



November 17, 2025



Nutrition Services Visits Rex Childcare and Early Learning Center

In honor of October Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) Month, Nutrition Services visited Rex Childcare & Early Learning Center.

Located in Rex, the center is a 1-Star Quality Rated Program that serves children ages four weeks to 14 years, offering Infant/Toddler Care, Preschool, Private Pre-K, and Georgia Pre-K classes.

Since 1992, Owner Adaeze Ngoddy, affectionately known as Ms. Ada, has served Clayton County families across generations. Her passion for agriculture began in childhood, influenced by her parents and paternal grandmother, who cultivated vegetables and other staple crops. Her mother, Susan, maintained fishponds and spent years teaching Rex Childcare students how to grow their own gardens. In her honor, the center's garden is named the *Garden of Susan*.

The garden plays a central role in the center's nutrition efforts. Harvested produce is incorporated into meals, snacks, and taste tests, and the staff has even experimented with canning.

Over the years, they've grown cabbage, cucumbers, watermelon, greens, carrots, and beets. With the change of season, the garden currently features cabbages, collard greens, rosemary, and peppermint. The garden also features a fig tree and a lemon tree. Children learn seasonal lessons, such as which plants can survive winter and how to protect others to ensure they return in spring.

Rex Childcare previously partnered with Small Bites Adventure Club to bring weekly nutrition education into their classrooms. They also collaborated with another Clayton County childcare program through the Hand, Heart & Soul Project, which provided a garden educator to work with children and support teachers. Currently, the center is preparing for winter by ordering plant coverings.

Rex Childcare was one of sixteen recipients of Nutrition Services Farm to ECE mini grants, funded by the USDA Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant (FY20).



Rex Childcare & Early Learning Center Site Visit Highlights



Children at the Rex Childcare & Early Learning Center learned about the different colors of apples.



Little taste testers at the Rex Childcare & Early Learning Center tried a new recipe—Apple Coleslaw.



Children at the Rex Childcare & Early Learning Center explored the different colors of apples and made a fun craft to match each color.

Your Input Needed to Design CACFP Summit Workshops

The Nutrition Services Team is planning a Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Summit to be held in 2026. This event will provide an opportunity for education and networking that will help providers deliver the highest quality meals and service.

We hope that you will make plans to join us for this event. To ensure the Summit delivers the most practical, relevant, and impactful content for *you*, we are asking for a few minutes of your time to complete a short survey by **November 24**.

Your feedback will help us finalize our agenda, select keynote topics, and design workshops that directly address your current challenges and professional development needs in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Please [click here](#) to participate in the survey.

FDCH Excess Carry Over Funds Due November 30

Family Day Care Home Sponsors (FDCH) with remaining administrative funds at the end of the fiscal year that exceed 10 percent of that fiscal year's administrative payments must return those excess funds to DECAL by November 30.

Additional Requirements: To support the calculation, a FDCH sponsor must submit a general ledger or the bank statement showing the total ending balance along with the FDCH Carryover Letter to the Budget Compliance Supervisor, [Gwendolyn Howard](#).

For more information, please refer to the CACFP Policy Memo, [Carry Over of Unused CACFP Administrative Reimbursement](#), dated October 1, 2020.

GA Child Care Owners & Administrators: Do You Want Your Child Care Business to Thrive?

The business trainings from **DECAL's FREE Thriving Child Care Business Academy** can assist you, just like they've helped thousands of others across the state. It's super easy to start. Our **Handbook** describes the trainings, coaching, and online resources we offer and our **Getting Started Guide** helps you decide where to begin your journey. Register now and receive state-approved training hours for:

- **Live Webinars from Alyssa Foskey of the UGA Small Business Development Center**
- **Live Webinars from Civitas Strategies**
- **Live Webinars from Georgia trainers on Strengthening Business Practices**
- **Live 30-minute Individual Coaching Sessions from Civitas** -no training hours or stipends offered
- **Small Study Groups from Civitas Strategies- \$125 stipends are also available after completion**

The 12 small study group topics now include 2 new ones about strategies for taking advantage of often-overlooked financial opportunities:

- **Maximizing Tax Credits to Strengthen Your Child Care Business*** : Learn how to identify and qualify for Georgia and federal tax credits that can reduce costs, support your staff, and strengthen your business. This track walks you through which credits may apply to you, what documentation you'll need, and how to take the next step with confidence.
- **Revenue Stacking in Georgia:** Learn how Quality Rated payments, CAPS subsidies, Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, and other state supports can work together to increase your revenue and stability. Whether you are new to these programs or looking to maximize their impact, you will gain strategies to strengthen your financial foundation and plan for long-term success.

