



January 15, 2026

Welcoming the New Year with CACFP

Supporting Providers, Strengthening Communities

As we step into a new year, we want to take a moment to thank you for your dedication in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Your commitment ensures that healthy, nutritious meals reach those who need them most, and we are grateful for the care and effort you bring to your programs every day.

The start of a new year is a perfect time to reflect, reset, and refocus. Whether your goals include strengthening meal planning, exploring new nutrition education ideas, improving administrative processes, or expanding participation, CACFP is here to support you every step of the way.

In 2026, we look forward to continuing our work together through:

- Training and professional development opportunities
- Updated resources and guidance
- Technical assistance to support program success
- Collaboration with partners across the state

As always, our goal is to help make CACFP participation as smooth, effective, and impactful as possible, so you can focus on what matters most: serving nutritious meals to Georgia's children and adults.

Thank you for being a valued part of the CACFP community. We wish you a successful, healthy, and rewarding year ahead.

Have You Thought about Feeding Kids this Summer?

Consider participating in Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program

Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program, ensures children 18 and under have access to nutritious meals and snacks during the summer when school is not in session.

If your institution currently participates in at-risk afterschool meals, you are well-positioned to offer summer meals.

Training is offered in February or March 2026. There are 50 Georgia counties where children did not have access to a Happy Helpings' meal site during FY25.

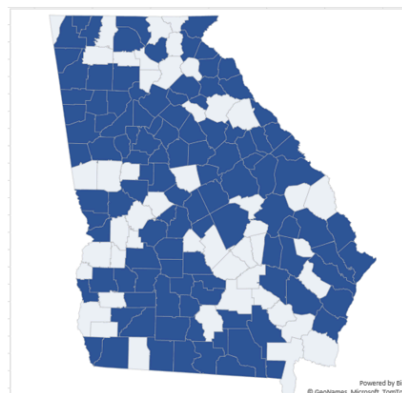
If you are able, please consider expanding your meal service to offer meals in any of the counties listed below.

To get started, please complete the online form on the sponsor page at happyhelpingsga.com.



FY26 Target Counties: 50 Counties

1. Bacon	11. Dawson	21. Johnson	31. Pickens	41. Towns
2. Banks	12. Dodge	22. Jones	32. Pierce	42. Treutlen
3. Berrien	13. Early	23. Long	33. Pike	43. Troup
4. Brantley	14. Evans	24. Marion	34. Pulaski	44. Union
5. Calhoun	15. Forsyth	25. Meriwether	35. Quitman	45. Webster
6. Camden	16. Gordon	26. Miller	36. Schley	46. Wheeler
7. Charlton	17. Grady	27. Montgomery	37. Screven	47. White
8. Coffee	18. Hall	28. Murray	38. Stewart	48. Wilkes
9. Crawford	19. Jeff Davis	29. Oconee	39. Taylor	49. Wilkinson
10. Dade	20. Jenkins	30. Oglethorpe	40. Telfair	50. Worth



*Blue: Counties where HH Meals were available in FY25:
White: Counties where meals were not available in FY25*

For answers to your questions, please contact Happyhelpings@dec.al.ga.gov

CACFP Area Eligibility Interactive Map Updated for FY26

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is excited to announce that the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) [Area Eligibility mapper](#) has been updated for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026.

At the beginning of each fiscal year, a special tabulation of American Community Survey (ACS) data provided by the United States Census Bureau is released to help establish area eligibility. To make the data easier to use, the release is accompanied by an interactive mapping tool, which now reflects the FY 2026 update.

The data set is also available for download on [open data site](#). To learn more about using census data for establishing area eligibility for CACFP, please review CACFP 04, [Area Eligibility in Child Nutrition Programs](#).

Upcoming Training Platform Upgrade

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) Bright from the Start's Nutrition Services Team is excited to announce an upgrade in our virtual learning experience. Effective immediately, we are moving from GoToWebinar and Zoom to Microsoft Teams for all webinars.

This transition offers several benefits:

- **Improved Accessibility:** Trainees/attendees can join webinars via browser, desktop app, or mobile.
- **Enhanced Engagement:** Access features like live reactions, integrated polls (Microsoft Poll), and breakout rooms and group activities.
- **Streamlined Access:** Easily locate and complete required training.

