



December 1, 2025

Holiday Messages from Our Decal Nutrition Service Team



Happy Holidays from all of us at DECAL Nutrition Services! We're grateful for your partnership and the incredible work you do during the summer months.

Please enjoy these video messages from our Nutrition team as they share their holiday cheer and warm wishes with you.



Georgia's Summer Food Service Program

Happy Helpings Sponsor Kick-off Call

January 8, 2026
11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Join Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services for the Happy Helpings Kick-off Call for experienced sponsors on Wednesday, January 8 at 11:00 a.m. for updates on the upcoming summer meals season.

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device: Microsoft Teams [Need help?](#)

Join the meeting now

Meeting ID: 237 510 935 222 10

Passcode: st6XY9vP

Dial in by phone

+1 470-481-4462,,307392855# United States, Atlanta

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 307 392 855#

Now Accepting Turnip the Beet Award Nominations

Nomination Deadline: January 2, 2026

Nutrition Services is excited to announce the return of the **Turnip the Beet Award** for meals served during summer 2025.

This award recognizes outstanding summer meal program



sponsors nationwide who go above and beyond to provide **high-quality, appealing, and nutritious meals** to children when school is out.

The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Augusta and City of Atlanta were awarded silver and bronze awards respectively for meals served during summer 2024.

Tell us how your organization went above and beyond this summer to ensure children participating in Happy Helpings received high-quality meals. Sponsors may self-nominate or be nominated by another party.

How to Apply:

- Review the [Turnip the Beet Award webpage](#)
- Check out the [Tips for Sponsors: Completing the Turnip the Beet Nomination Packet](#)
- Complete the [nomination form](#), which includes short-answer questions and menu criteria based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Include up to five pictures from your meal site when submitting your nomination form (i.e. pictures of meals, pictures of children helping with meals, pictures of children doing activities, etc.).

Submit your nomination form by **Friday, January 2, 2026**, to morgan.chapman@dec.al.ga.gov.

Questions? Contact Morgan Chapman, Nutrition Education Specialist at morgan.chapman@dec.al.ga.gov.

Happy Helpings Reconciliation Past Due

Annual Year-End Reconciliation Requirement for FY2025

Institutions operating the FY2025 Happy Helpings Summer Food Program (May 2025- Aug 2025) must complete an Annual Reconciliation Form. The form was due October 31.

If you haven't already done so, please submit the requested documents as soon as possible to avoid any delays in FY2026 Happy Helpings approval.

The reconciliation form and supporting financial documentation should be submitted together to nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov. Include the name of the institution and agreement number in the subject line of the email.

Please review the [reconciliation form](#) and [instructions](#).

Contact the Nutrition Budget Team at nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov with any questions.

Get a Head Start on Planning for Summer 2026

Items to do in December

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

December:

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

- Continue developing a marketing and outreach campaign.

Target Counties for Summer 2026

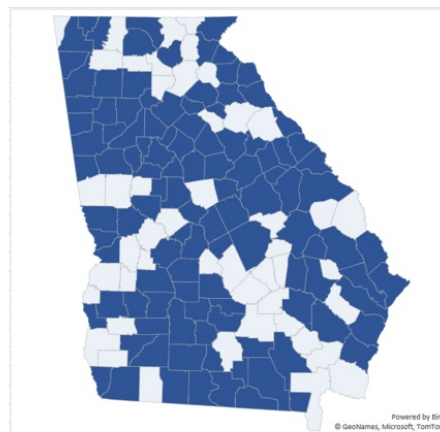
One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role in our significant progress toward that goal by expanding meal service to 109 counties in 2026. Thank you!

If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2026, please consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:



FY26 Areas of Need: 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

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.



Nutrition Ed Nook

All Things Citrus

Citrus is December's Harvest of the Month feature. ([English](#) and [Spanish](#))

Citrus fruits are juicy, flavorful fruits that grow on trees and have a thick, often bitter outer skin that must be peeled before enjoying the sweet and tangy inside. Most citrus fruits are packed with vitamin C, which helps heal cuts, boosts the immune system, and keeps skin healthy.

In Georgia, citrus plants are in season from November through December. There are 70+ citrus farming operations in Georgia and an estimated 300 acres dedicated to citrus

production year-round, mostly in the southern portion of the state where the climate is ideal for growing these fruits.

Citrus fruits come in many varieties, including oranges, which are sweet and juicy and often eaten fresh or used to make juice. Tangerines and mandarins are small, easy to peel, and perfect for children's snacks. Grapefruits are larger and tart, often enjoyed sliced or juiced. Lemons and limes are sour and commonly used to add flavor to foods and drinks.

Citrus can be used in many fun and healthy ways. Try adding orange slices to a fruit salad or yogurt parfait, or use lemon juice to flavor steamed vegetables or fish. Citrus-infused water with slices of lemon, lime, or orange makes a refreshing drink. Blend citrus fruits into smoothies, use lime juice in homemade salsa or guacamole, or enjoy grapefruit segments as a tangy addition to breakfast.

