



October 15, 2026

October is Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education Month

Every October, schools, ECE programs, farmers, and communities celebrate National Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education Month.

Visit our [Farm to ECE webpage](#) to find resources to help you celebrate:

- 4 Week Fall Sample Menu with Recipes
- Book List with Local Food Resources
- Farm-Themed Active Games
- Toddler and Pre-K Activity Ideas
- State-Approved Training Opportunities
- Partner Resources



We'd also love to see how your program is celebrating! Share photos of your Farm to ECE activities to Morgan.Chapman@dec.al.ga.gov.

DECAL Awarded USDA Team Nutrition Training Grant

[USDA's Growing Healthier Futures grant](#) empowers state agencies to develop innovative strategies that strengthen child nutrition programs, and Georgia was one of five states awarded this special opportunity.

DECAL's Nutrition Services team will partner with the University of Georgia for this three-year project that will include in-person training, nutrition education, and promoting of healthy eating environments through new campaigns, pilot programs, and resource development. We will announce new resources, campaigns and training opportunities in future newsletters.

If you have any questions about the grant, contact Monica.Griffin@dec.al.ga.gov.

Growing Local

Celebrating a Year of the S Initiative

Over the past year, the S Initiative for Local Procurement brought together CACFP operators, farmers, and community partners to strengthen local food purchasing and expand Farm to Early Care and Education (ECE) efforts across Georgia.

The year-long initiative supported funded and non-funded child care sites, creating opportunities for programs to learn, collaborate, build community connections, and strengthen their Farm to ECE practices. Five funded sites each received a \$6,000 mini-grant, representing a total investment of \$30,000 to help bring more local foods to the table and strengthen local procurement efforts.

We were proud to work alongside these CACFP operators:

- A Kids World Learning Center, Loganville
- A Kids World Learning Center, Covington (*formerly Appletree Prep Covington*)
- Angels in Motion Learning Center
- Bright Future Academy
- ECLC Community Learning Center
- Jacqueline Collister, Family Child Care Learning Home
- Kidz Korner Learning Academy
- Pre-K Preparatory Learning Academy
- Winnford Academy

Across the funded sites, the initiative reached nearly 600 children and supported gardens growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs, including strawberries, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, peppers, sweet potatoes, watermelon, blueberries, collard greens, and fresh herbs. Programs used these garden harvests in meals, taste tests, cooking activities, nutrition education, and family engagement, letting children experience foods they helped grow.

Programs also brought locally purchased foods to the table, including fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and other dairy products, beef, chicken, eggs, and herbs. Along the way, sites strengthened relationships with local farmers and suppliers, UGA Extension Offices, agricultural programs, and other community partners.

Mini-grant funds supported lasting improvements such as raised garden beds, a greenhouse, kitchen equipment, and garden supplies that helped programs grow, store, prepare, and serve more fresh foods. One program significantly increased its use of fresh foods, while another obtained a USDA Farm Number that opened new opportunities to support its garden.

Although the year-long initiative has ended, its impact continues. All programs reported plans to continue local procurement, and participants leave the initiative with new knowledge, resources, relationships, and ideas to continue growing their Farm to ECE efforts.

Hurricane Isaias and Impacted CACFP Counties

On October 8, 2026, Gov. Brian Kemp declared a State of Emergency for Georgia ahead of Hurricane Isaias. The state of emergency covers all **159 Georgia counties**. Further details on the State of Emergency declaration can be accessed at the following link: [Declaring a State of Emergency for Hurricane Isaias](#).

We hope the impact to your area was minimal. If your feeding program (and/or sponsored facilities) was affected by the storm over the weekend, contact us via email at Melissa.Stanley@dec.al.ga.gov or call 404-656-5957 as soon as possible.

As a reminder, DECAL's **Disaster Preparedness Guidance** is located on the DECAL website and can also be accessed by using following link: [DECAL Disaster Preparedness Guidance](#). The memorandum is designed to remind organizations of the various flexibilities that exist when preparing for or experiencing a disaster. Additional waivers/flexibilities regarding **unanticipated school closures** can be found below.