What to expect:

- **Joining Sessions:** You will now receive Microsoft Teams meeting invitations. Click the link to join via your preferred device.
- **Interaction:** Use Q&A, and reactions icons at the top/bottom of your screen.
- **Breakout Rooms:** Some webinars may include smaller group discussions.

We appreciate your flexibility as we have adopted this impactful platform to make training more interactive and connected.

Upcoming Training Dates:

January 15, 2026

PALS Session 1: Physical Activity is Important in Early Childhood

1:00-2:00 pm

Are you interested in learning why physical activity is essential for young children, and how it supports healthy development? Do you want practical strategies to help integrate movement into daily routines?

Join us for an informative session on practical strategies to help integrate movement into daily routines.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 26, 2026

Memo Monday: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians

10:00 am-12:00 pm

Are you aware of the guidelines for accepting medical statements completed by registered dietitians? Do you understand how this requirement supports accurate dietary accommodations and program compliance?

Join us for a clear overview of the guidelines for accepting medical statements from Registered Dietitians.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 27, 2026

Tuesday Tip! When to Request a Medical Statement

1:30-2:00 pm

Are you confident in knowing when a medical statement is required for participants with special dietary needs? Do you understand what documentation is necessary and how to properly follow program guidelines?

Please join this webinar for a clear and informative overview of:

- When to Request a Medical Statement
- Learn when a medical statement is needed
- What the medical statement must include
- How to ensure compliance for your program.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

February 10, 2026

Tuesday Tip! Feeding Infants in the CACFP

1:30-2:30 pm

Do you need a refresher on serving infants in the CACFP? This session will cover the CACFP infant meal pattern, best practices for feeding infants ages 0–5 months, and how to recognize signs of hunger and fullness, introducing solid foods, and essential strategies for choking prevention.

Join this webinar to learn how to create safe, nurturing, and developmentally appropriate mealtime experiences for infants in your care.

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

February 16, 2026

Memo Monday: Guidance on the Interpretation of Discrimination Based on “Sex” in USDA Child Nutrition Programs

10:00 am- 12:00 pm

Are you up to date on USDA guidance regarding the interpretation of discrimination based on “sex” in Child Nutrition Programs?

Join us for this Memo Monday training to review key guidance and compliance expectations.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

February 19, 2026

PALs Session 2: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Time and Space

1:30-2:00pm

Would you like to explore the national recommendations for time and space physical activity in childcare and brainstorm ways to overcome common challenges? Are you excited to learn more about tummy time for infants, outdoor play areas, and weather considerations?

Join this webinar for tips on developing skills to implement best practices for physical activity in ECE settings.

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

Notes:

This is a two-step process:

- **Step 1: After registering in GA ATLAS, you will receive a Training Confirmation email immediately from Georgia DECAL Help Desk - helpdesk@cnpus.com with a registration link to attend the webinar (check your spam/junk folder).**
- **Step 2: You must then register for the training using the link provided on the Training confirmation e-mail.**
- If you should have an issue with registering, please contact Leslie Truman prior to the day of training.
- [Click here](#) if you need a refresher on how to register for training in GA ATLAS.

Please note: Only the Program Contact (PC) can self-register within GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, please contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at (404) 657-1779 for assistance.

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 [FY 2026 CACFP Renewal Readiness](#) webinar. It provided step-by-step instructions on how to complete annual renewal requirements for FY 2026.

National CACFP Association Upcoming Training

January 26, 2026
Supporting Emotional Well-Being with Sesame Street in Communities
2:00 - 2:30 pm

A new year brings new beginnings, and a wonderful chance to refocus on the emotional well-being for those in our care. Join Sesame Street in Communities to explore free resources that help children name big feelings, build healthy coping skills, and strengthen bonds with the caring adults around them.

Through videos, storybooks, and hands-on activities with your favorite Sesame Street friends, you'll discover joyful ways to nurture emotional health and bring more calm, confidence, and connection into your daily routines.

- Identify key Sesame Street in Communities resources that promote emotional well-being for young children and caregivers.
- Apply strategies and activities to help children recognize emotions, build coping skills, and strengthen resilience.

