



September 17, 2025

Share Your Feedback about Summer Meals

Respond by September 30



DECAL's Nutrition Services Division appreciates your participation in Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program.

To better understand your experience as a Happy Helpings Sponsor, we have created an end-of-the-season survey. You may choose to respond anonymously or add your name to the survey.

We will use the information to ensure we are providing the resources you need to have a successful summer meals program.

Please click [here](#) or scan the QR code to participate in the survey.

Please respond by September 30, 2025. Again, thank you for your commitment in serving free and healthy meals during the summer months.

Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals

Many existing Happy Helpings sites are well-positioned to offer afterschool meals during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Both organizations and communities benefit when meals are offered to children in low-income communities year-round.

The opportunity for sponsors to transition to At-Risk Afterschool Meals, a component of CACFP, is upon us. Here are a few things to consider:

- An application for Happy Helpings sponsors transitioning to CACFP is required upon initial entry to the CACFP. General updates and annual renewal will be required thereafter.
- As part of the current ATLAS CACFP application process, Happy Helpings sponsors are required to sign a CACFP agreement in addition to their existing agreement.
- Sponsors are required to adhere to all monitoring requirements.
- Sponsors are required to attend training.

If you have questions or are interested in registering for training, please contact [Leslie Truman](#) at 404.657.1779

Happy Helpings Reconciliation Due October 31

Annual Year-End Reconciliation Requirement for FY2025

Happy Helpings (May 2025-August 2025)

Institutions operating FY2025 Happy Helpings Summer Food Program (May 2025- Aug 2025) must complete an Annual Reconciliation Form. **The form and financial document are due October 31.**

If you haven't already done so, please submit the requested documents to avoid any delays in FY2026 Happy Helpings approval.

The reconciliation form and supporting financial documentation should be submitted together to nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov. **Include the name of the institution and agreement number in the subject line of the email.**

Please review the [reconciliation form](#) and [instructions](#).

Contact the budget team at nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov with any questions.

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.

Are you interested in serving children nutritious meals year-round? Happy Helpings sites are well-positioned to offer afterschool meals during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). To learn more, please listen to the [November 2024 Memo Monday](#) webinar recording that discussed transitioning from the Summer Food Service Program to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-risk Afterschool Meals.

Training & Technical Assistance Team Announces New Roles



Nkem Ijeh promoted to Training Coordinator

We are thrilled to announce that Nkem Ijeh has been promoted to Training Coordinator.

Nkem has been an integral part of Nutrition Services for the past six years, providing outstanding training, technical assistance, guidance, and user-friendly resources to Child Nutrition (CN) Program operators in her previous role as the North/Northwest Technical Assistance Coordinator & Trainer.

A proud Georgia State University graduate, Nkem earned her bachelor's degree in Psychology before completing her Master in Public Health at Mercer University School of Medicine. Her career spans maternal and child health, education, and promotion—including leadership positions—all rooted in her commitment to serving families and supporting the health and wellness of children.

"Nkem is passionate about learning, sharing knowledge, and empowering providers to make meaningful connections that improve community health and family well-being. Her dedication to child advocacy and her ability to turn information into practical, impactful training make her an incredible asset to our team," says Grushan Blake, Nutrition Services Training Manager.

We are excited to welcome Nkem into this new role and confident that her expertise, energy, and passion will continue to strengthen our mission and our impact.

Leatha Bryant promoted to Lead Technical Assistance Coordinator & Trainer

We are delighted to announce the promotion of Leatha Bryant from Technical Assistance Coordinator & Trainer to Lead Technical Assistance Coordinator & Trainer.

Leatha has been with Nutrition for three years, consistently exceeding expectations in customer service, teamwork, training, and providing high-quality technical assistance to both internal and external stakeholders.



Bringing more than 20 years of management experience, Leatha has a strong background in leading teams, implementing quality improvement systems, and coaching and mentoring key personnel. She holds an associate's degree in organizational management and a Bachelor of Science in psychology from Troy University. In 2024, she served on the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) Task Force, where she played a vital role in re-designing training modules. In addition, she is a certified trainer for the State of Georgia.

