



November 1, 2023

Start-up Grants ensured More Georgia Kids had Access to Nutritious Meals & Snacks this Summer

Happy Helpings meals were available in 100 Georgia Counties

More kids throughout Georgia had greater access to nutritious meals and snacks over the past two summers thanks to the State of Georgia. The state allocated \$300k as part of the amended budget in FY22, and the funds were used to expand summer meals to unserved areas of the state.



As a result, 22 start-up grants, ranging from \$7k to \$25k, were awarded to 15 Happy Helpings sponsors. More than 112,000 meals and snacks were provided to children living in 27 counties not previously served by the Happy Helpings program.

“Our Happy Helpings Sponsors made extraordinary progress meeting the nutritional needs of Georgia’s children last summer with more than 2.8 million meals being served in 100 counties,” said Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services. “The start-up grants offered tremendous support to our sponsors allowing them to purchase food, equipment and to pay additional staff to support meal sites in counties that were not previously served.”

Increasing Access to Food Through Mobile Feeding

Second Harvest of South Georgia Shares Tips & Challenges

Have you ever thought about how to feed children that don’t live in populated areas during the summer when school is out? Transportation is often the greatest barrier to growth in summer meal programs, but mobile feeding overcomes that by taking the meals directly to the children in need that are in hard-to-reach places.

Second Harvest of South Georgia, headquartered in Valdosta, has participated in mobile feeding for more than five years. Kids Café Director Winona Green reports that this past summer, they served 2,000 meals at six mobile meal sites in Echols, Lanier, Lowndes and Ware Counties.

Green encourages other sponsors to consider operating mobile feeding sites. “You will reach children that can’t access meals at traditional congregate sites.” She added, “In rural areas, we have no public transportation, so we have to bring the meals closer to the children. These mobile sites help give the kids both socialization and food for the day.”

Here are a few best practices Green recommends for mobile feeding:

- Engage with both the children and their caregivers. Be sure to ask what needs they are facing and who else needs help throughout the community.
- Utilize established areas where tables are available such as parks, municipal areas, playgrounds and apartment complexes.
- Consider operating a mobile site at a fire station. Green says, “Kids love the idea and so do the firefighters.”
- Scout locations carefully, and ask your local police department for assistance in identifying where the need is the greatest.
- Reach out to the local newspapers to promote your mobile feeding site. Flyers, social media and announcements are also great ways to make the community aware of your mobile site.
- Develop community partnerships. Second Harvest of South Georgia routinely works with the local housing authorities. They also teamed up with Lanier County School System to hand out books at the mobile feeding sites.
- Brainstorm possibilities. Talk to DECAL and other sponsors about what’s worked and what hasn’t in other areas. Sharing ideas helps everyone!

Green says there are also challenges to consider with mobile feeding. She mentioned time and staffing are the two largest issues. “The logistics of timing your meal service at each site is key, and you also have to consider how you’ll ensure that food stays within safe temperature ranges.”

The heat, especially in South Georgia, is also a factor. “On a hot summer day, there are not a lot of kids that want to be outside on a ball field, unless they have a splash pad or something similar in the area,” said Green. In cases of inclement weather, most mobile feeding locations do not serve as shelter is generally unavailable.

Summer 2024 will be Here Soon

Start Planning Now

Providing summer meals is a year-round effort. At any point throughout the year, there are things you can do to prepare for next summer!

Here's a guide for the remaining months of 2024:

November:

- Take time to reflect on the summer with site administrators and determine what could be improved or what worked.
- Reflect on the service provided by your vendor. Ensure the food was well-received by the children.
- Revise menus as needed. Review unserved and underserved areas near current sites.
- Recruit sites to these areas of need.
- Compare participation from this year to that of prior years, as well as current participation for free and reduced-price meals in local schools.
- Consider providing non-monetary awards to recognize sites that excelled during the summer.
- Reach out to sites that were underutilized and offer support to increase participation for the coming year.
- Set participation goals for the next summer and plan how you will accomplish them.
- Look out for dates on mandatory sponsor training from DECAL.
- Begin developing a marketing and outreach campaign.

