

Nutrition News



Happy
Helpings

Georgia's Summer Food Service Program

January 2, 2026



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Happy
Helpings

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 Thursday, 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#

Deadline Today: Submit Nominations for High Quality Summer Meals

Turnip of the Beet Award

Nutrition Services is officially accepting nominations for the [Turnip the Beet Award](#) for summer 2025. Nominations are due today **Friday, January 2, 2026**.

The Turnip the Beet Award recognizes outstanding summer meal program sponsors nationwide who went above and beyond to provide appetizing, appealing, and nutritious meals to children during summer 2025.



This is a great opportunity for Happy Helpings sponsors to showcase their commitment to high-quality meals for children. Sponsors may self-nominate or be nominated by another party.

The [nomination form](#) includes short-answer questions and menu criteria based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Criteria include serving local foods, a variety of vegetables and fruit, whole grains, and low-fat and fat-free milk. You **must** include a one-month menu.

Include up to five photos from your meal site with your submission (i.e., meals served, children helping with meals, participating in activities, etc.).

Before completing your nomination form, review this helpful resource:

Submit your completed nomination form today **Friday, January 2, 2026**, to Morgan.Chapman@decal.ga.gov.

Questions? Contact Morgan Chapman, Nutrition Education Specialist at Morgan.Chapman@decal.ga.gov.

No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit: Feb 4

Register Today to Learn More About Rural Non-Congregate Feeding

Nutrition Services is partnering with No Kid Hungry to host the No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit: Innovating Rural Non-Congregate Together. The event is scheduled for February 4, 2026, at the Anderson Conference Center in Macon.

Whether you currently operate a rural non-congregate feeding program or are exploring the option, this event offers valuable information for you.

Program Overview

Attendees will participate in sessions of varying topics related to rural non-congregate programming, including innovative partnerships, menu planning, and financial management.

A complete program agenda will be emailed to all registered attendees closer to the Summit date.



Registration

[Register Now](#)

Summer 2026 will be Here Soon

Start Planning Now

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.

Here's a guide heading into 2026:

January:

- 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.
 - Begin developing a marketing and outreach campaign.
 - Develop a plan for the Food Service Permitting process, if applicable.
-

Start Planning Budget Projections

As the 2026 summer meals season quickly approaches, there is no better time to get a head start on budget planning for Happy Helpings. Once you have identified your potential sites for the 2026 program year, start planning your budget projections.

Identify your 2026 Revenue:

- Examples of revenue: Potential Reimbursement (# of meals x Rates), prior year excess funds, donations, other grants, and revenue producing activities.

Determine Upcoming Costs:

- Review historical data such as previous years serving sites and meals and prior year reconciliation documents.
- Determine how many staff will be required to operate efficiently.
- Assess projected costs that are necessary and reasonable for the 2026 program.
- Start gathering your supporting documents for requested costs.

For questions regarding your 2026 Happy Helpings budget, please email us at nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov.

Target Counties for Summer 2026

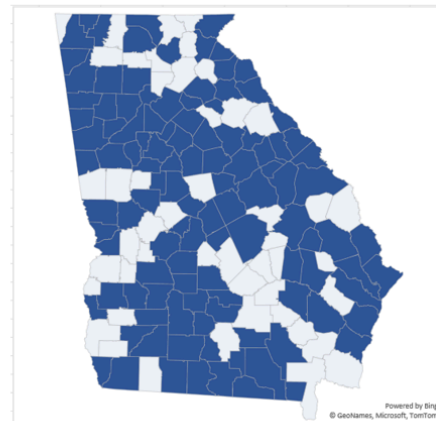
One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role in our significant progress toward that goal by expanding meal service to 109 counties in 2026. Thank you!

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 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

Faithful Service Awards Presented to Tamika Boone and Kristy Lanier

Nutrition Services is proud to recognize Tamika Boone, DECAL Nutrition Services Director (pictured on right), for her remarkable 20 years of dedicated service to the State of Georgia.