These new topics join the 10 other subjects you can choose: Financial Foundations; Recruiting & Retaining Staff; Mitigating Risk; Sales & Marketing; Revenue Streams & Growth; Technology; Assessing Your Business; Financial Planning; Tax Preparation Strategies; and Building a Strong Work Culture. Read all the Small Study Group summaries [here](#) and register [here](#). For help, email the friendly folks at gacoaching@civstrat.com.

Click [here](#) to read important disclaimer.



Chop, Look, Listen *A Mealtime Safety Initiative from DECAL*

Click on the video above to view the food demonstration and hear remarks from Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services.

Nutrition Services is proud to support **Chop, Look, Listen**, DECAL's statewide initiative focused on preventing choking incidents in young children during mealtimes.

Recognizing the critical role early childhood educators play in fostering safe eating environments, Chop, Look, Listen, was developed based on data from nearly 500 child care providers across Georgia. The providers acknowledged that understanding appropriate food size by age is a critical need for keeping children safe during mealtimes.

DECAL hosted two live events in Alpharetta and Brunswick to remind and inform child care workers, parents and guardians of how quickly food can become a choking hazard. During the

events, Nutrition Services partnered with local chefs to promote hands-on food preparation demonstrations. These demonstrations showcased proper chopping techniques, appropriate portions, and best practices to ensure food is served safely for young children in care.

Visit the [Chop, Look, Listen](#) webpage to explore safety resources and meet the Mealtime Minis — fun characters designed to help keep every bite safe and to support Nutrition Services' mission of promoting healthy, safe eating habits for all children in Georgia.



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.

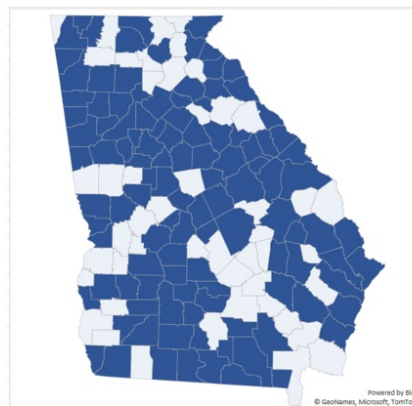
If you are able, please consider expanding your meal service to offer meals in any of the counties listed below.

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

DECAL Nutrition Welcomes Rhonda Kelley



Nutrition Services is pleased to announce that Rhonda Kelley has joined the Nutrition team in the role of Nutrition Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, Region 1.

Rhonda brings over 15 years of experience in education, coaching, professional development, and instructional support, most recently serving as a science teacher and head coach for Paulding County Schools. With a Master's in Secondary Science Education and a bachelor's in Biology/Chemistry, she has a strong foundation in evidence-based learning and curriculum support.

Transitioning from the classroom to the world of nutrition and provider support, Rhonda shared that DECAL immediately felt like the right fit. While researching the agency, she was drawn to the department's focus on evidence-based practice, continuous learning, innovation, and hands-on support—all core values that align with her passion for education and science.

“At the heart of what I like doing — and what I do best — is creating clarity and connection,” Rhonda explained. “I loved helping students grow and learn, and now I’m excited to bring that same mindset to supporting providers and helping them navigate nutrition policies and systems.”

Although she will miss the energy of the high-school classroom, Rhonda is excited for the next chapter. She looks forward to learning new systems, connecting with providers, and helping make complex information clear and accessible.

Rhonda said, “There will be a learning curve, but I’m excited to jump in. Helping people understand, simplify, and succeed — that’s the ‘light-bulb moment’ that motivates me.”

When she’s not working, Rhonda enjoys reading, photography, and spending time outdoors—especially during her favorite season, fall. She also enjoys cooking and hopes to rediscover her love of it now that her children are young adults. Rhonda and her family share their home with a calico cat named Pumpernickel and enjoy visits with her son’s new Aussie-doodle puppy.