[Register Now](#)



National CACFP Association Announcement:
Save the Date: CACFP Week is March 15-21, 2026



The National Child and Adult Care Food Program is excited to announce the campaign for 2026 CACFP Week: **Stirring Up Goodness**

CACFP Week is a national educational and information campaign sponsored annually by the National CACFP Association, designed to raise awareness of how the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program combats food insecurity and improves the nutrition in billions of meals served annually.

The upcoming campaign is **Stirring Up Goodness**, which centers on the idea that every CACFP meal is more than just nutrition - it's a moment of care, learning and connection.

Join in celebrating the positive impact of the CACFP and the people who make it happen, one meal at a time.

Everyone who registers will also receive an exclusive sample cycle menu, which focuses on how children and adults can be more involved in the meals and snacks that they eat.

[Sign Up for CACFP Week](#)

Visit the National CACFP [website](#) for ideas and materials to help you create a fun, engaging post.

2026 National Child Nutrition Conference



National Child Nutrition Conference is headed to Las Vegas in 2026. Don't miss out on training, networking, and exciting learning opportunities.

Check out our schedule of events and travel information on the [conference website](#).

Visit our conference registration page for more details regarding rates and programming plans.



Nutrition Ed Nook

Greens Galore

The January Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) spotlight is Collard, Mustard, and Turnip Greens.

These vibrant leafy greens are nutritional powerhouses, rich in vitamins A, C, and K, fiber, and folate, all of which support bone health, immunity, and vision.

Though available year-round, these greens truly shine during their peak season from December through March, when cooler temperatures enhance their flavor. Collards offer a hearty, slightly bitter taste, while mustard and

turnip greens bring a bold, peppery kick to the plate.

These greens are deeply rooted in Southern culinary traditions, especially around New Year's, symbolizing prosperity and good fortune. But their appeal goes far beyond the South—they're cherished in cuisines across the globe, from Kenya to Kashmir, Brazil to Portugal, and beyond.

Whether blended into smoothies, tossed in salads, sautéed in stir-fries, or simmered in soups and stews, these greens are as versatile as they are nutritious. This month, invite your participants to explore global flavors and celebrate the cultural diversity of these beloved greens.

Fun Fact: Turnip greens are one of the most calcium-rich vegetables—great for growing strong bones.

Integration:

- [Okra & Greens](#)
- [Smothered Greens](#)
- [Sausage & Greens Stew](#)
- [Black-Eyed Peas and Greens](#)

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.
- **Greens Craft:** Make paper greens art—children can tear, cut, and glue different shades of green paper to create their own collard, mustard, and turnip greens while learning how these veggies grow and help keep us healthy.
- **Read** [The Turnip](#) by Jan Brett. In a rollicking, cumulative tale, a badger family and their friends—Hedgie, Mr. Ram and Vanya, the horse—struggle to pull up a giant turnip. A cocky

rooster steps in and pulls, sending him into the air, holding onto the turnip. No one knows that a mother bear in her underground den has kicked the turnip up through the soil to give the family room to sleep through the winter.

- **Talk with families about how children can help with meal preparation such as swishing greens in a bowl of water to remove dirt.**
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate greens into their meals! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE greens-themed resources?** Check out Quality Care for Children's [Harvest of the Month toolkit](#) and [Eat, Learn, Grow Georgia](#) for more ways to engage ECE students.

Conversation:

- If eating greens could give you a superpower, what would it be and why?
- Do you know where greens grow—in a garden, on a farm, or somewhere else?
- Do you know what part of the plant we eat when we eat greens—the leaf, stem, or root?

Share your winter Harvest of the Month stories and menu integration of collard, mustard, and turnip greens with Nutrition Education Specialist, Morgan Chapman, MPH, MCHc at morgan.chapman@decal.ga.gov.

Physical Activity Corner

Winter Moves: Warm Hearts and Active Play for Healthy Growth

As winter arrives and temperatures drop, we often stay indoors to keep warm. Educators, staff and parents often face challenges in maintaining active routines during colder months.