Presented by Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud (pictured on left), this award acknowledges Tamika's outstanding leadership, deep commitment to service, and unwavering dedication to strengthening the quality and integrity of DECAL's

nutrition programs statewide.

Throughout her two decades Tamika is known for her strategic vision, collaborative spirit, and passion for ensuring children and families have access to healthy nutritious meals. Her influence has shaped countless initiatives, supported providers across Georgia, and made a lasting impact on the communities we serve.

Congratulations, Tamika! Thank you for your exceptional service, leadership, and commitment to DECAL's mission.



and the difference you continue to make each day.

Nutrition Services is also proud to recognize Kristy Lanier, Budget Compliance Specialist (pictured at right), with the Faithful Service Award for five years of dedicated service to the State of Georgia.

Presented by Demeteria Thornton, Application Services Manager (pictured on left), this award celebrates Kristy's commitment to accuracy, accountability, and excellence in supporting the financial integrity of our nutrition programs.

Kristy is known by her colleagues as dependable, detail-oriented, and deeply committed to ensuring our programs operate smoothly and efficiently. Her strong work ethic, collaborative spirit, and willingness to go the extra mile have made a meaningful impact on Nutrition Services.

Congratulations, Kristy! Thank you for your exceptional service

DECAL Transitioning to Microsoft Teams for Webinars

DECAL is excited to announce an upgrade in our virtual learning experience. Effective immediately, we are moving from GoToWebinar and Zoom to Microsoft Teams for all webinars.

This transition offers several benefits:

- **Improved Accessibility:** Trainees/attendees can join webinars via browser, desktop app, or mobile.
- **Enhanced Engagement:** Access features like live reactions, integrated polls (Microsoft Poll), and breakout rooms and group activities.
- **Streamlined Access:** Easily locate and complete required training.

What to expect:

- **Joining Sessions:** You will now receive Microsoft Teams meeting invitations. Click the link to join via your preferred device.
- **Interaction:** Use Q&A, and reactions icons at the top/bottom of your screen.
- **Breakout Rooms:** Some webinars may include smaller group discussions.

We appreciate your flexibility as we have adopted this impactful platform to make training more interactive and connected.

Upcoming Training

January 13, 2026

Tuesday Tip! Physical Activity in Small Spaces: Four Games to Promote Movement in Limited Space

1:30-2:00pm

Are you looking for simple, effective ways to keep children active even when space is limited? Would you like fresh ideas that promote movement, engagement, and fun in small indoor areas?

Please join this webinar for an energizing overview of how to promote movement in limited spaces.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 14, 2026

Happy Helpings Budget Readiness 1

10:00 am-12:00 pm

Are you prepared to manage your budget effectively for the upcoming Happy Helpings season? Do you understand the key financial requirements and tools needed to stay compliant and organized?

Join us for an essential overview of being Budget Ready for Happy Helpings.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 15, 2026

PALS Session 1: Physical Activity is Important in Early Childhood

1:00-2:00 pm

Are you interested in learning why physical activity is essential for young children, and how it supports healthy development? Do you want practical strategies to help integrate movement into daily routines?

Join us for an informative session on practical strategies to help integrate movement into daily routines.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 21, 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.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

January 26, 2026

Memo Monday: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians

10:00 am-12:00 pm

Are you aware of the guidelines for accepting medical statements completed by registered dietitians? Do you understand how this requirement supports accurate dietary accommodations and program

compliance?

Join us for a clear overview of the guidelines for accepting medical statements from Registered Dietitians.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

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.

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

Greens Galore

The January Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) spotlight is Collard, Mustard, and Turnip Greens.

These vibrant leafy greens are nutritional powerhouses, rich in vitamins A, C, and K, fiber, and folate, all of which support bone health, immunity, and vision.

Though available year-round, these greens truly shine during their peak season from December through March, when cooler temperatures enhance their flavor. Collards offer a hearty, slightly bitter taste, while mustard and turnip greens bring a bold, peppery kick to the plate.

