



March 2, 2026

## Add Fun & Learning to Your Meal Sites

### *Community Farmers Markets offers hand-on Fun & Nutrition Education to sites in DeKalb and Fulton Counties*

Community Farmers Markets (CFM) is a local food access non-profit that hosts weekly, outdoor, pop-up farmers markets with 30-70 local farmers, bakers, and makers across Fulton and Dekalb counties in East Atlanta, Grant Park, Oakhurst, and Decatur.

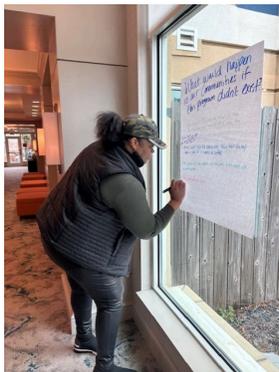
CFM also hosts pop-up markets in community gathering spaces throughout the west side of Atlanta. All farmers markets accept and double SNAP/EBT.

At sites within or around those neighborhoods, CFM can offer to Happy Helpings Sponsors:

- Set of \$5 vouchers to spend at the farmers market to share with community members
- Chef demo with free samples at community events (for children or adults)
- Mini pop-up farmers market at community events (for adults)
- Educational classes connecting local produce to science, math, and nutrition standards (for children)

For more information, visit [cfmatl.org](http://cfmatl.org) or reach out to Jenna Mobley, Director of Education, at [jenna@cfmatl.org](mailto:jenna@cfmatl.org).

## More Sponsors, More Meals, Greater Impact



*New and experienced sponsors gather for hands-on training to prepare for a successful Happy Helpings 2026 summer season.*

As we prepare for Summer 2026, Nutrition Services is continuing efforts to increase our community partners committed to feeding children across Georgia. Bringing in new sponsors ensures that more children have access to nutritious meals when school is out.

Our final New Sponsor Training for summer 2026 will be held March 11–12, 2026. This training is for organizations interested in becoming a Happy Helpings sponsor and for teams who want a comprehensive overview of program requirements, operations, and compliance expectations.

During the two-day training, participants will receive detailed guidance on:

- Sponsor responsibilities and oversight
- Application and GA ATLAS requirements
- Financial management and budgeting
- Monitoring and site compliance
- Maximum Meal Count (MMC) requirements
- Procurement and meal service standards

This session is especially important for organizations planning to operate for the first time. Experienced sponsors are also welcome to attend if you were unable to participate in the Experienced Sponsor Training. This is a great opportunity to refresh knowledge, clarify questions, and ensure your team is prepared for the upcoming season.

Now is the time to expand services, strengthen operations, and prepare for a successful summer.

Register [here](#) to attend the March 11-12, 2026, New Sponsor Training. Deadline to register is March 3, 2026.

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## Updated SFSP Reimbursement Rates Announced

### 2026 Reimbursement Rates Effective January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026



#### Maximum Rate per Meal (In Whole or Fractions of U. S. Dollars)

All States except Alaska and Hawaii		
Per Meal Rates in whole or fractions of U. S. dollars	Rural or Self-prep Sites	All Other Types of Sites
Breakfast	3.1975	3.1375
Lunch or Supper	5.6000	5.5100
(Supplement) Snack	1.3250	1.2950

The 2026 reimbursement rates are presented as a combined set of rates to highlight simplified cost accounting procedures. Section 738 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Pub. L 110-161, enacted on December 26, 2007, extends these procedures to all States.

As of January 1, 2008, reimbursement is based solely on a “meals time rates” calculation, without comparison to actual or budgeted costs.

Sponsors receive reimbursement that is determined by the number of reimbursable meals served multiplied by the combined rates for food service operations and administration. However, the combined rate is based on separate operating and administrative rates of reimbursement, each of which is adjusted differently for inflation.

## 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.

The reasons for changing the deadline include:

1. There is a more time for your application to be approved before you start operations.
2. It will give you an opportunity to focus more on program operations then on 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, contact your application services representative.

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## Start Planning Now for Summer 2026

Providing summer meals is a year-round effort. Throughout the year, there are things you can do to prepare for this summer.

