



May 1, 2026

Reminder Deadline to Submit SFSP Applications

May 15, 2026

Reminder: SFSP applications must be submitted by May 15, to participate in Happy Helpings for FY2026.

The reasons for changing the deadline include:

1. More time for your application to be approved before you start operations.
2. More opportunity to focus on program operations than on working on the application.
3. More time for Audits and Compliance to conduct reviews during program operations.

Any questions about this change, contact your Application Specialist (see below).

Application Specialists	Institution Assignment	Email	Phone Number
Jerald Savage	o (zero)- G	Jerald.Savage@dec.al.ga.gov	(770) 405-7916
Shericka Blount	H-P	Shericka.Blount@dec.al.ga.gov	(404) 656-6411
Vanessa Goodman	Q-Z	Vanessa.Goodman@dec.al.ga.gov	(404) 591-6027

Your Partner in Success

Technical Assistance Coordinators Are Here To Help

Strengthen Your Happy Helpings Summer Program!

Contact your TA to schedule a visit.



Training, guidance, and the right resources make all the difference in helping you feel prepared and confident for upcoming summer compliance visits.

Your regional Nutrition Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinator is here to support you every step of the way. Whether you need help understanding program requirements, preparing documentation, or strengthening your daily operations, they are your go-to resource.

How Your TA Can Support You:

- Review program requirements and ensure compliance
- Provide guidance on meal patterns, documentation, and best practices
- Answer questions and clarify program expectations
- Offer hands-on support to strengthen your program operations
- Help you prepare for successful monitoring and compliance visits

Let's work together to review requirements, address questions, and set your program up for success.

Contact your regional Nutrition TA Coordinator today to schedule a visit (see below).

Nutrition TA Coordinator	Region	Email	Phone Number
Julie Edwards	East	Julie.Edwards@dec.al.ga.gov	(404) 796-1205
LaKisha Battle	Southeast	Lakisha.Battle@dec.al.ga.gov	(478) 314-2806
Leatha Bryant	Southwest	Leatha.Bryant@dec.al.ga.gov	(404) 998-0721
Rhonda Kelley	North/ Northwest	Rhonda.Kelley@dec.al.ga.gov	(470) 859-9376
Emilia Emmanuel	Metro West	Emilia.Emmanuel@dec.al.ga.gov	(678) 337-9759

Gearing Up for SFSP: *Tasks for the Month of May*

Providing summer meals is a year-round effort, but May is a critical month for final preparation—especially with the application deadline of May 15 quickly approaching.

During May, sponsors should:

- Finalize and submit all applications and renewal forms by May 15.
- Review site locations to confirm operational hours, staffing, and monitoring schedules.
- Determine meal service logistics, including delivery methods and estimated meal counts.
- Complete all pre-operational site visits.
- Ensure administrative and site staff are fully trained and ready for program operations.
- Contract with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC), if applicable.
- Connect with DECAL to identify underserved areas and consider expanding services to meet community needs.

Timely completion of these steps will help ensure a smooth and successful Summer Food Service Program launch.

Navigating the SFSP Application: *Tips for Success*

With the SFSP application deadline of May 15 quickly approaching, now is the time to ensure your application is complete, accurate, and submitted on time. Following these tips will help prevent delays and set your program up for success.

Tips for Completing the Application

- Submit your full application no later than May 15 to avoid delays in approval.
- To minimize confusion, only the program contact and/or authorized representative should communicate with the application reviewer.
- The program contact is responsible for entering all information into the online application system, GA ATLAS.
- Complete all forms in their entirety—missing information can delay approval.
- Submit a signed Food Service Permit Inquiry Form for each county where meals will be served before submitting your application to DECAL.
- If using (or acting as) a Food Service Management Company (FSMC), ensure Questions 42 and 43 on the institution application are completed accurately.

Board of Directors Section

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

Budget

Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) Submission and Approval Process

For emergency requests:

- Email the SPWA request form and supporting documentation to Gwendolyn.Howard@dec.al.ga.gov within 24 hours of purchase.
- Submit a budget revision to include the cost.

For all other requests:

- Submit a budget revision including the cost.
- Upload the SPWA request form and supporting documents in GA ATLAS.
- Notify the budget team at Nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov at least three days before making the purchase.