Physical activity is crucial year-round in supporting and helping children and adults boost cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles and bones, and improve mental wellbeing. Staying active, especially on gray, cold days, is essential. Winter's embrace offers a world of possibilities for indoor/outdoor exploration and play.

Here are fun and engaging ideas for families and educators to incorporate physical activity into daily routines. Watch and monitor the temperature and wind chill, and limit outdoor time to 20–30 minutes when it's extremely cold.



Indoor Winter Activities:

- **Color Painting** (Classroom Art Station): Ignite creativity and sensory skills with color painting, where children can express their artistic side while learning about different colors. This activity is a fantastic way to explore their artistic expression and understand color, using the white bond paper as their canvas.
- **Toddler Snowstorm** (Motor Skills Development): This activity from SHAPE America is a fun and engaging way for toddlers to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. It involves rolling and catching cotton balls, followed by creating a "snowstorm" by tossing the cotton balls into the air. This activity helps toddlers improve coordination and interaction with others.
- **Winter-Themed Crafts** (Fine Motor Enrichment): Enhance fine motor skills with winter-themed crafts. Crafting activities such as cutting, gluing and assembling various materials not only aid in developing hand-eye coordination, but also foster creativity, allowing children to create their own winter wonderlands.
- **Story Time** (Literacy and Seasonal Awareness): Read aloud, [Winter is Here](#), by Kevin Henkes. A celebration of the sights, sounds, and smells of the season, this is perfect for young readers. Snow falls, animals burrow, and children prepare for the wonders winter brings.
- **Tummy Time** (Infant Physical Development): An exercise for infants to 12 months, tummy time is an activity that needs supervised time when an infant is awake and alert, lying on her/his belly. Opportunities for tummy time should last as long as possible to help infants learn to enjoy it and build their strength. For infants who are not used to it or do not enjoy it, each period of tummy time can start at 1–2 minutes and build up to 5–10 minutes over time.

- **Simon Says** (Group Movement Game): This is a fun classic game that encourages active play and helps in exercising listening skills. Although Simon Says is traditionally a child's game, kids of all ages can play and enjoy the game. The fun increases with the number of players.
- **Let's Get Moving** (Music and Movement Integration): Play **Move Along with Elmo** and enjoy the moves together. Sing Along: Substitute "Elmo" with the kids' names. For example, if the child's name is Alex, you can sing "Alex's got the moves!" Have fun dancing and singing along.

Outdoor Winter Activities:

- **Winter Nature Walks** (Outdoor Exploration): Encourage the children to observe and describe what they see, hear, and feel. Bring along a small bag to collect interesting natural items like pinecones, acorns, or smooth stones. After the walk, you can discuss their findings and even create a nature collage with the items collected.
- **Sensory Bin Winter Scavenger Hunt** (Sensory Engagement): Create a winter-theme scavenger hunt list with items like evergreen trees, stones, falling leaves, etc. Encourage children to use their five senses to experience the cold winter environment.
- **Snowball Toss** (Gross Motor Coordination): Create "snowballs" using soft balls, lightweight materials like yarn. Set up targets, such as buckets or hula hoops, and let children practice tossing the item into the target, enhancing both coordination and motor skills.
- **Soft Balls Bowling** (Indoor Physical Play): Set up bowling pins using empty plastic bottles. Children can take turns rolling soft balls and knocking down the "pins." This game is perfect for promoting physical activity, coordination, and friendly competition among young children.

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book, *Winter is Here*, by Kevin Henkes.
- **Watch the video on** **Move Your Way: Tips for Getting Motivated**.
- **Talk** with families about ways to integrate fitness into the cold winter season.
- **Bonus:** Send #ActivePlay, #ColdWinterActivities, #Outdoor/Indoor pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What is your favorite fitness activity to do during the winter season?
- How do you usually stay active during the colder months?
- Why is it important to exercise outdoors during the cold winter?
- How do you engage children in cold weather?

Physical Activity Resources

- Active Play in Cold Weather ([English](#) & [Spanish](#))
- [Dressing Kids for the Winter](#)
- [Understand the Weather: Child Care Weather Watch](#)
- [Cold Weather Safety](#)

When playing outside in cold weather, children should dress in layers to stay warm. Families are encouraged to provide hats and gloves, especially when temperatures drop below 32°F.

