



March 3, 2025

Last Chance to Register for the Happy Helpings Summit for Experienced Sponsors

Registration Deadline: March 5

- **Date:** Thursday, March 13, 2025
- **Location:** Anderson Conference Center at 5171 Eisenhower Parkway, Macon, 31206.
- **Time:** Registration: 8:00 a.m. Conference starts: 9:00 a.m. Conference ends: 4:30p.m.
- **Attendees:** Experienced Sponsors & Their Teams

Register [here](#) by March 5!

We are excited to announce that Nutrition Services is offering additional training for Sponsors at the Happy Helpings Summit on Thursday, March 13.

Get ready to connect with other seasoned sponsors, share insights, and learn from each other's experiences. This in-person event is the perfect opportunity to network and gain valuable knowledge about Happy Helpings. Don't miss out!

Topics include:

- Application Best Practices
- Budget Planning
- Financial Management
- Preparing for an Audit
- Procurement
- Program Forms
- Meal Planning
- Mobile Feeding
- Rural Non-Congregate

Additionally, members of the Nutrition team will be on hand to answer questions you may have about the program.

Register [here](#) by March 5!

Start Planning Now for Summer 2025

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

Here's a guide for 2025:

During March/April:

- Review sites and ensure you are aware of the locations, operational hours, staff, and dates for monitoring.
- Think about how meals will be delivered to the sites and how many will be served.
- Complete pre-operational site visits.
- Ensure administrative staff are trained.
- Complete application and renewal forms.
- Contract with a food service management company (FSMC), if necessary.
- Check with DECAL to determine if there are any potential sites lacking sponsors, or areas lacking sites and consider extending service to those areas.

Tips for Completing the Application:

- To minimize confusion and delays, only the program contact and/or authorized representative should be contacting the application reviewer. Keep in mind that the program contact is responsible for entering the information in the online application, GA ATLAS.
- Complete all forms in their entirety.
- The Food Service Permit Inquiry Form needs to be submitted/signed in every county where meals are being served prior to being submitted to DECAL.
- If utilizing a food service management company (FSMC) or acting as FSMC, ensure that numbers 42 & 43 are responded to correctly on the institution application.

Board of Directors Section:

- Ensure that all sections are completed for each board member.
- Any changes made to the Board of Directors (BOD) need to be supported with board meeting minutes.
- Ensure that the "delegation of authority" form is signed by an officer of the board (as defined on the form).

Management Plan:

- The plan should be updated annually.
- The percentage of time allocated to Happy Helpings for personnel/staffing should align with the allocation on the staff distribution report.
- Staff and duty allocations in the Management Plan must match the names of staff and duty time listed in Staff Distribution Worksheet.

Site Application:

- Site changes, including add-a-sites, need to be approved prior to making changes to an approved budget.
- Ensure to indicate days that the site will not serve meals during normal operating dates on #14.
- If site is outdoors (park, driveway, pool), please detail the plan if indicating that meals will be served indoors when answering #28.

Maximum Meal Count (MMC):

- The threshold for the maximum number of meals that can be served is 100.
- Sponsors that request a MMC over the threshold prior to the initial approval of the site application must submit written justification to their assigned Application Specialist explaining why an increase is needed.
- Enrollment/registration information should be submitted to justify the increase for sites that are closed enrolled.
- Letters of authorization for sites located at unaffiliated schools and/or unaffiliated apartment communities can include information to justify the increase. A justification letter is not required for sites requesting the same MMC over the threshold that was approved the previous year. Additionally, if the request is over the MMC threshold, but under the approved MMC that was approved the previous year, no justification letter is required.
- If a request appears unreasonable/unsupported, then the MMC over 100 will not be approved.
- Sponsors that begin operations and later request a MMC over the threshold must submit written justification to their assigned Business Operations Specialist explaining why the increase is needed. Additionally, three consecutive days of daily meal count (DMC) forms must be submitted. If the request is unsupported, the MMC to provide more than 100 meals will not be approved.

- Sponsors requesting a MMC increase are required to indicate the additional children requesting a meal after all available meals were served on the daily meal count form. Sponsors do not have to serve any additional meals over the approved MMC in the site application. Note: If DECAL doesn't approve the requested MMC increase, then the cost of any additional meals served over the approved MMC will be the responsibility of the sponsor.
- All meal count increase request must be reviewed and approved by DECAL prior to claim submission of the operating month.

Updates to SFSP Procurement Templates

Nutrition Services recently updated the **Procurement Manual** and the **Procurement and Purchasing Policy Template**.

Changes include, but are not limited to:

- Added language on local foods and geographic preference
- Added clause regarding year-round Food Service Management Company (FSMC) contracts with Summer Food Authorities, Higher Education Institutions and Hospitals
- Updated sample small purchase document and FSMC agreements to reflect the most current versions

Documents can be accessed [here](#).

