



February 2, 2026

## New Deadline to Submit SFSP Applications

*May 15, 2026*

During the Happy Helpings Kick-off Call, held in January, Nutrition Services announced that all SFSP applications must be submitted by May 15, to participate in Happy Helpings for FY2026.

There are several reasons behind this change. They include:

1. There is a greater chance for your application to be approved prior to start of operations.
2. It will give you an opportunity to focus on program operations as opposed to working on the application.
3. It gives Audits and Compliance more time to conduct reviews during program operations.

If you have any questions about this change, please contact your application services representative.

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## Authorization Letter Requirements for Meal Sites at Schools and Apartments

There is a new authorization letter requirement for FY26. This requirement affects meal sites that are located at schools or apartment complexes.

### Apartment Communities

1. Sites located in apartment communities require a letter of authorization from the apartment manager or owner acknowledging operation of the SFSP on the property.
2. If the site is located in a gated community, the letter must also indicate the site is open to all children from the community, and that they have access to the SFSP.
3. **New for FY26:** The letter must be dated and include the printed name, signature and title of the authorized official. The letter must also indicate the exact location where the meal(s) will be served.

### Schools

1. Unaffiliated sites located in schools require a letter of authorization.
2. The letter must be on the school's letterhead signed by the Superintendent or Principal acknowledging operation of the SFSP on the school's property.
3. **New for FY26:** The letter must be dated and include the printed name, signature and title of the authorized school official. The letter must also include the exact location where the meal(s) will be served.

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## Resources to Market Meal Sites

Nutrition Services offers several resources to help Sponsors promote Happy Helpings meal sites.  
DECAL

## SPONSORS

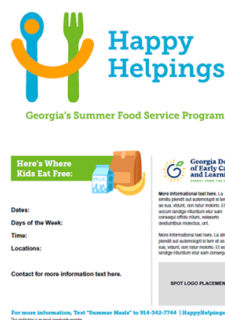
Branded Marketing materials are available on the [DECAL.ga.gov](http://DECAL.ga.gov) website to promote meal sites. The materials can be downloaded under Happy Helpings Participant Information and Posters and Flyers. Password protected: Flyer

Editable Posters (11 x 17) (on right)

Editable Flyer (8 1/2 x 11) (on right)

Social Media Graphics

Flyers to promote how to locate a meal site are available by request. Translations are available in Arabic, French, Spanish and Swahili.



## DECAL

Billboard Campaign for South GA

MARTA Bus Advertising

Geofencing (banner ad when utilizing an app on a mobile phone within a target zip code.)

Social Media



The resources above are available to Sponsors. You can download any of the editable resources on the [DECAL.ga.gov](http://DECAL.ga.gov) web page.

DECAL promotes the USDA's Meal Site Finder through an advertising campaign that begins at the end of May through the first week in August.

## Happy Helpings Branded Specialty Items

*Order Deadline: February 16*

Specialty Items for Kids	Specialty Items for Sites & Staff
Back Packs	Happy Helpings T-shirts
Frisbees	Bar Towels
Water Bottles	Directional Signs
Kick Balls- Small	Banners
	Paper Bags

Limited Quantities  
Email [Cindy.Kicklighter@decal.ga.gov](mailto:Cindy.Kicklighter@decal.ga.gov)



A limited number of Happy Helpings branded specialty items are available to sponsors for special events.

If you would like to place an order, please send your request to [Cindy Kicklighter](#) by February 16.

## Partnering with DECAL to Host Kick-off, Spike Events

During the summer meals season, Nutrition Services partners with Sponsors to host two kick-off events in June and one Spike event in July.

The purpose of these events is to bring awareness to the availability of free nutritious meals during the summer, and to create excitement for the kids by offering engaging activities like games and music.

If you are interested in partnering, please contact [Cindy Kicklighter](#).



## Start Planning Budget Projections Now

As the 2026 Summer Meals season quickly approaches, now is the perfect time to get a head start on budget planning for Happy Helpings. Once you have identified your potential sites for the 2026 program year, begin developing your budget projections.

**Identify your 2026 Revenue:**

Examples of revenue may include:

- Potential reimbursement (number of meals × reimbursement rates)
- Prior-year excess funds
- Donations
- Other grants
- Revenue-producing activities

### Determine Upcoming Costs:

- Review historical data, including prior years' serving sites, meal counts, and reconciliation documents
- Determine the number of staff required to operate efficiently
- Assess projected costs that are necessary and reasonable for the 2026 program year
- Begin gathering supporting documentation for all requested costs

For questions regarding your 2026 Happy Helpings budget, please email us at [nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov).