DECAL will review and provide written approval or denial. Approved SPWAs will be uploaded to GA ATLAS.

Site Application

- Site changes, including add-a-sites, must be approved before making changes to an approved budget.
- Indicate any non-operating days in Question #14.
- If the site is outdoors, include a detailed indoor contingency plan in Question #28.

Maximum Meal Count (MMC)

- The standard MMC threshold is 100 meals per site.

Before Initial Approval:

- Requests above 100 meals must include written justification submitted to your Application Specialist.

Acceptable justification includes:

- Enrollment or registration documentation for closed enrolled sites
- Letters of authorization for unaffiliated schools or apartment communities

No justification required if:

- Requesting the same previously approved MMC, or
- Requesting below a previously approved threshold

Requesting an Increase After Operations Begin

- Submit written justification to your Business Operations Specialist
- Provide three consecutive days of Daily Meal Count (DMC) forms
- Document any additional children requesting meals after all meals are served

Important Reminders

- Sponsors are not required to serve meals beyond the approved MMC.
- If an MMC increase is not approved, the sponsor is responsible for any excess meal costs.
- All MMC increase requests must be approved before submitting your monthly claim.

Final Tip:

Don't wait until the last minute—submitting a complete and accurate application by May 15 is the best way to ensure a smooth approval process and a successful summer program.

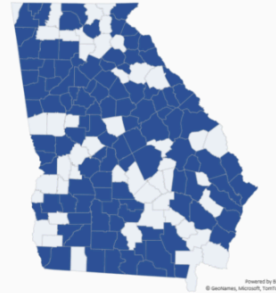
Target Counties for Summer 2026

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 2025. 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



Working Together to Feed Georgia's Children

Modifying the FNS Instruction 113-1: Civil Rights Compliance and Enforcement

This USDA memorandum ensures that current USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) guidance pertaining to federal civil rights and nondiscrimination obligations remains aligned with applicable laws, regulations, executive orders and directives relevant to the Agency's 16 nutrition assistance programs.

In that vein, FNS is modifying the **FNS Instruction 113-1: Civil Rights Compliance and Enforcement** — Nutrition Programs and Activities and developing a new guidance tool that will provide assistance and direction to FNS employees and recipients of federal financial assistance in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Amended guidance will be released when finalized.

In the interim, civil rights and nondiscrimination laws and regulations remain in effect, along with related compliance and enforcement requirements. FNS program offices and state agencies are advised to immediately discontinue citing FNS Instruction 113-1 when there are noncompliance issues or concerns resulting from management evaluations (MEs), compliance reviews or any similar monitoring and oversight activities, and to discontinue using FNS Instruction 113-1 for technical guidance. Rather, pertinent civil rights and nondiscrimination laws and regulations should be cited and used instead.

To access the guidance, click [here](#)

For questions or for additional information, contact Melissa Stanley, Policy Administrator, at Melissa.Stanley@decal.ga.gov.

Unanticipated School Closure Waivers

Waivers Available Through June 30

On July 30, 2025, Nutrition Services received USDA approval for statewide waivers for Happy Helpings sponsors to use during unanticipated school closures.

The 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, 2026.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) 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 upon approval to use 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.

Happy Helpings Sponsors interested in applying for these waivers during unanticipated school closures must submit waiver requests via the Waiver Module within GA ATLAS. For questions, contact Melissa.Stanley@dec.al.ga.gov or Tammie.Baldwin@dec.al.ga.gov.

Updated Income Eligibility Guidelines Released

July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027

This notice announces the USDA's annual adjustments to the Income Eligibility Guidelines to be used in determining eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, free milk, and Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer benefits for the period from **July 1, 2026 through June 30, 2027**.

To access the upcoming Income Eligibility Guidelines, click the following link:

[Child Nutrition Programs – Income Eligibility Guidelines \(2026-2027\)](#)



Turnip the Beet Award

Recognizing Excellence in Summer Meals

The Turnip the Beet Award is a national recognition from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that honors outstanding summer meal program sponsors who go above and beyond to serve high-quality, nutritious, and appealing meals to children during the summer months.

This award highlights programs that provide well-balanced meals that are nutritious and enjoyable, help encourage participation, and support child nutrition when school is not in session. Strong programs often include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and locally sourced foods when available.