Happy Helpings Sponsors should refer to the updated documents moving forward.

For further details, please register for the upcoming March 25, 2025, Supporting Documentation Training.

Areas of Need for Summer 2025

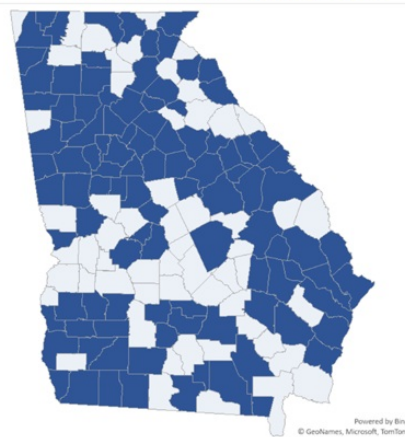
One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role in our significant progress toward that goal by expanding meal service to 103 counties in 2024! Thank you!

If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2025, please consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:



FY25 Areas of Need: 56 Counties

1. Atkinson	13. Crisp	25. Jeff Davis	37. Oglethorpe	49. Twiggs
2. Bacon	14. Dade	26. Jenkins	38. Pierce	50. Upson
3. Banks	15. Dawson	27. Jones	39. Pulaski	51. Webster
4. Berrien	16. Dodge	28. Lincoln	40. Quitman	52. Wheeler
5. Bleckley	17. Dooley	29. Long	41. Schley	53. Wilcox
6. Brantley	18. Echols	30. Lumpkin	42. Screven	54. Wilkes
7. Brooks	19. Forsyth	31. Madison	43. Stewart	55. Wilkinson
8. Camden	20. Gilmer	32. Marion	44. Sumter	56. Worth
9. Charlton	21. Gordon	33. Miller	45. Taylor	
10. Chattahoochee	22. Grady	34. Montgomery	46. Telfair	
11. Cook	23. Haralson	35. Murray	47. Towns	
12. Crawford	24. Harris	36. Oconee	48. Treutlen	



Blue: HH meals were offered in these counties: White: Areas of Need

Unanticipated School Closure Waivers Available

On August 5, 2024, Nutrition Services received USDA approval for statewide waivers for Happy Helpings sponsors to utilize during unanticipated school closures.

The following waivers are available during unanticipated school closures when meal service operations are limited due to natural disasters, unscheduled major building repairs, court orders relating to school safety or other issues, labor-management disputes, or when approved by the State agency for similar unanticipated causes.

The following approved waivers are available when schools are closed with no virtual learning/classes:

- **Non-Congregate Meal Service**
- **Parent and Guardian Meal Pick-up**
- **Meal Service Times**
- **Service of Meals at School Sites**

The waivers listed above are available through **June 30, 2025**.

Once approved by Nutrition Services' Applications Unit to operate during unanticipated school closures, Happy Helpings sponsors interested in applying for the above-mentioned waivers must submit waiver requests via the Waiver Module within GA ATLAS.

Sponsors may only serve meals in a non-congregate setting, adjust the time of meal service, allow parent pick up, and allow service of meals at non-school sites once the sponsors are approved for the waivers.

Waivers cannot be approved for more than 10 consecutive operating days without approval from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In situations that may warrant longer approval periods, the FNS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) will work closely with Nutrition Services to determine if an extension is needed.

For questions, please reach out to Tammie Baldwin at Tammie.Baldwin@dec.al.ga.gov.

Upcoming Training and Technical Assistance

March 13, 2025 – Happy Helpings Summit **8:00 am - 4:30 pm**

Experienced sponsors and their teams are invited to attend the Happy Helpings Summit at the Anderson Conference Center in Macon On March 13. Sponsors will have a chance to connect with other sponsors and gain additional knowledge about operating Happy Helpings. The Nutrition team will be on hand to answer questions. Continental breakfast, lunch and snack are included.

Click [here](#) to register!

March 17, 2025 – Memo Monday **10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Summer is approaching. Have you thought about possibly serving summer meals by using the Mobile Feeding Option? Did you know there is a Site Cap for all sponsored sites during the operation of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)? Please join this webinar for an in-depth look into the following memo(s):

- [Mobile Feeding Options in Summer Feeding Programs](#)
- [Site Caps in the Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\)](#)

[\[Register Now\]](#)

March 25, 2025 – Supporting Documents & Resources **10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Each year, CACFP & SFSP operators are tasked with calculating the food cost for the fiscal year and selecting the appropriate procurement method(s) to support the food cost. Join this webinar to learn:

- Ways to distinguish the standard procurement methods with each procurement threshold
- How to complete or create a Procurement Policy, and
- The required procurement documents to complete and submit to support the cost of food.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

March 26, 2025 – PALS Session 3: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Types, Daily Activities, & the Provider's Role. **1:00 - 2:00 pm**

Would you like an opportunity to examine different types of physical activity and ways to identify how they encourage health and child development? Please join this series where we will address how physical activity can be embedded throughout the daily schedule and can support early learning. Throughout this session participants will consider how they create environments and experiences that support physical activity.