December:

- Begin to determine which sites are returning, explore new site options, and meet with community partners.
 - Plan site staff training, meal production and delivery, and programs and activities.
 - Begin exploring the potential for serving mobile meals. Continue developing a marketing and outreach campaign.
-

Areas of Need for Summer 2024

One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you helped us make significant progress in meeting that goal expanding service from 85 counties in 2022 to 100 counties in 2023! Thank you!

If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2024, please consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:



Areas of Need: 59 counties

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| • Appling | • Dade | • Laurens | • Putman | • Webster |
| • Atkinson | • Dawson | • Lincoln | • Quitman | • Wheeler |
| • Bacon | • Dodge | • Long | • Schley | • White |
| • Banks | • Emanuel | • Lumpkin | • Screven | • Wilcox |
| • Berrien | • Evans | • Marion | • Stewart | • Wilkes |
| • Brantley | • Gilmer | • Miller | • Sumter | • Wilkinson |
| • Brooks | • Gordon | • Montgomery | • Talbot | • Worth |
| • Calhoun | • Haralson | • Murray | • Telfair | |
| • Camden | • Heard | • Oconee | • Towns | |
| • Charlton | • Jasper | • Oglethorpe | • Treutlen | |
| • Chattahoochee | • Jeff Davis | • Pickens | • Turner | |
| • Clay | • Jenkins | • Pierce | • Union | |
| • Cook | • Johnson | • Pulaski | • Warren | |



Unanticipated School Closure Waivers Available

On August 30, 2023, Nutrition Services received USDA approval for statewide waivers for Happy Helpings sponsors to utilize during unanticipated school closures.

The following waivers are available during unanticipated school closures when meal service operations are limited due to natural disasters, unscheduled major building repairs, court orders relating to school safety or other issues, labor-management disputes, or when approved by the State agency for similar unanticipated causes.

The following approved waivers are available when schools are closed with no virtual learning:

- **Non-Congregate Meal Service**
- **Parent and Guardian Meal Pick-up**
- **Meal Service Times**
- **Service of Meals at School Sites**

The waivers listed above are available through April 30, 2024. To read more, click [here](#).

Training Resources

In Case You Missed It: Webinar Recordings Now Available!

If you missed a webinar, please visit the [Training and Technical Assistance](#) webpage for previously recorded webinars. This month's training highlight is the [Happy Helpings Budget Reconciliation Training](#). It discusses detailed information on the annual Year-End Reconciliation process, how to complete the Reconciliation Form, types of documents required for submission and potential next steps.

Food Buying Guide (FBG) for Child Nutrition Programs *New Training Modules!*

Team Nutrition released two [2] new training modules featuring the Food Buying Guide

(FBG) for Child Nutrition Programs. These modules provide a step-by-step tour through the Exhibit A Grains Tool and FBG Calculator available on the FBG Interactive Web-Based Tool and Mobile App. Each module provides an in-depth look at each tool and interactive knowledge checks to assist the learner. Topics covered include:

- **Module 1:** Overview of the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs
- **Module 2:** Recipe Analysis Workbook (RAW)
- **Module 3:** Product Formulation Statement
- **Module 4:** Exhibit A Grains Tool
- **Module 5:** Food Buying Guide (FBG) Calculator

The Food Safety at FNS

The Food Nutrition Services (FNS) food safety team helps protect people served by FNS programs from foodborne illness by developing food safety education, training, and technical assistance resources to support FNS program operators, with an emphasis on Child Nutrition Programs, including:

- **National School Lunch Program** (NSLP)
- **School Breakfast Program** (SBP)
- **Summer Food Service Program** (SFSP)
- **Seamless Summer Option** (SSO)

The Food Safety Team also has resources available in Spanish to help operators who may feel more comfortable working and reading in Spanish. Resources include:

- The Emergency Response Pocket Guide
- A Flash of Food Safety, a video series
- The Food Allergy Book
- Reducing the Risk of Choking in Young Children at Mealtimes
- [[See Spanish Resources](#)]



Nutrition Ed Nook

Oh, My Squash

Squash is the November Harvest of the Month (**English** and **Spanish**) spotlight!