### During March/April:

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

The deadline to submit the Happy Helpings application is May 15. Follow these tips for a successful application:

- To minimize confusion and delays, only the program contact and/or authorized representative should communicate with the application reviewer.
- The program contact is responsible for entering all information in the online application, GA ATLAS.
- Complete all forms in their entirety.
- The Food Service Permit Inquiry Form must be submitted and signed in every county where meals will be served prior to submission to DECAL.
- If using food service management company (FSMC) or acting as an FSMC, ensure that questions #42 and #43 are answered correctly on the institution application.

### Board of Directors Section:

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

### Management Plan:

- The plan must be updated annually.
- The percentage of time allocated to Happy Helpings for personnel/staffing must align with the allocation listed on the Staff Distribution Report.

- Staff names and duty allocations in the Management Plan must match the Staff Distribution Worksheet.

### **Site Application:**

- Site changes, including add-a-sites, must be approved prior to making changes to an approved budget.
- Indicate any days the site will not serve meals during normal operating dates on question #14.
- If the site is outdoors (park, driveway, pool, etc.), provide a detailed indoor contingency plan when responding to question #28.

### **Maximum Meal Count (MMC):**

- The threshold for the maximum number of meals that can be served is 100.

### **Prior to Initial Site Approval:**

- Sponsors requesting an MMC over the threshold must submit written justification to their assigned Application Specialist explaining why the increase is needed.
- Enrollment/registration information must be submitted for closed-enrolled sites to justify the increase.
- Letters of authorization for sites located at unaffiliated schools and/or apartment communities may include justification for the increase.
- A justification letter is not required if:
  - The same MMC over the threshold was approved the previous year, OR
  - The request is over 100 but below the previously approved MMC.
- If a request appears unreasonable or unsupported, the MMC over 100 will not be approved.

### **After Operations Begin:**

- Sponsors requesting an MMC increase must submit written justification to their assigned Business Operations Specialist.
- Three consecutive days of Daily Meal Count (DMC) forms must be submitted.
- If unsupported, the request to serve more than 100 meals will not be approved.
- Sponsors must indicate additional children requesting meals after all available meals were served on the DMC form.
- Sponsors are not required to serve meals over the approved MMC.
- If DECAL does not approve the MMC increase, any additional meals served over the approved MMC will be the sponsor's financial responsibility.

All meal count increase requests must be reviewed and approved by DECAL prior to claim submission for the operating month.

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## **Start Planning Budget Projections Now**

As the 2026 Summer Meals season quickly approaches, now is the perfect time to start budget planning for Happy Helpings. Once you have identified your potential sites for 2026, 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

## Changes to Federal Procurement Thresholds

On August 27, 2025, the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council, or FAR Council issued a final rule amending the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) to further implement a statute, which requires an adjustment every five years of statutory acquisition-related thresholds for inflation (i.e., micro purchase and small purchase thresholds). This adjustment applies to Georgia's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

### Federal Acquisition Regulation: Inflation Adjustment of Acquisition-Related Thresholds (FAR Case 2024-001)

Thresholds administered under Federal awards are referenced in 48 CFR 2.101 (also known as FAR 2.101) and increased to the following effective October 1, 2025:

- Federal micro-purchase threshold—\$15,000 or less; and
- Federal SAT (as also known as the small purchase threshold)—\$350,000 or less.
- For Georgia sponsors: Micro-purchase = \$15,000; formal procurement is required when total contract value exceeds \$350,000 or any stricter state/local limit.

**Note:** CACFP and SFSP program operators are reminded to continue referencing Federal procurement regulations at 2 CFR 200, which cite the above regulations. Georgia DECAL will notify CACFP organizations as Program resources are updated to reflect this change.

For more information and to access the guidance, click [here](#).

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## Revised Product Formulation Statement (PFS) Templates and Samples

On January 8, 2026, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) announced the recently revised [Product Formulation Statement \(PFS\) templates and samples](#) are now available for food industry partners to demonstrate how a food product may contribute to the meal pattern requirements in Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). A PFS may be voluntarily provided by manufacturers at the request of program operators, but it is not approved by USDA.

### A Reminder to Providers:

A Child Nutrition (CN) label is authorized by USDA and provides a warranty of a product's meal pattern contribution when the processed product is used according to the manufacturer's instructions. A PFS is typically provided for processed products that do not have a CN label. See also, DECAL Policy Memorandum, **Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements (11/15/2024)** which can be accessed [here](#).