Waivers Available during Unanticipated

School Closures

On September 18, 2026, DECAL was approved by USDA to grant CACFP facilities waivers for the following:

- Non-Congregate Meal Service
- Parent and Guardian Meal Pick-up
- Meal Service Times
- At-Risk Enrichment Activities

You may access the waiver request approval at the following link: [USDA SY 2026-27 Prospective Waiver Approval](#).

These waivers can only be utilized during unanticipated school closures resulting from natural disasters, unscheduled major building repairs, court orders relating to school safety or other issues, labor-management disputes or when approved by DECAL for similar unanticipated causes.

In order for a CACFP facility to utilize the above-mentioned waivers, the facility:

- Must be approved to operate the CACFP (child care centers, adult day care centers, emergency shelters, day care homes, outside-school-hours care centers, and/or at-risk afterschool sites);
- Must be located in an area impacted by an unanticipated school closure resulting from natural disasters, unscheduled major building repairs, court orders relating to school safety or other issues, labor-management disputes or when approved by DECAL for similar unanticipated causes; and
- Must limit the use of the waivers to no more than 10 consecutive days. In situations that may warrant a longer time period, Food Nutrition Service (FNS) approval will be required.

CACFP organizations must seek approval to utilize these waivers and can request their usage through the waiver module in [GAATLAS](#).

Note: Home Delivery does not apply to day care homes.

For questions, contact [Melissa Stanley](#) or [Tammie Baldwin](#).

Eligibility for For-Profit Institutions Participating in CACFP At - Risk

For-profit institutions can participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-Risk Afterschool Meals component if they meet specific eligibility criteria. To qualify, a for-profit center must be eligible to participate in the traditional child care component of the CACFP, meaning at least 25% of the enrolled children (or 25% of the licensed capacity, whichever is less) meet specific low-income or financial assistance thresholds.

25% Enrollment and Capacity Thresholds

To satisfy the baseline requirement, a for-profit institution must verify that at least 25% of its enrollment meets one of the following criteria during the calendar month preceding their initial application or annual reapplication:

- Free or Reduced-Price Meals: The children qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on federal income eligibility guidelines.
- Title XX Benefits: The children receive child care subsidy benefits under Title XX, and the center receives compensation through this program.

At-Risk Afterschool Program Requirements

Once the for-profit institution meets the 25% child care threshold, the specific afterschool program it operates must fulfill the standard "At-Risk" criteria:

- Area Eligibility: The program must be physically located in the attendance boundary of a public school where 50% or more of the enrolled students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

- Structure and Content: The program must provide regularly scheduled, supervised, and organized academic or enrichment activities after the regular school day, on weekends, or during school holidays during the regular school year
-

Health Permit Verification Requirements

Because Department of Public Health (DPH) permits do not list a specific expiration date—stating instead that they remain valid until "suspended, revoked, or expired," DECAL cannot continuously research individual permit statuses.

DPH guidance confirms that permits remain active and in good standing if the annual fees are paid, provided there is no change in ownership, location, or a formal revocation.

What is Changing

- New Applicants: Effective immediately, new institutions and sponsors applying to participate in CACFP must submit proof of payment for the current year's annual health permit fee invoice.
- Approved Participants: Approved CACFP institutions and sponsors must submit this proof when adding new sites or making updates.

This requirement applies to self-operating entities and Food Service Management Companies (FSMCs). Application reviewers will verify proof of payment during the application approval process.

Rules for Adult Day Care Centers

- Department of Community Health (DCH) Licensed (24+ capacity): Programs licensed for 24 or more participants per day require a local health department food service permit.
 - New Applicants: Effective immediately, new institutions and sponsors applying to participate in CACFP that hold a food service permit must submit proof of payment for the current year's annual health permit fee invoice.
 - Approved Participants: Approved CACFP institutions and sponsors that hold a food service permit must submit proof of payment for the current year's annual health permit fee invoice when adding new sites or making updates.
- Department of Community Health (DCH) Licensed (<24 capacity): Programs serving fewer than 24 participants per day fall below the threshold, follow DCH minimum safety rules, and do not need this permit proof.
- Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) Approved
 - Effective immediately, new institutions and sponsors applying to participate in CACFP that are approved by DBHDD that hold a food permit must submit proof of payment for the current year's invoice.
 - Approved CACFP institutions and sponsors that hold a food permit must submit proof of payment for the current year's annual health permit invoice fee when adding new sites or making updates.