As educators, embrace the joys of winter season and the adventures it brings. Always prioritize children's safety during physical activity, and let's keep moving together.

Share your #ColdWinterActivities, #OutdoorIndoor stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov

Follow DECAL on Pinterest

Do you need ideas to help incorporate nutrition education and physical activity at your site?

Check out DECAL's Pinterest for CACFP, Happy Helpings& Harvest of the Month recipes, physical activity ideas, healthy holiday celebrations, and more click [here](#).

Nutrition and Physical Activity pins are saved and added weekly.

Questions or suggestions, submit to morgan.chapman@decal.ga.gov or tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov.



Eat Healthy and Live Active

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 25-26 Calendar

The Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month is a collaborative campaign between Quality Care for Children, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Department of Human Services, and Georgia Organics. The campaign aims to encourage healthy eating habits by promoting a different local, seasonal fruit or vegetable each month.

Visit [EatLearnGrowGA](https://eatlearngrowga.org) to access a variety of classroom activities aligned with the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), recipes, book lists, family newsletters, and more to help you incorporate a new vegetable or fruit each month in the classroom, kitchen, and home.

For school-age children resources, visit the Georgia Department of Education's Harvest of the Month [webpage](#).

CACFP Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [GA Child Care Owners & Administrators: Do You Want Your Child Care Business to Thrive?](#)
- [Reminder to Review Online CACFP Applications](#)
- [Waivers Available during Unanticipated School Closures](#)
- [FNS Issues Guidance on Using Federal Funds to Purchase Local Foods](#)
- [At-Risk Afterschool Waivers Available during Unanticipated School Closures](#)
- [Update on Cash in Lieu of Commodities \(CILC\) Rates and Claim Processing](#)
- [Helpful Hints for Completing the CACFP Application](#)
- [Supplier Change Request \(SCR\) Form and Updates](#)
- [Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians for Schools and Child and Adult Care Institutions and Facilities](#)
- [Guidance on the Interpretation of Discrimination Based on “Sex” in USDA Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Statements Supporting Accommodations for Children with Disabilities in the Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Reimbursement Rates for CACFP Providers](#)
- [Updated Procurement Forms to include Civil Rights Assurance Statement](#)
- [Updated Agreements for DCH and Administrative Sponsors](#)
- [How to File a CACFP Claim for Reimbursement](#)

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
January	Harvest of the Month: Greens Galore
January 15	PALS Session 1: Physical Activity is Important in Early Childhood- Webinar
January 19	Holiday: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
January 26	Memo Monday: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians-Webinar
January 26	NCA Free Webinar: Supporting Emotional Well-Being with Sesame Street in Communities
January 27	Tuesday Tip! When to Request a Medical Statement- Webinar
February 10	Tuesday Tip! Feeding Infants in the CACFP- Webinar
February 16	Memo Monday: Guidance on the Interpretation of Discrimination Based on "Sex" in USDA Child Nutrition Programs- Webinar
February 19	PALs Session 2: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Time and Space- Webinar
March 15-21	CACFP Week
April 13-17	2026 National Child Nutrition Conference

Decal Download

Starting Early in Early Childhood Education



Some Georgia high school students are getting a jump start on their careers in early childhood education by taking classes on the subject in high school.

For example, Maxwell High School of Technology in Gwinnett County offers early childhood education offerings that include a fully operational Georgia's Pre-K Program classroom. The programs equip students with

essential skills from creating safe and healthy learning environments to mastering child development and curriculum planning.

Joining us to talk about the program at Maxwell High School of Technology in Gwinnett County is Karey McFall, an Early Childhood Education Instructor, along with Laurynn Martin, a paraprofessional and former student at the program. We are also joined by current students Aubrey Hoyt and Justin Davilla Mora. From DECAL we are joined by Rokeya Stone, a Georgia's Pre-K Program Specialist who works with the team at Maxwell High School of Technology.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

How was my Customer Service?

Provide feedback on your experience with the Nutrition Team



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



Nutrition Services Marketing & Outreach Team

Cindy Kicklighter
Joann Kilpatrick

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