These greens are deeply rooted in Southern culinary traditions, especially around New Year's, symbolizing prosperity and good fortune. But their appeal goes far beyond the South—they're cherished in cuisines across the globe, from Kenya to Kashmir, Brazil to Portugal, and beyond.

Whether blended into smoothies, tossed in salads, sautéed in stir-fries, or simmered in soups and stews, these greens are as versatile as they are nutritious. This month, invite your participants to explore global flavors and celebrate the cultural diversity of these beloved greens.

Fun Fact: Turnip greens are one of the most calcium-rich vegetables—great for growing strong bones!

Integration:

- **Okra & Greens**
- **Smothered Greens**
- **Sausage & Greens Stew**
- **Black-Eyed Peas and Greens**

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.
- **Greens Craft:** Make paper greens art—participants can tear, cut, and glue different shades of green paper to create their own collard, mustard, and turnip greens while learning how these veggies grow and help keep us healthy!
- **Read** *The Turnip* by Jan Brett. In a rollicking, cumulative tale, a badger family and their friends—Hedgie, Mr. Ram and Vanya, the horse—struggle to pull up a giant turnip. A cocky rooster steps in and pulls, sending him into the air, holding onto the turnip. No one knows that a mother bear in her underground den has kicked the turnip up through the soil to give the family room to sleep through the winter.
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as swishing greens in a bowl of water to remove dirt.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate greens into their meals! Check **Pinterest** for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE greens-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:

- If eating greens could give you a superpower, what would it be and why?
- Do you know where greens grow—in a garden, on a farm, or somewhere else?
- Do you know what part of the plant we eat when we eat greens—the leaf, stem, or root?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Winter Moves: Warm Hearts and Active Play for Healthy Growth

As winter arrives and temperatures drop, we often stay indoors to keep warm. Educators, staff, and parents often face challenges in maintaining active routines during colder months.

Physical activity is crucial year-round for boosting cardiovascular health, strengthening muscles and bones, and improving mental well-being in both children and adults. Staying active, especially on gray, cold days, is essential.

Winter's embrace offers a world of possibilities for indoor/outdoor exploration and play.

Here are fun and engaging ideas for families and educators to incorporate physical activity into daily routines. Watch and monitor the temperature and wind chill, and limit outdoor time to 20–30 minutes when it's extremely cold.



Indoor Winter Activities:

- **Color Painting** (Classroom Art Station): Ignite creativity and sensory skills with color painting, where children can express their artistic side while learning about different colors. This activity is a fantastic way to explore their artistic expression and understand color, using the white bond paper as their canvas.

- **Toddler Snowstorm** (Motor Skills Development): This activity from SHAPE America is a fun and engaging way for toddlers to develop social, emotional, and motor skills. It involves rolling and catching cotton balls, followed by creating a "snowstorm" by tossing the cotton balls into the air. This activity helps toddlers improve coordination and interaction with others.
- **Winter-Themed Crafts** (Fine Motor Enrichment): Enhance fine motor skills with winter-themed crafts. Crafting activities such as cutting, gluing and assembling various materials not only aid in developing hand-eye coordination, but also foster creativity, allowing children to create their own winter wonderlands.
- **Story Time** (Literacy and Seasonal Awareness): Read aloud [Winter is Here](#), by Kevin Henkes. A celebration of the sights, sounds, and smells of the season, this is perfect for young readers. Snow falls, animals burrow, and children prepare for the wonders winter brings.
- **Tummy Time** (Infant Physical Development): An exercise for infants to 12 months, tummy time is an activity that needs supervised time when an infant is awake and alert, lying on her/his belly. Opportunities for tummy time should last as long as possible to help infants learn to enjoy it and build their strength. For infants who are not used to it or do not enjoy it, each period of tummy time can start at 1–2 minutes and build up to 5-10 minutes over time.
- **Simon Says** (Group Movement Game): This is a fun classic game that encourages active play and helps in exercising listening skills. Although Simon Says is traditionally a child's game, kids of all ages can play and enjoy the game. The fun increases with the number of players.
- **Let's Get Moving** (Music and Movement Integration): Play ["Move Along with Elmo"](#) and enjoy the moves together. Sing Along: Substitute "Elmo" with the kids' names. For example, if the child's name is Alex, you can sing "Alex's got the moves." Have fun dancing and singing along.