All summer meal sponsors in good standing are eligible and may self-nominate or be nominated. Stay tuned for upcoming application details.

To learn more about the Turnip the Beet Award, visit [here](#).

Upcoming Training

May 12, 2026

Tuesday Tip: Farm to Summer: Incorporating Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest
1:30 - 2:00 pm

Are you ready to support farmers and serve fresh foods that are locally grown?

Join this webinar to learn:

- Tips for increasing Georgia grown produce on your menus,
- Ways to engage children through hands-on food & ag education, and
- Ideas for increasing garden-based education.

BONUS: Learn about USDA's Turnip the Beet Award and how to become involved.

Participants can earn one-half [0.5] state-approved hours for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

May 18, 2026

Memo Monday: Best Practices For Delivering Nutritious Meals In Rural Settings

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Do you need a review of best practices for serving quality meals during rural non-congregate meal service?

This webinar will provide a review of the following DECAL memorandums:

- [Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the Summer Food Service Program, January 8, 2025](#)
- [Non-Congregate Meal Service in Rural Areas: Questions and Answers #3, January 10, 2025: Questions and Answers #3, January 10, 2025](#)

[\[Register Now\]](#)

May 28, 2026

PALS Session 5: Goal Setting and Action Planning

1:00 - 2:00 pm

Would you like to review your self-assessment, explore best practices, and identify areas for improvement in physical activity?

This session will help you develop action steps to meet your goals, and you will leave with a plan to improve your physical activity practices.

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 have an issue with registering, contact Leslie Truman before 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 can self-register within GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at (404) 657-1779.

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, documents required for submission, and potential next steps.

Farm to Summer

Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest



Summer in Georgia is a time of agricultural abundance and bountiful harvests, making it the perfect season to connect children and families to fresh, locally grown foods.

Farm to Summer is an initiative that encourages child nutrition programs to feature local fruits, vegetables, and other foods at their peak freshness and flavor while engaging children in hands-on learning experiences that connect them to where their food comes from.

During the summer months, Georgia's farms are harvesting a variety of seasonal produce, including fruits such as peaches, blueberries, watermelon, cantaloupe, and strawberries, and vegetables like tomatoes, sweet corn, cucumbers, squash and zucchini, bell peppers, okra, and eggplant.

Through activities such as gardening, cooking, taste testing, and agriculture-based learning, Farm to Summer helps improve the quality and appeal of summer meals while keeping children nourished, active, and engaged throughout the summer months. Farm to Summer also supports Georgia farmers and communities by strengthening local food systems and building healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

Learn more by attending our upcoming *Tuesday Tip!* training, *Farm to Summer: Incorporating Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest*, on May 12, 2026, from 1:30 pm – 2:00 pm. Register in [GA Atlas](#) or [GaPDS](#) to learn practical ways to incorporate Georgia-grown foods and Farm to Summer activities into your program.

Once you've built your knowledge, it'll be time to celebrate.

The following article will help you plan your Farm to Summer Week celebration.

Save The Date: Farm to Summer Week

June 22 – 26, 2026

A promotional graphic for Farm to Summer Week 2026. The graphic is split into two main sections. The left section shows several white bowls filled with fresh fruits and vegetables, including watermelon, strawberries, blueberries, and cucumbers. The right section is a green background with white and yellow text. At the top right, it says "Nutrition Services" with a logo. Below that, "Farm to Summer Week" is written in large, stylized letters, with "2026" in the middle. Underneath, "June 22 - 26" is written. A blue box contains the text "Themes of the Week" followed by a list: "Monday - What is Farm to Summer?", "Tuesday - Gardening & Physical Activity", "Wednesday - Cooking & Tasting", "Thursday - Locally Grown in Meals & Snacks", and "Friday - Literacy, Music & Movement". At the bottom, it says "Teaching our youngest learners healthy habits that will last a lifetime." and "This institution is an equal opportunity provider." There is also a small circular inset photo of children sitting around a table eating.

DECAL's Nutrition Services will celebrate Farm to Summer Week June 22-26, 2026. Farm to Summer engages kids and families through fun, hands-on experiential learning activities, improves the quality and appeal of summer meals, and increases access to fresh fruits, vegetables, & nourishment during the summer months.