The revised PFS templates and samples add clarity and provide additional instructions for manufacturers, and update terminology to align with current CNP guidance. A new sample PFS for documenting how to credit a food product containing meats/meat alternates (M/MA) is included with the revised PFS templates and existing samples for grains and vegetables. New samples for combination foods that contribute to more than one meal component are also available.

### Program Operators

The [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#) webpage was updated to assist CNP operators with evaluating a manufacturer's PFS. Program operators are encouraged to review information about manufacturer documentation, including Child Nutrition (CN) labels, found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/manufacturer-documentation>.

### Industry Partners

## Resources to Market Meal Sites

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

**SPONSORS**

- Branded Marketing materials are available on the [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](#) 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.

## 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 toward meeting that goal by expanding meal service to 109 counties in 2026. Thank you.

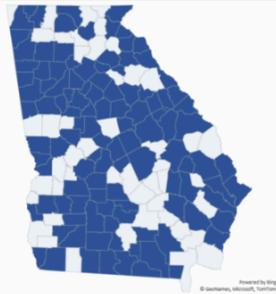
If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2026, consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:




### 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*





Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning  
BRIGHT FROM THE START

*Working Together to Feed Georgia's Children*

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

No Kid Hungry provides schools and community-based organizations with financial support 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.

*Note: Completing 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 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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## Nutrition Services Welcomes Mercedes Burch



Nutrition Services is thrilled to welcome Mercedes Burch to the team as our new Technology Project Coordinator for the USDA Non-Competitive Technology Innovation Grant (n-TIG).

This federal grant supports the Procurement Project and the Meal Service Project, and Mercedes will play a key role in enhancing nutrition procurement systems, modernizing meal service operations, and strengthening cross-functional technology initiatives.

Mercedes holds a bachelor's and master's in business administration from Western Governors University and brings nutrition 10 years of experience leading high-stakes, cross-functional teams. She has expertise in project scope analysis, resource allocation, risk mitigation, and stakeholder coordination — all skills that will help advance the Procurement and Meal Service Projects efficiently and effectively.

In her previous roles, Mercedes managed complex, multi-site technology and network transformation initiatives for Cisco, delivering significant revenue impact and improving project delivery through structured communication and procurement validation. She also brings valuable software implementation experience from QGenda, where she led multiple projects from kickoff through go-live and post-implementation support. Earlier in her career, she coordinated operations, documentation, and financial reporting across various industries, further strengthening her versatility and collaboration skills.

Outside of work, Mercedes is a proud wife and mother of three children: a 15-year-old son, an 11-year-old daughter, and a 3-year-old daughter. She serves as Team Mom and part-time assistant coach for her daughter's soccer team alongside her husband, Andrew, who is the head coach. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, attending Atlanta United games, and playing board games with her kids.

We are excited to have Mercedes on board and look forward to the expertise, leadership, and collaboration she will bring to the team.

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## Upcoming Training

**March 10, 2026**

## Tuesday Tip! Planning Tasty & Nutritious Meals

1:30-2:00 pm

Are you ready to retire your routine recipes? Join this webinar to learn tips, tools, and tangible resources for planning tasty and nutritious meals for your monthly menus.

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

[\[Register Now\]](#)

**March 11-12, 2026**

### Happy Helpings New Sponsor Training

9:30 am-3:00 pm

This in-person training is 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 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.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

**March 12, 2026**

### 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 to examine different types of physical activity and ways to identify how they encourage health and child development? 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 can create environments and experiences that support physical activity. Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour 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](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 have an issue with registering 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.

Note: Only the Program Contact (PC) can self-register within GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, 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, 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.

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## Plan Now for Your Summer Garden

### *A Garden Tip Guide*

Summer is right around the corner, and now is the ideal time for Happy Helpings sponsors to start planning a garden for their summer meal sites.

A little planning now can lead to a fun, hands-on garden that enhances meals, supports nutrition education, and gives children something exciting to explore all summer long. Starting now helps you stay organized, gather supplies gradually, and create a garden that's ready when summer meals begin.

