



August 1, 2025

Spike Event held with Fannin County Recreation Department

Nutrition Services partnered with the Fannin County Recreation Department to host a vibrant spike event as part of the Happy Helpings summer meals program. Designed to boost attendance during the late summer months, the event served as a joyful reminder to parents and guardians that nutritious meals are still available for children even when school is out.



Held at the Fannin County Recreation Department, the celebration emphasized the importance of healthy eating and active living. Children enjoyed a variety of engaging activities including connect four, hopscotch, and jump rope, while also savoring nutritious meals, taste-testing Georgia-grown fruits and vegetables, and staying hydrated with fruit- and vegetable-infused water. The event highlighted the critical role of summer meal programs in ensuring consistent access to nutrition for children across the community.



During lunchtime, children were served well-balanced, nutritious meals featuring crowd-pleasers like creamy mac and cheese, crisp celery sticks, sweet strawberries, and refreshing milk. In addition to their lunch, many had the opportunity to taste-test a variety of Georgia-grown fruits and vegetables—introducing them to fresh, local produce in a fun and flavorful way.

To stay cool and hydrated, the kids sipped on fruit- and vegetable-infused water, learning how hydration can be both healthy and delicious. But the fun didn't stop there! Laughter and excitement filled the air as children moved, played, and made lasting memories with their peers.

Among the many engaging activities available to the children was a creative art station that encouraged self-expression. Diana Myers, Nutrition & Physical Activity Supervisor, took time to connect with the children and inspire their imaginations.

In a particularly heartwarming moment, one young girl chose to draw a picture of Diana herself. Touched by the sweet gesture, Diana gratefully accepted the drawing, a sincere and special reminder of the impact she has on the children she serves with kindness and care.



Overall, the day was a joyful reminder of how nourishing meals, hydration, and active play come together to support the health and well-being of our children—all while making summer a little brighter and a lot more fun.



We would like to thank the Fannin County Recreation Department for hosting this event and supporting efforts to promote child nutrition and physical activity.

Special thanks to Lorraine Panter of the Fannin County Recreation Department for coordinating the day's activities, hosting representatives from the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), and leading the event with the support of her outstanding staff. We also appreciate the participation of DECAL Board Member Cristina Washell, representing the Ninth Congressional District.

Behind the Meals: Rabun County's Team Powers Summer Nutrition

Clayton Adams, DECAL's Early Education Community Partnership Lead spent a day in Clayton, Georgia, observing the Happy Helpings program sponsored by Rabun County Family Connection.

He watched Director Laura Lane and her dedicated team, most of which are employees of Rabun County School District and Jennifer Davenport, a Head Start teacher in Franklin County, prepare and distribute meals to more than 400 children at 17 sites. "I learned so much about all it takes to coordinate, manage, and implement this program each and every day," said Clayton.



During his visit, Clayton met Jimmy Long, a bus driver for the Rabun County School District who plays a critical role in Happy Helpings. Clayton says, "Jimmy arrives early in the morning, helps prepare the meals for the day and delivers them to at least five sites."



Clayton rode along with Jimmy to two meal site locations in low-income apartment complexes. He said, "Jimmy knew each and every one that came to get food. He knew their names, their parents' names, their siblings' names. He gave every child, teenager, and parent a hug with words of wisdom and encouragement. He passed out community health fair flyers and reminded families on health check-ups. The level of care, kindness and trust that this man has built in Rabun County, is something that I have never witnessed in my 15 years of community work. He is a humble individual with the biggest heart and is truly called to do this work."

Pictured L to R: Jimmy Long, Mindy Parker, Laura Lane, Jennifer Davenport, Betty Edmonds, Cara Matkovic with baby, Britney Matkovic, Gertha Ramey, Gabe Bates, and Clayton Adams.

Boys & Girls Club of Greater Augusta and the City of Atlanta Recognized with 2024 Turnip the Beet Award



We're proud to announce that Happy Helpings Sponsors Boys & Girls Club of Greater Augusta and the City of Atlanta were recently recognized with USDA's Summer 2024 Turnip the Beet Award. This national award honors exceptional summer meal program sponsors who go above and beyond to serve high-quality, nutritious, and appealing meals to children during the summer months.

The **Boys & Girls Club of Greater Augusta** received the Silver Award. When asked about food and nutrition-based activities at their summer sites, Food Program Coordinator Susan Robertson shared that they started a garden at E. W. Hagler, where children were responsible for planting, maintaining, and harvesting vegetables. She explained that "the fresh veggies were cut up in salads and cooked to taste," giving children a hands-on experience with healthy eating.