Official Notice

The sponsor or institution is solely responsible for ensuring validity. Any meal service operations conducted under an invalid permit may result in DECAL disallowing reimbursement for the associated meals.

Physical Activity Corner

Get Moving With PALS

On Saturday, September 19, 2026, DECAL Nutrition Services partnered with the Georgia Department of Public Health North Central Health District to deliver a Physical Activity Learning Session (PALS) Training at The Stop Event Center in Milledgeville, Georgia.

Fourteen early care and education (ECE) professionals representing programs in Hancock, Washington, and Baldwin counties participated in this interactive training, gaining practical strategies to promote physical activity and healthy development among young children.



PALS helps ECE programs create healthier, more active learning environments for young children. The training combines evidence-based content with self-assessments, policy development, resources, and practical strategies that support sustainable improvements in physical activity practices.

The event began with welcoming remarks from Williesha Hatcher, ECE Coordinator for the SHINE Program. The training team included DECAL's Tina McLaren, Morgan Chapman, Julie Edwards, and Monica Griffin. We want to give a special thank

you to PALS trainers Sheila Thomas, Ed.D. of Thomas Educational Consulting and Training, and Lois Clark of Hancock County Early Head Start/Head Start/Pre-K.

Furthermore, special thanks to Alicia Wright, Hamdy Inusah, Cynthia Mosley, and Karen Ebey-Tessendorf with the Georgia Department of Public Health, North Central Health District, for sponsoring and organizing this successful event. Their partnership made this valuable PALS training possible.

Interested in hosting a PALS training in your community?

Contact Tina McLaren, MPH, Physical Activity Specialist, at tina.mclaren@decalfga.gov for more information.



October's Move of the Month in the Garden

🌱 Digging In This Season!

What if a garden could become a classroom, playground, and nutrition lesson all in one? By incorporating active play into gardening, child care programs can help cultivate healthier children while making physical activity enjoyable and meaningful. Children can dig, rake, water, carry supplies, pull weeds, and harvest fruits and vegetables. These activities help develop strength, coordination, balance, and gross motor skills.

🐝 Try These Garden-Inspired Movement Games

- **Pollinator Adventure:** Children pretend to be bees and butterflies traveling from flower to flower around the garden.
- **Garden Yoga:** Practice poses like tree pose, butterfly pose, seed pose (child's pose), and frog pose (yoga squat) in the garden. Find more at [Kids Yoga Stories](#).
- **Farmer Simon Says:** Try October's Move of the Month in the garden. Watch the video, then [download this handout](#) for movement prompts.



Click [here](#) to watch the video.

Additional Physical Activity Resources:

- [SAGE \(Sustainability via Active Garden Education\) Curriculum](#)
- [Move and Learn on the Farm: Rhymes and Farm Facts](#)
- [Kids Gardening](#)

Small garden activities can have a lasting impact on children's physical activity levels, food acceptance, and overall well-being. This season let's dig into the power of active play in ECE gardens! Together, we're planting seeds for our youngest learner's future, one garden at a time. 🌱🍅🥕

We'd love to feature your class in our next newsletter or on social media. Share your gardening photos, family engagement success stories, and activity ideas with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren at tina.mclaren@dec.al.gov.

Have a Healthy and Happy Halloween

Halloween is a fun time to celebrate with children, and there are plenty of ways to make the day special while supporting healthy habits. Celebrate the season with festive snacks that encourage children to explore healthy foods. Try ideas like pumpkin parfaits, veggie jack-o'-lanterns, or whole grain pumpkin muffins. You can also add to the fun with Halloween-themed activities, active games, crafts, or story time.

Looking for more inspiration?

Explore our Healthy Holiday Celebrations: Halloween Pinterest board for healthy recipes, activities, and creative celebration ideas: [Click here](#)

📷 We'd love to see your celebrations. Share photos of your healthy Halloween creations and help inspire other ECE providers with ideas they can try in their programs.