Fun Fact: After citrus flowering shrubs or trees are planted, it takes around four years before a tree will start producing significant amounts of citrus.

Integration:

- [Fruit Smoothie](#)
- [Orange Banana Frosty](#)
- [Avocado and Corn Salsa](#)
- [Herry's Blueberry Lemon Parfait](#)

Education:

- **Watch** the [Where Do Fruits and Vegetables Come From ?](#) video to learn where different fruits and vegetables grow. Before watching, ask children where they think citrus fruits come from. You may hear answers like "trees," "farms," "the grocery store," or even "Florida" or "Georgia." Encourage discussion and let children share what they know or guess. After the video, talk about how citrus fruits grow on trees, often in warm climates, and are harvested by farmers.
- **Conduct a sensory exploration experiment.** Invite children to explore a variety of citrus fruits such as oranges, lemons, limes, and grapefruits. Offer whole fruits for observation and encourage children to notice the colors, shapes, and sizes of each one. Let them smell the fruits and describe the different scents. Allow children to touch the fruits, feeling the texture of the skin and the juiciness inside. Provide small pieces of each fruit for tasting, pointing out that some citrus fruits are sweet while others are sour. Finally, explore sound by listening to what the fruit sounds like when squeezed or gently dropped.
- **Read** [An Orange in January](#) by Dianna Hutts Aston. Plump juicy oranges are one of the great pleasures of winter- and one that is usually taken for granted. Now here's an eloquent, celebratory picture of how those oranges have found their way to the grocery store shelves, and then into kids' tummies.
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as peeling and separating orange segments for a snack.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate citrus fruits into their meals! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE citrus-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:

- Have your program participants eaten citrus before?
- Have program participants ever picked citrus fruit from a tree?
- Which citrus fruit is their favorite?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Let It Flow, Let It Glow: Holiday Movement & Mindfulness

New Month, New You - Energize Your Health. The holiday season is a wonderful time to connect with loved ones and build healthy habits together.

Whether you're caring for children or adults, staying active during Christmas and New Year can bring joy, reduce stress, and promote overall well-being. Let's make this season fun, festive, and full of movement.

Here are some simple active ways to stay active and stress-free. Reduce screen time, add exercise, and move it. You and your loved ones can create calendars of fun and easy fitness activities for the month of December. This can include indoor and outdoor activities, such as yoga, walking/jogging, gardening, dancing (Zumba), doing sit-ups, family hiking or nature walking, jumping rope, biking, playing basketball and soccer.

Post and write small, specific, measurable exercise goals in a visible area, such as on the refrigerator, holiday calendar, and white board. Encourage each other to set active habits. Furthermore, do some stretches hours before bedtime to help with relaxation and sleep. Focus on creating moments of holiday joy and movement. Take time to relax and recharge, too. Make physical activity a part of the joyous and fun holiday season.



Integration:

- **Twelve (12) Days of Fitness on the holidays**
- **Move Your Way: Tips for Getting Motivated**
- **Winter Activities for Kids**
- **Healthier Holidays in 1-2-3**
- **What Exercise is Right for Me?**

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book, *Grow Strong! A Book About Healthy Habits*, by Cheri J. Meiners.
- **Watch** the video on, *The Importance of Being Physically Active*.
- **Talk** with families about ways to integrate fitness into the holiday winter season.
- **Bonus:** Send #HolidayWorkout, #HolidayFitnessGoal pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What is your favorite fitness activity to do during the holiday winter season?
- How do you stay physically active during the holidays?
- Why is it important to exercise during the holidays?
- What is stress free and easy exercise to do in the holidays?

Share your #HolidayFitnessChallenge, #HolidayFitnessGoals, #HolidayWorkout 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.com) 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](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
December	Harvest of the Month: All Things Citrus
December 25	Holiday: Christmas Day
December 26	State Holiday
January 2	Deadline for Turnip the Beet Award Nominations
January 8	Happy Helpings Sponsor Kick-off Call- Webinar
January 21	Happy Helpings Experienced Sponsor- Virtual Training
February 11	Happy Helpings Experienced Sponsor- Virtual Training

On the next ...

DECAL Download

New Episodes Every Wednesday!

This Week's Topic:

Georgia's Summer Food Service Program

Joann Kilpatrick
Marketing & Outreach Specialist

Cindy Kicklighter
Nutrition Marketing and Outreach Manager

Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Decal Download

Happy Helpings

Summer vacation for many kids across Georgia means, no school, more free time and more fun. However for those kids facing food insecurity, the issue is made worse. No school can also mean limited access to affordable, nutritious foods.

That's where Happy Helpings comes in. It's the summer food service program funded by the USDA and administered by DECAL. In this episode of DECAL Download we learn more about Happy Helpings and get an update on how the program is doing.

We are joined by Marketing and Outreach Specialist, Joann Kilpatrick and Nutrition Marketing and Outreach Manager, Cindy Kicklighter.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Added New Sites After Application Approval](#)
- [Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At- Risk Afterschool Meals](#)
- [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?](#)
- [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)

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 Division

Marketing & Outreach

Cindy Kicklighter
Joann Kilpatrick

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