Summer squashes are high in vitamins A & C, and fiber. Summer squashes are in season in Georgia from around May through October. Summer squashes grow quickly and have thin skin; to retain the most nutrients, leave their skin on while eating. Zucchini, yellow, and scallop squashes are three primary summer squashes.

Winter squashes are an excellent source of vitamin A and provide many minerals. Winter squashes are in season in Georgia from around September through March. Winter squashes have hard, thick skin that allows them to be stored in a dry, cool location for several months. Edible pumpkins are one of many types of winter squash. Other types of squash include acorn, butternut, and spaghetti varieties.

Fun Fact: Seeds from inside the pumpkin can be dried and saved for growing pumpkins next year.

Integration:

- **Zucchini Pizza Boats**
- **Three Sisters Soup**
- **Spaghetti Squash**
- **Butternut Apple Crisp**
- **Turkey Pumpkin Chili**
- **Whole Grain Pumpkin Muffins**

Education:

- **Watch** the [Harvest with Holly](#) video that explores the Harvest of the Month spotlight, how these items grow, where they grow in Georgia, and how they get from the farms to school meals all across the state of Georgia.
- **Do a taste test** with winter and/or summer squashes. Have the children describe the squashes using the five senses, look, feel, taste, sound, and smell (for example, zucchini and spaghetti squash).
- **Read 'Sophie's Squash' by Pat Zietlow Miller**. On a trip to the farmers' market with her parents, Sophie chooses a squash, but instead of letting her mom cook it, she names it Bernice. Kids will love this playful story of a unique fall friendship between a girl . . . and her squash!
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as grating summer squash with a box grater or rinsing winter squash seeds to roast.
Bonus: Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate squash into their meals!

Conversation:

- Have your program participants eaten squash before?
- What type of squash have they eaten before (winter and/or summer)?
- Which type of squash is their favorite?

November's Harvest of the Month Bonus Item

The Healthy Potato



Sweet potatoes are the November Harvest of the Month bonus spotlight! The perfect dish as we get closer to the Thanksgiving holiday. Sweet potatoes are nutritional powerhouses packed with vitamins A & C, niacin, potassium, fiber, and other vitamins and minerals.

Sweet Potatoes grow underground and love hot, moist temperatures like our Georgia climate. Sweet potatoes are in season in Georgia from August through November. Ocilla, GA located in Irwin County is home to the annual Georgia Sweet Potato Festival that has been celebrated since the 1960s.

Integration:

- [Sweet Potato Fries](#)
- [Sweet Potato Pancakes](#)
- [Mashed Sweet Potatoes](#)
- [Apple Glazed Sweet Potatoes](#)
- [Sweet Potato and Orange Muffins](#)

Share your Harvest of the Month stories and menu integration of squash and sweet potatoes with Nutrition Education Specialist, Morgan Chapman, MPH, MCHc at morgan.chapman@decal.ga.gov.

Physical Activity Corner

Stay Active this Holiday Season

Power Up – The holiday season is here! It is the most celebrated and busiest time of the year.

What is the key to holiday exercise? Make it fun!



The power of regular exercise is an important part of staying healthy, managing stress, and improving your mental health. Studies have found a strong connection between regular exercise and increased levels of movement to help with sleep, reduce fatigue, and improve concentration and learning.

For overall health and wellness, it is recommended that children engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day to stay healthy and fit, both mentally and physically. We encourage families to spend quality time together in their garden — planting, raking, pruning, and watering the plants, take a walk together in your community, or walk to your local farmer’s market to choose new fruits and

vegetables to enjoy.

Remember to keep your body hydrated daily and get eight (8) hours of sleep per night. Engaging in healthy eating habits and being physically active can help avoid holiday weight gain and get a great jumpstart to the holiday season.

Integration:

- **Family Fitness During the Holiday Season**
- **Holiday Events in Georgia**
- **Core Exercises for Preschoolers**
- **All Weather Activities**
- **Healthier Holidays in 1 – 2 – 3!**

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book **Turkey Goes to School by Wendy Silvano**
- **Watch** the video on **Staying Active during the Holidays.**
- **Talk** with families about ways to incorporate fitness into their daily lives. **Bonus:** Send home #HolidayWalk, #HolidayGear, #Holiday5KRun #HolidayMarathon #HolidayExercise pictures and events that are happening in your community

Conversation:

- What type of exercise can you do during the holiday season?
- How can I stay active and motivated during the holidays?
- What is a fun fitness activity to do as a family?