The themes for the week are:

- Monday – What is Farm to Summer?
- Tuesday – Gardening & Physical Activity
- Wednesday – Cooking & Taste Testing
- Thursday – Locally Grown in Meals & Snacks
- Friday – Literacy, Music & Movement

Stay tuned to Nutrition Services' [Farm to Summer Week](#) webpage for materials and resources to use in your celebration.

Physical Activity Corner

Move It May

Throughout May, Happy Helpings providers, families, and communities are encouraged to move more, sit less, and enjoy being active together. In mixed-age settings, activities work best when they can be easily adapted so every child feels successful and engaged.

USDA's [Summer Food, Summer Moves Operator's Activity Guide](#) provides more than 30 fun games and educational activities to do at your summer meal site. Each game includes tips for adjusting the game based on the age of the children, group size, and time available.

You'll find games like:

- **Red Pepper, Green Pepper, Chili Pepper:** Play like red light, green light. Red pepper means stop, green pepper means run, and chili pepper means dance or jump in place.
- **Movies Moves Party Games:** Kids create new dance moves based on their favorite movies. This one's great for indoor play on rainy days.
- **Game Inventors:** Kids work together to invent and present new games to the group.

Family Activity Guides are also available, and are a great option for rural, non-congregate sites to share. Find the full activity guide, family activity guides, posters, and additional resources by visiting the link [here](#).

Let's move it this May. Every movement counts—big or small.

Share Your Story

We'd love to feature your Happy Helpings program in an upcoming newsletter or on social media. Share your stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist Tina McLaren at tina.mclaren@decalfga.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 encourages healthy eating habits by promoting different local, seasonal fruits or vegetables each month.



Visit [EatLearnGrowGA](https://www.eatlearngrowga.com) 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
May	Harvest of the Month: Legumes
May 12	Tuesday Tip: Farm to Summer: Incorporating Georgia's Bountiful Summer Harvest - Webinar
May 15	Deadline to Submit SFSP Application
May 18	Memo Monday: Best practices for delivering nutritious meals in rural settings - Webinar
May 25	State Holiday: Memorial Day
May 28	PALS Session 5: Goal Setting and Action Planning - Webinar
June 2	Tuesday Tip: Let's Hydrate - Webinar
June 9	Building Better Menus: Nutrition Trends You Need to Know - Webinar
June 11	Kick-off event: YMCA of Rome and Floyd County
June 15	Memo Monday: Happy Helpings Policies and Memos - Webinar
June 17	Annual Reconciliation: Happy Helpings Summer Food Service Program - Webinar
June 22-26	Farm to Summer Week

On the next ... **DECAL Download** New Episodes Every Wednesday!

This Week's Topic: **Georgia's Pre-K Summer Transition Program**

Jeff Randa
Project Director for Easter Seals North Georgia

Pam Weiser
Project Director for Fulton County School District

Meghan McNail
Director for Pre-K Instruction and Regional Operations

Devon Porter
Summer Transition Program and Outreach Manager

DECAL Download

Georgia's Pre-K Summer Transition Program

On this week's episode, we're talking about the Georgia's Pre-K Summer Transition Program, a dynamic initiative that is held during June and July, offering high-quality instruction with a focus on

language, literacy, and math. The STP has proven to reduce the achievement gap among young learners and provide essential support for children as they prepare for Pre-K and Kindergarten.

Joining us this week to talk about the Summer Transition Program is Meghan McNail, Director for Pre-K Instruction and Regional Operations, and Devon Porter, Summer Transition Program and Outreach Manager. Also joining us are Jeff Randa, Project Director for Easter Seals North Georgia, and Pam Weiser, Project Director for Fulton County School District.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Adding New Sites After Application Approval](#)
 - [Determining The Correct Form To Use For Excess Funds](#)
 - [2026 Reimbursement Rates](#)
 - [Requesting Advance Payments](#)
 - [Happy Helpings Summit Training Videos](#)
 - [Resources to Promote Meal Sites](#)
 - [New Supplier Change Request](#)
 - [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)
 - [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)
 - [And Justice for All Posters](#)
 - [Resources to Market Meal Sites](#)
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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.



Nutrition Division

Marketing & Outreach

**Cindy Kicklighter
Joann Kilpatrick**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

[Nondiscrimination Statement: English](#)

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