports the development of essential community facilities that serve rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. This program is available to public entities such as municipalities, counties, parishes, boroughs, and special-purpose districts, as well as non-profit corporations and tribal governments. These funds can help construct, enlarge, or improve community facilities for health care, public safety, and community and public services, including the purchase of equipment required for a facility's operation. Funds can also go to purchasing or retrofitting vehicles to improve SFSP delivery of meals or for transportation to congregate meal sites.

[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HCF\\_CF.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/HCF_CF.html)

When developing a proposal and seeking funding it is important to have four things clearly identified:

1. The need that the sponsor intends to address;
2. An implementation plan;
3. An identified legal entity that can apply for, receive, and account for funds; and
4. Community stakeholders who support the plan.

USDA RD officers, organized regionally within each State, can help with developing your proposal. All loans and grants are processed in RD State and local area offices. For more information, or to talk with a Community Facilities field staff specialist, contact the USDA RD office in your area. The website for the locating field offices

is: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

Information concerning the USDA's RD programs can be found at:

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov>

State contacts can be found at:

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/StateOfficeAddresses.html>.

For questions, you can call your RD staff toll-free at 1-800-670-6553.



## Planning and Implementing SFSP

These FNS resources can help you in planning, partnering, and implementing summer meal programs:

### Summer Meals Toolkit

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>

### Proactive Planning

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

### Summer Meal Policy Resources

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

### Maps

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/capacitybuilder>

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/areaeligibility>

## Additional Program Development Resources

Depending on the needs and interests of your program there are a number of other resources that can help develop program capacity as well as help to build capacity with partners in the community. Some of these resources may build program capacity for summer meals as well as help support local food sourcing and farmer's markets.

### USDA Food and Nutrition Service

[Team Nutrition grants](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition) fund training and technical assistance for foodservice, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity. States may apply each year and disburse funds to facilities operating Child Nutrition Programs.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition>

### USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

[Cooperative Extension](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/familyconsumersciences.cfm) and [Family and Consumer Services](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/familyconsumersciences.cfm) which have education and training programs at the community level that include child care centers.

<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/familyconsumersciences.cfm>



The [Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program \(CFPCGP\)](#) provides funding that may be used in conjunction with SFSP or the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Projects must meet the food needs of low-income individuals through food distribution, community outreach to assist in participation in Federally assisted nutrition programs, or improving access to food as part of a comprehensive service; increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for the food needs of the communities; promote comprehensive responses to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues; and meet specific state, local or neighborhood food and agricultural needs including needs relating to: equipment necessary for the efficient operation of a project; planning for long-term solutions; or the creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers.

<http://nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm>

### **USDA Agricultural Marketing Service**

The [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) provides grants towards to help improve and expand domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agri-tourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. Agricultural cooperatives, producer networks, producer associations, local governments, nonprofit corporations, public benefit corporations, economic development corporations, regional farmers' market authorities and Tribal governments are among those eligible to apply. <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/fmpp>

The [Farmers Market Directory](#) and [food hub](#) resource may be able to serve communities lacking larger grocery stores by providing an alternate food purchasing venue.

<http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/>

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5105388>

[Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Compass](#) is a [digital guide](#) and a [searchable map](#) of projects, farmer's markets and food hubs that have received federal support for local food work.

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF\\_COMPASS](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF_COMPASS)

<http://www.usda.gov/documents/KYFCompass.pdf>

<http://www.usda.gov/maps/maps/kyfcompassmap.htm>

### **USDA Rural Development**

RD has broadband and utility grants and loans via [Community Connect Program](#) and the [Farm Bill Broadband Program](#).

[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp\\_commconnect.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp_commconnect.html)

[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp\\_farmbill.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp_farmbill.html)



## Other Partner Resources

The [No Kid Hungry Share Our Strength](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/free-summer-meals-kids) best practices web site has resources for outreach, implementation, program guides, toolkits and links to reference materials at <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/free-summer-meals-kids>

The Multi-State Technical Assistance Program helps States implement Federal Transit Administration Programs. Contacts in most States may be able to identify resources and stakeholders related to transportation development.

<http://scopt.transportation.org/Pages/MembersMTAP.aspx>

The [National Recreation and Park Association](http://www.nrpa.org/fundraising-resources) offers grants to support SFSP and CACFP programming and food to local government agencies providing park and recreation services, as well as funding for community gardens.

<http://www.nrpa.org/fundraising-resources>

## For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and compatible with your Program. 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>

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