Training Objectives:

- To develop skills to follow the best practices of physical activity in ECE settings, and
- To identify the role of ECE professionals in promoting physical activity for children birth to age five

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 9-10, 2025- FY 2025 Happy Helpings (HH) New Sponsors Training **9:15 am - 3:00 pm**

Join us for the FY 2025 HH New Sponsors Training, a comprehensive in-person session designed for new sponsors. This training will provide essential guidance on program requirements, compliance, and best practices to ensure successful participation.

This training is required for:

- New sponsoring organizations
- Experienced sponsors that did not operate the previous summer
- Experienced sponsors with a new Program Contact who have little to no knowledge of SFSP
- Experienced sponsors who fail to attend other allocated trainings, and
- If the State Agency deems required

Please contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at (404) 657-1779 for assistance.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 16, 2025 – Happy Helpings Budget Readiness **10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Do you have the budget basics? Join this webinar to learn:

- The purpose of the budget package.
- The purpose of all budget line items in GA ATLAS.

- How to prepare & develop a complete GA ATLAS budget package.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 21, 2025 – Memo Monday

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Have you reviewed recordkeeping requirements for SFSP recently? Please join this webinar for a refresher on the following policy.

- **SFSP Policy #5 - Recordkeeping Requirements for All Sponsors and Sponsored Facilities Participating in the SFSP**

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 22, 2025 – Tuesday Tip! Active Play with Mixed Age Groups

1:30 - 2:00 pm

Wondering how to engage mixed age groups in active play? Join this webinar to learn:

- How to maximize active play options for ECE programs with mixed age groups,
- Developmentally appropriate practice and recommendations for active play for young children.
- How to apply these recommendations to adapt and design active play opportunities according to the needs of each age group.

Participants can earn one-half [0.50] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 23, 2025 – PALS Session 4: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Families, Training, Resources, and Policies

1:00-2:00 pm

Would you like to explore concrete strategies for family engagement around physical activity? During this session, participants will be able to explore developmental milestones and tools from CDC that support milestone tracking. In addition, free and low-cost resources that advance physical activities practices and how program policies support will be shared with participants.

Join this session where we cover the following objectives:

- How to recognize family engagement opportunities around physical activity.
- How to communicate with families about their children's physical activity.
- Ways to identify policy statements that follow the best practices for physical activity in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings.

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

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

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 Procurement Readiness](#) webinar.

It discussed relevant procurement practices when procuring food & non-food items, how to develop formal solicitations, and how to incorporate local sourcing practices into a meal service.



Nutrition Ed Nook

Rooting for You!

Root vegetables are the March Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) spotlight. These vegetables, which grow underground at the base of a plant, bring vitamins, minerals, starches, and sugars to help supply the body's needs. Edible roots come in many sizes, shapes and colors. They are a great way to add color to your plate.

In Georgia, radishes and beets are harvested in the spring, while carrots are harvested from December through June.

Carrots come in many colors like red, purple, white, or yellow, however, orange carrots are the most recognized. Enjoy fresh carrots in a variety of forms - sliced into sticks, chopped, or shredded.

Beets come in a variety of colors, including white, red, Chioggia, and golden. Smaller to medium size beets tend to have better flavor. Try beets in a smoothie for a cool, refreshing treat.

Radishes are crisp, crunchy, and come in different colors such as red, pink, white, and purple, shapes, and sizes. Enjoy radishes shredded into salads, stews, soups, pastas, or slaws.

Fun Fact: Many people claim these root vegetables are sweeter when grown in Georgia because of our weather.

Integration:

- [Curtido](#)
- [Fresh Carrot Salad](#)
- [Vegetarian Borscht](#)
- [Un-beet-able Berry Smoothie](#)
- [Roasted Radishes](#)
- [Crunchy Vegetable Wraps](#)
- [Delicious Dunking Dip](#)

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.
- **Taste** with carrots, beets, radishes, or another root vegetable to see how participants enjoy them and add it as a side item on your menu.

- **Read *Carrot Soup***, by John Segal. Take one rabbit, patiently growing carrots. Add his friends - Mole, Dog, Cat, Duck, and Pig. Mix all ingredients together for a super-delicious surprise!
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as rinsing and drying root vegetables to be cooked in a dish.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate root vegetables into their meals!
- **Want ECE root vegetable-themed resources?** Check out Quality Care for Children's [Harvest of the Month toolkit](#) for more ways to engage ECE students.