The **City of Atlanta** was awarded the Bronze Award. Operations Director Shelby Beverly shared that they served a number of culturally diverse areas, including Latin American and Indian communities. She said their vendor was very responsive in adjusting meals to meet cultural needs. Shelby also highlighted the recreation department's summer theme, *Camp Best Friends: Road Trip*, where each week featured a different U.S. destination. "On our menu, we served a meal that corresponded to the destination they were traveling," she said, citing examples like Chicago-style hot dogs for Chicago, Tex-Mex for California, and barbecue for Texas.

All summer meal sponsors in good standing are eligible for the Turnip the Beet Award and may self-nominate or be nominated by others. Stay tuned for details on the next opportunity to apply.

Farewell and Congratulations to Diana Myers

After six and a half years of service at DECAL, we say a fond farewell to Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Supervisor Diana Myers as she transitions to a new role as Director of Fund Development with the Athens YWCO.

"Diana has been a vital part of our team, leading with heart, creativity, and a deep commitment to Georgia's children and families," said Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services. "Her leadership, insight, and kindness have left a lasting impact on our work and our people."

Thank you for your service, Diana.



Pictured L to R: Tina McClaren, Physical Activity Specialist, Morgan Chapman, Nutrition Education Specialist, Diana Myers, Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Supervisor and Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services.



Service Award for 10 Years of Service

We are proud to celebrate LaKisha Battle, who has been honored with the Faithful Service Award in recognition of 10 years of service as a Technical Assistance Coordinator for the Southeast Region.

Sonja Adams, Senior Manager of Provider Services says, "LaKisha's supervisor, Grushan Blake, and I both agree that she exemplifies what it means to serve with integrity, compassion, and excellence. Throughout her time in this role, LaKisha has consistently gone above and beyond to support nutrition program operators, provide timely guidance, and to ensure that children and families receive the nutritional support they need."

Her colleagues describe her as dependable, driven, and deeply passionate about her work. LaKisha's ability to build strong relationships, solve challenges with grace, and lead with a servant's heart makes her truly deserving of this honor.

Congratulations, LaKisha! Your dedication has not gone unnoticed, and we are grateful for the incredible impact you continue to make.

Pictured L to R: Sonja Adams, Senior Manager of Provider Services and LaKisha Battle, Technical Assistance Coordinator for the Southeast Region.

Meet Dylan Uhler, Business Operations Specialist



We're excited to introduce Dylan Uhler who recently joined the Nutrition Services team as a Business Operations Specialist. Reporting to Demetria Thornton, Application Services Manager.

In this role, Dylan is responsible for reviewing and determining eligibility for the Child and Adult Food Care Program sponsored facilities and Happy Helpings meal sites. Additionally, she reviews and approves new CACFP facility & Happy Helping meal site applications and monthly updates for participating institutions and Sponsors.

Dylan brings a strong background in federal food programs, having worked with SNAP in Colorado for five years in both direct services and policy development. After taking time off to raise her family, Dylan was eager to return to the field— and found the perfect fit with DECAL Nutrition Services. "I've always been drawn to policy work," Dylan shared. "I function really well within structured programs, and I enjoy the clarity that comes with federal guidelines. That's what keeps pulling me back to this kind of work." Dylan is also a proud parent and spouse.

She and her husband recently celebrated their 18th wedding anniversary and are raising three active children: a 16-year-old son who's about to start driving, a 13-year-old son, and a 9-year-old daughter. With a busy household and a partner who travels weekly, Dylan is looking forward to the extra help a teen driver will bring.

We're thrilled to have Dylan on board and look forward to the great work she'll do in supporting our mission.

Farm to Summer Week Recap

Celebrated June 23–27

DECAL's Nutrition Services proudly celebrated **Farm to Summer Week** from June 23 to 27, an annual initiative held during the last full week of June. This special week is designed to bring fresh, local food and hands-on learning experiences to children and families during the summer months. The goal is to enhance the quality and appeal of summer meals, increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and ensure children remain nourished and engaged while school is out.

Each day of the week featured a unique theme to guide activities and spark curiosity:

- ☐ Monday – What is Farm to Summer?
- ☐ Tuesday – Gardening & Physical Activity
- ☐ Wednesday – Cooking & Taste Testing
- ☐ Thursday – Locally Grown in Meals & Snacks
- ☐ Friday – Literacy, Music & Movement



Keep the Celebration Going!

Didn't get a chance to participate this year? No worries! You can still explore the **Farm to Summer Week** webpage for a variety of free, ready-to-use materials that bring the farm-to-table experience to life any time of year.

☐ **We'd love to see your stories!** Share your photos, activities, and creative moments using the hashtags #GAFarmtoSummer or #GAFarmtoECE or email to morgan.chapman@dec.al.ga.gov and help inspire others to connect children with fresh, local food in fun and meaningful ways.