### Get Started with These Simple Tips

- **Pick Your Garden Space:** Choose a spot that fits your site: containers, raised beds, or a small plot all work. Look for good sunlight, easy water access, and a safe area where children can observe and participate. *Tip:* Containers are a great option for sites with limited space.
- **Make a Simple Plant Plan:** Decide what to grow based on what does well in Georgia's early summer. Choose beginner-friendly plants and plan when each will be planted so your garden is ready when kids arrive. Click [here](#) for ideas of easy crops to get you started. *Tip:* Growing a few easy crops is better than planting too much.
- **Gather Supplies Early:** Start collecting soil, containers, tools, gloves, labels, and watering cans now. Spreading this out early helps your team feel prepared and confident. *Tip:* Labeling plants helps connect the garden to nutrition lessons.
- **Look for Community Support:** Reach out to Cooperative Extension, Master Gardeners, or local organizations and businesses. Many can offer advice, volunteers, or donated items like seeds or soil. *Tip:* Community partners can also be guest speakers for nutrition education.
- **Get Your Team Involved:** Assign clear roles for planting, watering, and upkeep. Sharing responsibilities helps keep the garden healthy all summer. *Tip:* Rotate tasks so staff and children can both take part.

If you're new to gardening or need technical assistance, contact [Monica.Griffin@decal.ga.gov](mailto:Monica.Griffin@decal.ga.gov) or [Morgan.Chapman@decal.ga.gov](mailto:Morgan.Chapman@decal.ga.gov).

By planning now, your garden can become a welcoming, interactive space that brings nutrition education to life, gives children hands-on experiences with fresh, Georgia-grown produce, and sets the stage for even more opportunities to engage them, including using your garden as a fun way to encourage physical activity, which the next article will explore.

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## Physical Activity Corner

### *Let's Get Moving in the Garden, Active Play for Growing Learners*

Beyond growing fresh produce, gardening also provides an engaging, hands-on way for children to stay active and build healthy movement habits during summer meal programs.

Gardening activities like digging in the soil, planting seeds, watering plants, and exploring the outdoor space give children the opportunity to develop motor skills, build muscles, and improve balance and coordination. Time outdoors adds extra smiles, relaxation, and boosts their energy.



### Here are fun movement activities you can do with children in the garden:

- **Plant & Run:** Run to the garden spot, plant a seed, and run back to tag a friend.
- **Dig, Dig, Dig:** Use your arms to dig holes and turn soil.
- **Reach & Stretch:** Stretch up high like a tall tree or bend down to touch the ground.
- **Garden Yoga:** Try a tree pose, squat like a frog, or stretch like a flower growing.
- **Harvest Hunt:** Walk, bend, and reach to find fruits or vegetables to pick.

### Quick tips for educators:

- Encourage children to move at their own pace.
- Join in since children love moving with adults.
- Talk about spring, weather, and plants while moving.

Spring is a great time to move, grow, and play. Let's enjoy the outdoors, explore together, and build healthy bodies one step at a time.

Check out [15 Simple Ways to Get Moving](#) for more fun ways to engage children outdoors.

Share your stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren at [tina.mclaren@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto: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 encourage healthy eating habits by promoting different local, seasonal fruits or vegetables each month.

Visit [EatLearnGrowGA](#) to access 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
March	Harvest of the Month: Root Vegetables
March 10	Tuesday Tip! Planning Tasty & Nutritious Meals - Webinar
March 11-12	Happy Helpings New Sponsor Training - In Person Training
March 12	PALS Session 3: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Types, Daily Activities, & the Provider's Role - Webinar
May 15	Deadline to Submit SFSP Application

## Decal Download

On the next ...

**DECAL**  
Download   
New Episodes Every Wednesday!

*This Week's Topic:*  
**DECAL Scholars**



**Charlotte Pelz**  
Vice President of Education,  
Care Solutions

**Dr. Christi Moore**  
Director of Workforce  
Supports and Learning



Georgia Dept  
of Early Care  
and Learning  
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## DECAL Scholars

DECAL Scholars is a transformative initiative designed to support early childhood educators on their journey to earning a degree or credential.

From personalized educational counseling to scholarship assistance, DECAL Scholars is making a real difference for those who

dedicate their careers to giving Georgia's youngest learners the best possible start. Joining us this week to talk about DECAL Scholars is Dr. Christi Moore, Director of Workforce Supports and Learning here at DECAL, and Charlotte Pelz, Vice President of Education at Care Solutions.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

## Happy Helpings Resources:

*The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:*

- [Added New Sites After Application Approval](#)
- [Authorization Letter Requirements for Meal Sites at Schools and Apartments](#)
- [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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