Conversation:

- Have your participants ever tasted carrots, beets, or radishes before?
- Which root vegetable do they prefer: carrots, beets, or radishes?
- What other root vegetables do they like to eat?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Spring Into Health with Gardening!

As spring approaches, now is the perfect time to venture outdoors and get in some physical activity while smelling the fragrance of bright, beautiful flowers blossoming in the morning.

“Spring Into Health” with gardening this season, a great form of physical activity! Gardening improves fitness and overall health and mental wellbeing. In addition, gardening is a way to integrate family engagement through Farm to Early Care & Education (ECE) in your program.

Farm to ECE has become increasingly popular in our communities in Georgia for many good reasons! When children are gardening with the assistance of parents or providers, they tend to eat more fruits and vegetables, have a better understanding of nutrition, improve their physical and mental development, increase social & emotional skills, and connect with nature.



Gardening can provide farmers, providers, parents, and children with a sense of purpose in life and nature; this may include the feeling of the soil slipping through their fingers for strength and the awe in harvesting fruits and vegetables after planting, caring, and harvesting them. Gardening helps to enhance body movement, coordination, and fine & gross motor skills. Gardening is a great way to bring the family together while planting, caring, and harvesting fresh fruits and vegetables, preparing and cooking meals with the produce from your garden, and engaging in the outdoors in a meaningful way. Time to go outdoors, experiment, and explore!

Integration:

- [Getting Started: Georgia Farm to ECE Guide](#)
- [Georgia Master Gardeners: Gardens of Georgia](#)
- [Quality Care for Children's Farm to ECE Webpage](#)
- [Join a Community Garden – Food Well Alliance](#)
- [UGA Extension's Community and School Gardens](#)

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book, *The Garden Project*, by Margaret McNamara.
- **Watch** the video on “[Introduction to Gardening with Children](#)” by Georgia Organics in Georgia.
- **Talk** with families about ways to start a small garden, whether at home, in their local community, at your childcare site, or at their local school.
- **Bonus:** Share #LoveGardening, #SpringIntoHealth #GardenLife, #Instagarden, #CommunityGarden pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- How do you feel after gardening?
- What would you like to plant in your garden?
- How does gardening help you with physical activity?
- Why is it important to build and grow gardens in your communities?

Share your #LoveGardening, #SpringIntoHealth, #MyGarden, #GardenLife, #Instagarden 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 2024-2025 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 a different local, seasonal fruit or vegetable each month.

Visit Quality Care for Children’s Farm to ECE [webpage](#) to access a variety of classroom resources, including activity ideas linked to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), recipe ideas, a book list, and family

newsletter to help you promote a new vegetable or fruit each month.

For school-age children resources, visit the Georgia Department of Education's Harvest of the Month [webpage](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
March	Harvest of the Month: Root Vegetables
March 13	Happy Helpings Summit- In Person Training
March 17	Memo Monday: SFSP Mobile Feeding- Webinar
March 25	Supporting Documents & Resources- Webinar
March 26	PALS Session 3: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Types, Daily Activities, & the Provider's Role - Webinar
April 9 & 10	Happy Helpings New Sponsors Training- In Person Training
April 16	Happy Helpings Budget Readiness- Webinar
April 21	Memo Monday: SFSP Policy- Webinar
April 22	Tuesday Tip! Active Play with Mixed Age Groups- Webinar
April 23	PALS Session 4: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Families, Training, Resources, and Policies- Webinar

Decal Download

Early Childhood Educators

For the fourth consecutive year, DECAL and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning are recognizing three individuals as Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year for 2024-2025.



Joining us to talk about serving as Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year is Zina Hadjaz from The Quadrilingual Academy in Smyrna, Infant Teacher of the Year (0-15 months), Laura Silva from My Little Geniuses in Marietta, Toddler Teacher of the Year (15-36 months), and Samantha Mullins from Our House at Central in Atlanta, Preschool Teacher of the Year (36-48 months). Also joining us is Miranda Murphy, Outreach Project Manager for Practice and Support Services, and Laura Wagner, Executive Director for the Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At Risk Afterschool Meals](#)
- [Commercial Recall: BrucePac Meat and Poultry](#)
- [After School Programs Required to Apply for License or Exemption to Participate in At-Risk](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)
- [Notify DECAL When Updating Your Bank Information](#)
- [Procurement Methods At-A-Glance](#)
- [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)
- [Identifying the Difference between Pre-Award Cost Request vs. Excess Funds](#)
- [2025 SFSP Reimbursement Rates](#)
- [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)

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**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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