Share your #HolidayGear, #Holiday5KRun, #HolidayMarathon, and #HolidayMotivation stories and photos with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at tina.mclaren@dec.al.gov.

DECAL's Nutrition Spotlight

Meet Vanessa Goodman, Business Operations Representative

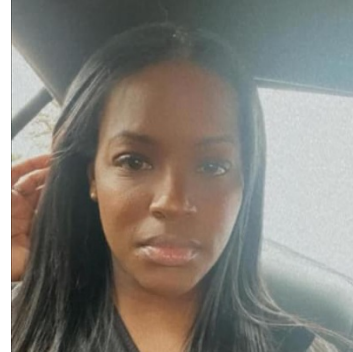
Vanessa Goodman joins the Nutrition Services Division as a Business Operations Representative. In this role, she is reviewing and determining eligibility for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and sponsored facilities. Vanessa is responsible for CACFP site level updates for sponsoring organizations that fall under D-G and Q-Z.

Vanessa is also assisting with processing add a site applications

and site level updates for Happy Helpings.

Vanessa may have a new position, but she has been with DECAL almost two years. In her previous role as a Scholarship Administrative Specialist, she processed initial applications to determine program eligibility for CAPS scholarships.

Vanessa currently resides in Conyers with her husband, and she is the mother of four. She enjoys spending time with her family and friends and decorating her home. Vanessa loves the holidays especially Christmas as it is her favorite time of year.



Eat Healthy and Live Active

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 23-24 Calendar

Harvest of the Month (HOTM) is the Georgia Department of Education School Nutrition Program's farm to school initiative that highlights an item each month that can be sourced locally and served in Georgia's school meals.

The Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month is a collaborative campaign to promote a different local, seasonal fruit or vegetable in child care settings each month.

Visit the Georgia Department of Education's HOTM [webpage](#) and Quality Care for Children [webpage](#). Upon viewing, you can find tips and tricks for preparing produce items, curriculum connections, activity lists and book alignment for your early care classrooms.



Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start Planning for Summer 2024 • Harvest of the Month: Squash • Bonus Harvest of the Month: Sweet Potatoes
November 23	Thanksgiving

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Thank You for Another Successful Summer Season](#)
- [Annual Year-End Reconciliation Requirement for FY2023](#)
- [Sonja Adams Celebrates 15 Years with State of Georgia](#)
- [Happy Helpings Year-End Reconciliation Memorandum](#)
- [Understanding Food Yield to Prevent Food Waste](#)
- [Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals](#)
- [After School Programs Required to Apply for License or Exemption to Participate in At-Risk](#)

- Stay Informed on Monitoring
- Determining Duty Allocation in the Management Plan
- Pre-Award Cost Request vs. Excess Funds Use Request
- Be a Health Hero - Health Empowers You
- Guidance on Collecting Race and Ethnicity Data
- Updated HH Forms and Policies
- Reminder: PolicyStat is available on the Nutrition Services' Webpage
- Check your Email Messages in GA ATLAS

How was my Customer Service?

Provide feedback on your experience with the Nutrition Team



Click on the icon at right to participate in the customer service survey. Responses are anonymous.

NEW DECAL Download

School-Age Child Care in Georgia

When you think about child care in Georgia, you probably picture infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and Pre-K students. However, a large number of families rely on child care for their school-age children attending elementary and even middle school.

In these cases, child care providers offer homework help, tutors, STEAM activities, health & fitness, character

development, crafts, and more. Joining us on this episode of DECAL Download to talk about school-age children served by Georgia's child care industry is Michelle Garris, the DECAL School Age and Youth Program Specialist, and Brittany Sams, the CCS Director of Administrative Services and Special Operations.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Nutrition Division

Marketing & Outreach Team



Cindy Kicklighter
Carl Glover

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