Review Your Financials

Annual Year-End Reconciliation Due October 31

Sponsors, we are coming to the end of the summer meals season. While you are busy feeding the kids, don't forget to take a moment to review your financials. At the end of the summer, you will need to prepare and submit your Annual Year-End Reconciliation documents. This is a great time to begin reviewing your records to ensure your costs align with your approved budget.

Here are some helpful tips to get you started:

Review the approved costs in your budget and compare them to your current spending for Happy Helpings.

- If you notice costs getting close to or exceeding the approved amount, let this be your cue to submit a budget revision to reflect updated costs or determine whether you need to utilize other program revenue.
- Ensure all transactions are accurately recorded throughout the duration of the program.

Get familiar with the reconciliation form early:

- Please review the [reconciliation form](#) and [instructions](#).
- Take some time to explore how the form works before the submission date on **October 31, 2025**. It will automatically calculate costs and funds as they are entered.
- Review your Management Plan and make sure you're following your organization's financial recordkeeping practices.

Ask Questions!

If you have questions about your costs or the reconciliation process, please contact NutritionBudget@dec.al.ga.gov. Include the name of the institution and agreement number in the subject line of the email.

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 Reconciliation Training](#) webinar. It discussed detailed information on the annual Year-End Reconciliation process, how to complete the Reconciliation Form, and documents required for submission and potential next steps.

Are you interested in serving children nutritious meals year-round? Happy Helpings sites are well-positioned to offer afterschool meals during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). To learn more, please listen to the [November 2024 Memo Monday](#) webinar recording that discussed transitioning from the Summer Food Service Program to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-risk Afterschool Meals.



Nutrition Ed Nook

Juicy, Sweet Melons!

The August Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) feature is melons! These sweet, juicy fruits are a summertime favorite, perfect for enjoying fresh off the vine or chilled in the refrigerator. Whether you're slicing into a

crisp watermelon or savoring a fragrant cantaloupe, melons offer a refreshing taste of the season.

Melons are grown in many regions and come in a wide variety of flavors, colors, and textures. The Galia melon, originally from Israel, is known for its sweet, aromatic flesh and netted rind. The Charentais melon, a small, fragrant variety from France, is prized for its rich orange flesh and intense flavor. In Japan, the Yubari King melon is considered a luxury fruit, often given as a gift and known for its perfect sweetness and smooth texture.

Georgia plays a major role in melon production, especially during the summer months. The state ranks second in the nation for watermelon production, and Cordele, located in Crisp County, is known as "The Watermelon Capital of the World." When it comes to cantaloupe, the top-producing counties in Georgia are Tift, Colquitt, and Worth.

Melon season in Georgia runs from May through October, with June, July, and August being the peak months for the sweetest and juiciest fruit. This makes August the perfect time to enjoy locally grown melons at their best.

Melons are incredibly versatile and can be used in a variety of dishes. They add a burst of freshness to salads, salsas, and side dishes. They can also be incorporated into main courses or blended into refreshing drinks. Their natural sweetness and high-water content make them a perfect ingredient for hot summer days.

Fun Fact: Watermelon is in the same family as cucumbers, pumpkins, and squash.

Integration:

- [Melon Salsa](#)
- [Melon Cooler](#)
- [Melon and Mint](#)
- [Watermelon Pop](#)
- [Watermelon Cooler](#)
- [Cantaloupe Melon Kabobs](#)

Education:

- **Watch [Inside Georgia's Sweetest Season: Cordele's Watermelon Harvest](#)** video to see harvest season in full swing. Grower, Leger & Son, shows what it takes to get thousands of sweet, juicy watermelons from field to market. Take a look behind the

- scenes of Georgia's favorite summertime staple!
- **Discuss** the importance of hydration. Watermelon is 92% water. Food is an option for hydrating. Sliced, cubed, juiced or blended, watermelon is a versatile hydrating food you can enjoy.
- **Read *Watermelon Day***, by Kathi Appelt Koller. There's a watermelon growing in the corner of the patch where the fence posts meet, and Jesse is waiting for it. Waiting for it to fill up with the cool summer rain and the hot summer sun. Waiting until at last it is ripe and ready for eating. Waiting until it is ready for her family's annual Watermelon Day.
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as using a plastic knife or cookie cutter to cut melons into cubes or fun shapes.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate melons into their meals! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE melon-themed resources?** Check out Quality Care for Children's [Harvest of the Month toolkit](#) for more ways to engage ECE students.