True to her science-and-tech roots, Rhonda has a keen eye for design and detail — whether reviewing video edits, creative projects, or giving feedback to her daughter, who is studying animation and emerging media in college.

We closed our conversation by asking Rhonda her favorite motivational quote. She didn’t hesitate:

“Do or do not. There is no try.” — Yoda

Rhonda believes in growth, effort, and commitment — values we know will make a positive impact across the Nutrition Division and among the providers she supports.

Please join us in giving Rhonda a warm welcome and we are so excited to have her on board.

Celebrating Professional Excellence: Julie Edwards Earns National CACFP Certification

We are proud to celebrate Julie S. Edwards, Training and

Technical Assistance Coordinator (TA) for the East Region, for earning the CACFP Management Professional (CMP) certification through the National CACFP Association.

"Achieving the CACFP certification is affirmation of my leadership in child nutrition. As a TA Coordinator, it strengthens my ability to impact the communities we serve. The certification enhances my professional credibility and represents Georgia DECAL's commitment to high nutritional standards for the children and adults under our care." Julie S. Edwards.

This prestigious credential recognizes her commitment to excellence in child nutrition and her leadership in supporting CACFP operations across Georgia.

The CMP certification is awarded to CACFP professionals who demonstrate advanced expertise in program administration, leadership, training, and continuing education. This achievement highlights Julie's dedication to ongoing professional development and her passion for supporting providers and communities statewide.

Please join us in congratulating Julie on this outstanding accomplishment and her continued service to Georgia's children and families.



Training Opportunities Available Through the National CACFP Association

December 4, 2025
Head Start Boot Camp
11:00 am - 5:00 pm

Discover how nutrition and CACFP regulations work hand in hand with Head Start programs to support children and families. Walk away with strategies you can apply right away to build healthier habits and brighter futures in Head Start.



Registration: [Click here](#)

Upcoming Training Dates:

December 2, 2025
Tuesday Tip! Festive Flavors: Fun Snack Ideas for Every Month
1:30 - 2:30 pm

Join us for "CACFP Festive Flavors", a hands-on, engaging training designed to help you:

- Plan creative, festive snack menus aligned with seasonal themes and holidays
- Understand how to make those snacks CACFP creditable (meeting meal pattern requirements)
- Reduce added sugar while keeping snacks fun and appealing
- Use practical tools, recipe templates, and visual inspiration you can apply right away
- Engage children in snack time through themes, taste tests, and participation

Whether you're new to menu planning or looking for fresh ideas, this training will give you a "snack idea calendar" you can use all year.

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

[\[Register Now\]](#)

December 15, 2025
Memo Monday- Meal Pattern Updates
10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Effective October 1, 2025, CACFP regulations have been moved to ADDED sugar limits for breakfast cereals and yogurts. Be in the know on how to prepare for the transition and calculate the new added sugar limits. Learn what this means for product selection, menu planning, and staying in compliance, so you can confidently serve nutritious meals to children in your care!

- [Meal Pattern Updates due to 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans – June 28, 2024](#)
- [Smoothies Offered in Child Nutrition Programs with Questions and Answers – June 28, 2024](#)

[\[Register Now\]](#)

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.



Nutrition Ed Nook
The Healthy Potato

Sweet potatoes are November's Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) feature. They are root vegetables that grow underground and come in a variety of colors, including orange, purple, and white. Sweet potatoes are nutritional powerhouses. They're rich in vitamins A and C, niacin, potassium, fiber, and other essential nutrients that support eye health, immunity, and

digestion.

Sweet potatoes thrive in Georgia's hot, moist climate. August through November is sweet potato season in Georgia.

Sweet potatoes are incredibly versatile in the kitchen. They can be mashed, baked, roasted, steamed, boiled, sautéed, or grilled. Add them to soups, casseroles, salads, or even desserts for a flavorful and nutritious boost. Try mashed sweet potatoes with a sprinkle of cinnamon or baked sweet potato fries as a tasty finger food.

Fun Fact: Ocilla, GA is home to the annual Georgia Sweet Potato Festival that has been celebrated since the 1960s.