## Target Counties for Summer 2026

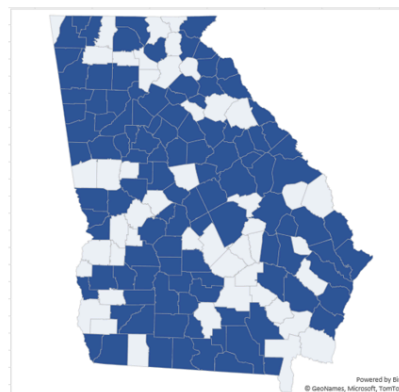
One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role in our significant progress toward that goal by expanding meal service to 109 counties in 2026. Thank you!

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 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

## Interested in a Summer Grant for Serving Rural Non-Congregate Meals?

No Kid Hungry provides schools and community-based organizations with the financial support they need to ensure kids have access to the nutritious food needed to live, learn and play.

If you will be serving rural non-congregate meals this summer and are interested in grant funding, please scan the QR code (on right) to fill out an inquiry form.

Please note that completion of the form does not constitute an automatic invitation to complete a No Kid Hungry grant application. Funding availability differs greatly by state and how organizations

align with our funding priorities.

#### Interested in a Summer Grant?

- Do you serve rural non-congregate meals?
- Are you interested in the rural non-congregate program?

**Scan this QR Code!**



Scan the QR code to fill out our inquiry form as a first step!



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## Upcoming Training

**February 11, 2026**

**Happy Helpings Experienced Sponsor Training (virtual)**

**9:30am-2:00pm**

Are you an experienced sponsoring organization that operated and participated in Happy Helpings during the previous fiscal year without significant operational deficiencies and with the same Program Contact as last year?

If so, please plan to attend one of our Experienced Sponsor trainings that are offered to eligible sponsoring organizations.

All returning sponsors that plan to operate this upcoming summer must attend one of these training sessions to continue participation in the program. This training will include an instructor-led format to satisfy training requirements.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

**February 19, 2026**

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

**1:00-2:00pm**

Would you like to explore the national recommendations for time and space requirements in physical activity for 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.***

[\[Register Now\]](#)

**February 25-26, 2026**

**Happy Helpings New Sponsor Training**

**9:30 am-3:00 pm**

This in-person training is designed for new sponsors participating in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Experienced sponsors who did not attend the Experienced Sponsor Training are also required to attend. The training will cover SFSP regulations, policies, and the latest program updates to support successful program implementation and compliance.

All new sponsors that plan to operate this upcoming summer must attend one of two in-person training sessions to participate in the program. This training will include an instructor-led format to satisfy training requirements.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

### 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](mailto: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.

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## 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

### *Cruciferous Vegetables*

The February Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) spotlight is cruciferous vegetables, a family of cool-weather crops that includes broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage.

These veggies come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, and they're packed with nutrients like vitamins A, C, E, and K, folate, fiber, and powerful antioxidants that help protect our bodies and support long-term health.

In Georgia, cabbage is in season from October through July, while broccoli and cauliflower thrive from late fall through spring, especially when protected from winter frost.

**Cabbage** comes in many varieties: green, red, savoy, napa, and bok choy. It's perfect for stir-fries, soups, or even raw in slaws.

**Broccoli** includes familiar florets as well as Chinese broccoli, broccolini, and broccoflower. Try it steamed, roasted, or tossed into pasta.

**Cauliflower** isn't just white—look for green, orange, and purple varieties! Mash it like potatoes or chop it into “rice” for a fun twist.

**Fun Fact:** Did you know? Cruciferous vegetables also include collard greens, mustard greens, and turnip greens—our January spotlight veggies!



### Integration:

- [Creamy Coleslaw](#)
- [Ramen Cabbage Salad](#)
- [Cheesy Broccoli Tots](#)
- [Asian Chicken & Broccoli](#)
- [Baked Cauliflower Tots](#)
- [Sautéed Cauliflower Rice](#)

### 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.
- **Do Math:** Give each participant a small broccoli floret and have them count as many of the tiny flower buds as they can. Then, have them guess how many buds might be on an entire head of broccoli based on their count.
- **Read** [Katie's Cabbage](#) by Katie Stagliano. This is the inspirational true story of how Katie Stagliano, a third grader from Summerville, South Carolina, grew a forty-pound cabbage in her backyard and donated it to help feed 275 people at a local soup kitchen.
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as measuring ingredients and stirring them together or peeling the outer leaves from a head of cabbage to be cooked in a dish.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate cruciferous vegetables into their meals! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE cruciferous vegetable-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 participants ever eaten broccoli, cauliflower, or cabbage? How do they like them prepared?
- Have participants tried other cruciferous vegetables like bok choy, Brussels sprouts, arugula, or kale? Which one was their favorite?
- If cruciferous vegetables could give participants a superpower, what would they want and why?

Share your Harvest of the Month stories and menu integration of cruciferous vegetables with Nutrition Education Specialist, Morgan Chapman, MPH, MCHc at [morgan.chapman@dec.al.gov](mailto:morgan.chapman@dec.al.gov).