Conversation:

- What melons have your program participants eaten before?
- Which melon do they like best—watermelon, cantaloupe, or honeydew?
- If they could make their own melon, what color or shape would it be?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Family Engagement Through Physical Activity

Family engagement during the earliest years of a child's life is one of the most powerful factors of a child's growth and development. The positive outcomes of engaging parents, staff, and caregivers increase the support for children's learning at home, empowers parents, and improves family well-being. According to the CDC, family engagement in relation to physical activity in childcare settings and schools work together to increase physical activity opportunities outside of a child's learning environment.

Family engagement improves cognitive development and academic performance, better social-emotional development, and improved health. Their families are children's first teachers, and it is the quality of parent-child relationship and interactions that create the foundational skills that children need at home, in school and their community.



Family Engagement & Physical Activity Ideas & Tips for Families:



- Have a Family Picnic: Social interactions boost children's cognitive and communication abilities. Have a family picnic in the backyard of your home, outside on the lawn, or at a nearby park. Consider bringing a blanket, basket, toss and catch, kickball, running, etc. to get active!
- Plan a day outdoors: As a family, schedule a time each day for an outdoor activity with your children. Hike a local nature trail/park or ride a bicycle path.
- Choose toys appropriately and wisely: Give children toys that encourage physical activity, such as balls, hopscotch, hula hoops, and jump ropes. Choose the Do it Yourself (DIY) materials on active play indoors and outdoors.
- Limit Screen Time: As per the CDC, one to two hours of screen time a day should be the limit for children. As a family, set boundaries, keep the television and electronics out of

- the child's bedroom and limit computer usage to school projects.
- Gardening: Caring for the plants give the children a reason to get outside each day. Learning how to grow a garden teaches us about the origins of our food and encourages healthy eating and active living habits.

Engaging families as partners early in the physical activity space allows parents to establish strong home-school and community connections that support their children's growth and development in the long-term. It is an essential component of high-quality early care and education. Let Us Keep Family Engagement Moving!

Integration:

- **Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning – Family Engagement and Resources**
- **CDC – Families and Community Engagement**
- **Strengthening Families Georgia**
- **Six (6) Fun and Easy Outdoor Activities for Kids (Strong4Life)**
- **15 Ways to Encourage Family Engagement**

Education:

- **Read aloud, *We Move Together***, by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos.
- **Watch** the video on Family Engagement: **The Power of Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Education.**
- **Talk** with families about ways to bring family together and to promote physical activity on family engagement all year round, whether at home, outside, in their local community, at your childcare site, or at their local community recreational areas.
- **Bonus:** Share #FamilyEngagement, #InstaFitness, #MoveYourWay #OutdoorFamilyActivities, #ActiveIndoors pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What physical activities are good for family engagement?
- How do you encourage families to engage in physical activity (indoor/outdoor)?
- Why is family engagement important in children?
- How does family impact physical activity?

Share your #FamilyEngagement, #InstaFitness, #OutdoorFamilyActivities, #MoveYourWay #ActiveIndoor stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at tina.mclaren@decal.ga.gov



Eat Healthy and Live Active

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 2025-2026 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 different local, seasonal fruits or vegetables 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](https://www.doe.ga.gov/harvest-of-the-month).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
August	Harvest of the Month: Melons
September 1	Holiday: Labor Day
September 30	Deadline to submit Happy Helpings Start-up Grant Results
October 31	Deadline to submit Happy Helpings Annual Year-End Reconciliation

Decal Download *Adaptive Learning Mini-Grants*

DECAL's Inclusion and Behavior Support Program has introduced an exciting initiative, the Adaptive Learning Mini Grant. It's an opportunity that will assist in building inclusive environments where every child, regardless of ability, can thrive. In this episode we will hear from both staff members and a grant recipient, exploring their perspectives, experiences, and the real-world impacts of this program.



Joining us on this episode of DECAL Download to talk about the Adaptive Learning Mini Grants is Peggy Sutton, the Inclusion and Behavior Support Regional Supervisor, and Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist, Jenn Dover and Esther Whitaker. We are also joined by Shaheen Ehani, the Director at Kids Galaxy of Marietta, and Abby Brooke, the Assistant Director of Doodlebugs Childcare. Both are recipients of the grant. Our final guest is Stephanie Royal, she is a parent whose child attends Doodlebugs Childcare.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Added New Sites After Application Approval](#)
- [Happy Helpings Summit Training Videos](#)
- [Resources to Promote Meal Sites](#)
- [Excessive Heat and Air Quality Advisories](#)
- [New Supplier Change Request](#)
- [Advance Payment Requests Update](#)
- [Updates to SFSP Procurement Templates](#)
- [Procurement Methods At-A-Glance](#)
- [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)
- [2025 SFSP Reimbursement Rates](#)
- [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)

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the Nutrition Team

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