Upcoming Training Dates:

November 10, 2026

Tuesday Tip! Chop, Look, Listen: Preventing Choking with Infants & Toddlers
1:30- 2:15 p.m.

Children under age four are at the greatest risk of choking while eating. Join this webinar to learn how to safely modify and serve solid foods to infants and toddlers and examples of foods that can be offered safely.

Participants can earn three-fourths [0.75] state-approved hours for attending this training in its entirety.

[Register Now](#)

November 12, 2026

Building Better Menus with the Dietary Guidelines
6:00- 7:00 p.m.

This training will introduce the new Dietary Guidelines and provide practical, budget-friendly strategies for incorporating more real foods into CACFP and Happy Helpings menus.

[Register Now](#)

November 16, 2026

Memo Monday: CACFP Policies

This Memo Monday session will review CACFP policies related to Family Child Care Learning Homes, including requirements for claiming meals and recent changes affecting the eligibility and participation of day care and group day care homes in the CACFP.

- [The Claiming of Meals by Family Child Care Learning Homes Licensed by the State of Georgia, CACFP #12](#)
- [Changes to the Eligibility of Day Care Homes' and Group Day Care Homes' Participation in the CACFP](#)

[Register Now](#)

Notes:

Registering for training 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 in the Training Confirmation email.**
- If you have an issue with registering, contact [Leslie Truman](#) before the day of the training.
- [Click here](#) if you need a refresher on how to register for training in GA ATLAS.

NOTE: Only the Program Contact (PC) can self-register in GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, 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, visit the [Training and Technical Assistance](#) webpage for previously recorded webinars.



New Resource: Chop, Look, Listen

Have questions about choking prevention? DECAL Child Care Services has released a new Chop, Look, Listen FAQ to provide answers to commonly asked questions and help support safe mealtimes for young children.

[Download the Chop, Look, Listen FAQ](#) to learn more.

For additional information and resources, visit DECAL's [Chop, Look, Listen campaign webpage](#).

Follow DECAL on Pinterest

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

To 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.





Harvest of the Month

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 2026-2027 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, and the Georgia Department of Human Services. The campaign encourages healthy eating habits by promoting different local, seasonal fruits or vegetables each month.

Visit DECAL's [Harvest of the Month Pinterest Page](#) for recipes, culinary tips, classroom activity ideas, and more.

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:

- [CACFP Crediting Handbook Revised](#)
- [FY2027 CACFP Reimbursement Rates](#)
- [CACFP Area Eligibility Interactive Map Updated for FY26](#)
- [A Resource Hub for Food Industry Partners](#)
- [Recordkeeping Requirements in the CACFP](#)
- [Revised Product Formulation Statement \(PFS\) Templates and Samples](#)
- [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](#)
- [Reimbursement Rates for CACFP Providers](#)
- [How to File a CACFP Claim for Reimbursement](#)

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

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
October	Harvest of the Month: Apples
October	Farm to School and Farm to Early Care and Education Month
October 12	State Holiday: Columbus Day
November 10	Tuesday Tip! Chop, Look, Listen: Preventing Choking with Infants & Toddlers - Webinar
November 11	State Holiday: Veterans Day
November 12	Building Better Menus with the Dietary Guidelines - Webinar
November 16	Memo Monday: CACFP Policies - Webinar

DECAL Download



In October, DECAL is hitting the road. In partnership with Child Trends, we will host four regional DECAL Road Shows to bring agency updates, professional learning, resources, and DECAL staff directly to child care providers across Georgia.

Each roadshow will include a plenary session, breakout learning opportunities, and an Exhibition Hall with representatives from

nearly every DECAL division and program area.

The Roadshows are scheduled for:

- October 15 – UGA Campus Conference Center, Tifton
- October 20 – Clarence Brown Conference Center, Cartersville
- October 22 – Morrow Center, Morrow
- October 29 – Georgia Southern University CPE Center, Statesboro

Joining us to talk about the DECAL Roadshows are Dr. Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner of Quality Initiatives and Partnerships, and Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner of Child Care Services.

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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