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## Physical Activity Corner

### *February is American Heart Month*

Let's celebrate by making heart health a priority. The American Heart Association (AHA) observes February as American Heart Month, a time to raise awareness about heart health and encourage regular physical activity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), heart disease is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States but teaching healthy habits early can make a big difference. One person dies every 34 seconds in the United States from [cardiovascular disease](#) (CVD). This is a startling statistic that DECAL's physical activity program seeks to combat through preventative measures within child nutrition programs.



In addition, did you know that physical activity is a lifestyle change you can make to decrease your risk of CVD? According to 2018 data, approximately 1 in 4 U.S. adults reported achieving adequate aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities to meet the physical activity guidelines. Being physically active is one of the best ways to keep our heart, body, and brain healthy.

Small steps can make a big difference, whether it's adding movement to your classroom, taking a family walk, or dancing together at home. Every move matters. Show your heart some love this month by staying active and caring for yourself and your loved ones. By building healthy habits, we're creating stronger hearts for ourselves, our children, and the communities we love.

Here are tips for educators and parents to create a heart-healthy environment in the classroom and at home.

### For Educators: Classroom Heart-Healthy Ideas

- Start the day with a 5-minute stretch or dance break.
- Incorporate movement into lessons, such as dance, play, games, jumps, and math marches.
- Create a Heart Month Bulletin Board: Include facts, student artwork, and daily activity tips.
- Encourage water breaks and discuss why hydration matters.



### For Parents: Family-Friendly Heart Health

- Plan a 15–30-minute family walk after dinner.
- Cook together: Try heart healthy meals like grilled chicken, veggies, and whole grains.
- Limit sugary drinks, opt for water or fruit-infused water.
- Make it fun: Use a printable activity tracker for children to log daily movement.

Activities such as walking, running, dancing, swimming, yoga, and gardening are a few examples of fun and enjoyable activities that promote heart health. Take extra care of your heart and help your loved ones, or those who already suffer from heart diseases.

### Move to the Beat! Activity Tracker

Help your child stay active. Log daily movement for seven days. Write the activity and check off the heart when completed.

Name Child's/Parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Goal: \_\_\_\_\_

Day	Activity	✓ Heart
Day 1	_____	♥
Day 2	_____	♥
Day 3	_____	♥
Day 4	_____	♥
Day 5	_____	♥
Day 6	_____	♥
Day 7	_____	♥

### Integration:

- [Million Hearts®](#)
- [National Wear Red Day](#)
- [American Heart Association: How Much Physical Activity Do You Need?](#)
- [Motivate Your Child to Stay Active](#)

### Education:

- Read out loud, *The Very Special Heart Words* by Yvette Manns
- Watch the video on [I Heart Exercise S E16](#).
- Talk with families about ways to keep your heart healthy and strong daily.
- Bonus: Share #HeartWalk, #OurHearts #MoveToTheBeat, #PumpItUp, #LoveFitness pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

### Conversation:

- What physical activity promotes heart health?

- How can you keep your heart strong and healthy?
- Why is fitness important for your heart health?
- Why is it important to keep our children active and heart healthy?

Share your #DECALPhysicalActivity, #MoveToTheBeat, #PumpItUp, #LoveFitness, #OurHearts, #HeartWalk stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, [Tina McLaren at tina.mclaren@decals.ga.gov](mailto:tina.mclaren@decals.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
February	Harvest of the Month: Cruciferous Vegetables
February 4	No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit: Innovating Rural Non-Congregate Together- In Person Training
February 11	Happy Helpings Experienced Sponsors- Virtual Training
February 16	Deadline to Order: Happy Helpings Branded Specialty Items Holiday: Washington's Birthday
February 19	PALS Session 2: Physical Activity is Important in Early Childhood- Webinar
February 25-26	Happy Helpings New Sponsor Training- In Person
May 15	Deadline to Submit SFSP Application

On the next ...

## DECAL Download

New Episodes Every Wednesday!

**Katie Hagan**  
SEEDS Program Director

**Jennifer Jones**  
Executive Director,  
Apparo Academy

**Veronica Thomas**  
Director of Practice and  
Support Services

**Caitlyn Sanders**  
Research Manager, GEARS

**This Week's Topic:**

**Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning**

## Decal Download

### Inclusive Early Learning Week

This week we're preparing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Inclusive Early Learning Week, happening all across Georgia February 9-13, just before Valentine's Day.



This milestone event honors a decade of commitment to supporting children with disabilities and their families. Joining us to talk about Inclusive Early Learning Week is Katie Hagan, SEEDS Program Director, and Veronia Thomas, Director of Practice and Support Services. From GEEARS, the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, is Research Manager Caitlyn Sanders. And Jennifer Jones is Executive Director of a nonprofit called Apparo Academy in Augusta, an early learning program that supports children with special needs using a unique model.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

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## 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 your Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)

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## 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.

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**Nutrition Division**

**Marketing & Outreach**

**Cindy Kicklighter**  
**Joann Kilpatrick**

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