Outdoor Winter Activities:

- **Winter Nature Walks** (Outdoor Exploration): Encourage the children to observe and describe what they see, hear, and feel. Bring along a small bag to collect interesting natural items like pinecones, acorns, or smooth stones. After the walk, you can discuss their findings and even create a nature collage with the items collected.
- **Sensory Bin Winter Scavenger Hunt** (Sensory Engagement): Create a winter-theme scavenger hunt list with items like evergreen trees, stones, falling leaves, etc. Encourage children to use their five senses to experience the cold winter environment.
- **Snowball Toss** (Gross Motor Coordination): Create 'snowballs' using soft balls, lightweight materials like yarn. Set up targets, such as buckets or hula hoops, and let children practice tossing the item into the target, enhancing both coordination and motor skills.
- **Soft Balls Bowling** (Indoor Physical Play): Set up bowling pins using empty plastic bottles. Children can take turns rolling soft balls and knocking down the "pins." This game is perfect for promoting physical activity, coordination, and friendly competition among young children.

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book, [Winter is Here](#), by Kevin Henkes.
- **Watch** the video on [Move Your Way: Tips for Getting Motivated](#).
- **Talk** with families about ways to integrate fitness into the cold winter season.
- **Bonus:** Send #ActivePlay, #ColdWinterActivities, #Outdoor/Indoor pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What is your favorite fitness activity to do during the winter season?
- How do you usually stay active during the colder months?
- Why is it important to exercise outdoors during the cold winter?
- How do you engage children in cold weather?

Physical Activity Resources

- Active Play in Cold Weather ([English & Spanish](#))
- [Dressing Kids for the Winter](#)
- [Understand the Weather: Child Care Weather Watch](#)
- [Cold Weather Safety](#)

When playing outside in cold weather, children should dress in layers to stay warm. Families are encouraged to provide hats and gloves, especially when temperatures drop below 32°F. As educators, we embrace the joys of the winter season and the adventures it brings. Always prioritize children's safety during physical activity, and let's keep moving together.

Share your #ColdWinterActivities, #OutdoorIndoor stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at tina.mclaren@dec.al.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](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
January	Harvest of the Month: Greens Galore
January 2	Deadline to Submit Your Turnip the Beet Award Nomination
January 8	Happy Helpings Sponsor-Kick-Off Call- Webinar
January 13	Tuesday Tip! Physical Activity in Small Spaces: Four Games to Promote Movement in Limited Space- Webinar
January 14	Happy Helpings Budget Readiness 1- Webinar
January 15	PALS Session 1: Physical Activity is Important in Early Childhood- Webinar
January 19	Holiday: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
January 21	Happy Helpings Experienced Sponsors- Virtual Training
January 26	Memo Monday: Requirement to Accept Medical Statements from Registered Dietitians-Webinar
February 4	No Kid Hungry Georgia Summer Summit: Innovating Rural Non-Congregate Together- In Person Training

Decal Download

Decal Interns

In this week's DECAL Download, we sit down with our talented group of college interns who joined us during the fall semester.

They share insights into the projects they worked on and the valuable lessons they gained along the way.



DECAL's interns represent six local colleges and universities, including Ariana Banhan from Georgia Tech; Christine Bonaparte from Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health; Kiersten Harris from Georgia Military College; Jaida Hayes from Clayton State University; Zeniya Lukonde from Spelman College; and Nava Pidugu from Georgia State University. Also joining the conversation is Mark Dock, Senior Manager

of Human Resources here at DECAL.

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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