Integration:

- [Candied Yams](#)
- [Sweet Potato Hash](#)
- [Sweet Potato Patties](#)
- [Sweet Potato Pancakes](#)
- [Sweet Potato and Orange Muffins](#)
- [Black Bean and Sweet Potato Quesadillas](#)

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.
- **Read** [Little Sweet Potato](#) by Amy Beth Bloom. When Little Sweet Potato rolls away from his patch, he is forced to search for a new home. He stumbles upon some very mean plants on his journey and begins to wonder if maybe he is too lumpy and bumpy to belong anywhere. Will Little Sweet Potato ever find a home that's just right for him?
- **Taste test** mashed sweet potatoes. Offer each child a plate with three taste test–size scoops of plain mashed sweet potatoes. Add a dash of a different spice to each scoop: one with cinnamon, one with nutmeg, and one with ginger. Ask children to wait to taste until everyone has been served. On the count of 3, have all children try each version one at a time. Create an observation chart to help children record their ratings and select their favorite.
- **Talk** with families about how children can help with meal preparation such as scrubbing sweet potatoes under cool running water or pricking whole sweet potatoes with a fork before baking or microwaving.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes that incorporate sweet potatoes home for families to try together! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE sweet potato-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:

- What are children's favorite ways to eat sweet potatoes?
- If children could make a new sweet potato dish, what would they add to it?
- Have any children ever helped cook sweet potatoes at home? If so, what did they make?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Move, Groove, and Be Merry This Holiday Season

Power Up. The holiday season is here, a time full of celebration and activity. The key to staying active during the holidays is to make it fun.

Regular physical activity is essential for maintaining health, managing stress, and boosting mental well-being. Research shows that consistent movement improves sleep, reduces fatigue, and enhances focus and learning.

Did You Know? Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily to support both physical and mental health.

Here are some festive ways to stay active as a family:

- Spend time in the garden — plant, rake, prune, or water together.
- Take a walk around your neighborhood or visit a local farmer's market to pick out seasonal fruits and veggies.
- Turn up your favorite holiday tunes and host a family dance party.
- Bundle up for a winter nature walk and observe seasonal changes.
- Create an indoor obstacle course using pillows, chairs, and blankets.



Stay Active and Joyful
This Holiday Season!

Tips:

- Stay hydrated.
- Aim for 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Remember — cold weather doesn't mean physical activity has to stop! Staying active and eating well can help prevent holiday weight gain and set a healthy tone for the season.

Integration:

- [How To Have Healthier Holidays in 1 – 2 – 3!](#)
- [Holiday Events in Georgia](#)
- [Stay Healthy During the Holidays](#)
- [Core Exercises for Preschoolers](#)
- [All Weather Activities](#)

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.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@dec.al.ga.gov or tina.mclaren@dec.al.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://www.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](https://www.georgia.gov/harvest-of-the-month).

CACFP Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [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](#)

You can find archived CACFP Newsletters [here](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
November	Harvest of the Month: Sweet Potatoes
November 24	Deadline: CACFP Summit Survey
November 27	Holiday: Thanksgiving
November 28	State Holiday
November 30	FDCH Excess Carry Over Funds Due
December 2	Tuesday Tip! Festive Flavors: Fun Snack Ideas for Every Month- Webinar
December 4	Head Start Boot Camp- Webinar
December 15	Memo Monday: Meal Pattern Updates- Webinar

Decal Download

Chop, Look & Listen



Choking accidents remain a leading cause of injury and even death among young children both in child care settings and at home.

In 2024, Georgia suffered two incidents where toddlers in child care choked while eating fruit and later died. One happened in Brunswick and the other in Alpharetta.

In response to those tragedies, DECAL has created a new campaign to equip caregivers, educators, and parents with practical tools and strategies to keep children safe. It's called Chop, Look & Listen.

Joining us on this episode of DECAL Download to discuss the new campaign is Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services, and Candace Gilbert, the Child Care Services Training and Communications Manager.

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Nondiscrimination Statement: English

Nondiscrimination Statement: Spanish

FOLLOW US



Bright from the Start: DECAL | 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive | Atlanta, GA 30334 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!