“Leatha is passionate about helping others, sharing new policies and techniques, and equipping providers with the tools they need to meet program expectations while staying in compliance. Beyond her professional expertise, she is also deeply committed to mentoring youth and young adults, supporting their personal and professional growth,” says Grushan Blake, Nutrition Services Training Manager.

We are proud to promote such a dedicated and talented team member and look forward to the transformative contributions Leatha will continue to bring to Nutrition in her new role.



No Kid Hungry: Non-Congregate Summer Meals Sponsor Survey *Deadline extended! Open until September 26*

This short 20-minute survey is your chance to share what worked, the challenges you faced, and ideas to make next summer even stronger. Don't miss this opportunity to have your voice heard!

Complete it [here](#) by September 26, 2025



Nutrition Ed Nook *It's a Pepper Party!*

The September Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) feature is peppers!

These vibrant fruits come in many shapes, sizes, colors, and flavors, and they are used in cuisines all over the world. Scientifically, peppers are considered fruits because they contain seeds and grow from flowering plants.

Bell peppers & hot peppers are excellent sources of vitamins C and B6. A single bell pepper provides about 169% of the recommended daily intake of vitamin C, while a hot pepper provides around 72%. As peppers ripen, their levels of vitamins A and C increase. This means sweet peppers become sweeter, and hot peppers become hotter. You can tell a pepper is ripening when its color changes from green to red, yellow, orange, or even purple.

There are many types of peppers to explore. Bell peppers are sweet and come in colors like green, red, yellow, orange, and purple. Banana peppers are mild and often used in salads or pickled. Poblano peppers have a mild to medium heat and are great for roasting or stuffing. Jalapeños are medium in heat and commonly used in salsas. Serrano peppers are hotter than jalapeños and are often used in sauces. Habanero peppers are very hot and have a fruity flavor, while the Carolina Reaper is currently the hottest pepper in the world.

In Georgia, bell peppers are harvested in both the spring and fall. They are typically available from mid-June through October. Locally grown peppers are often fresher, more flavorful, and more affordable than those transported from other regions.

Fun Fact: Jalapenos are one of the most common peppers found around the world! Did you know that they are the only peppers to have ever been to space? In the 1980s, astronauts on the Columbia space shuttle took Jalapenos into space!

Integration:

- [Fiesta Wrap](#)
- [Bell Pepper Pizza](#)
- [Chunky Black Bean Dip](#)
- [Eggplant and Pepper Dip](#)
- [Stuffed Peppers with Turkey and Vegetables](#)

Education:

- **Watch** the [Learn Fruits and Vegetables for Kids: The Bell Pepper](#) video. In this episode, participants get to know the bell pepper better and have fun!
- **Taste Test** a variety of colorful peppers. Provide slices of sweet bell peppers in colors such as red, yellow, orange, and green. Encourage children to use their senses to explore the different peppers. Create an observation chart in a centralized area where participants can share their descriptions of the peppers.
- **Read** aloud [Armadilly Chili](#) by Helen Ketteman. Miss Billie Armadilly is hankering to make a pot of chili! Only she has to make it by herself because Tex the tarantula, Mackie the bluebird and Taffy the horned toad are too busy to lend a hand. But then the smell of chili brings all of her friends back to Miss Billie's door. What's an armadillo to do?
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as washing and cleaning peppers for a meal.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate peppers into their meals! Check [Pinterest](#) for recipe inspiration.
- **Want ECE pepper-themed resources?** Check out Quality Care for Children's [Harvest of the Month toolkit](#) for more ways to engage ECE students.

Conversation:

- Have your program participants eaten peppers before?
- What peppers have they tried?
- Which peppers do they like the most?

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

Physical Activity Corner

Family Engagement Through Physical Activity

Physical activity, exploration, and play are critical for all ages, especially our youngest learners. Through

this, children develop coordination and strong, healthy bodies and exercise their minds through sensory play including touching, reaching, grasping, and exploring.

Play is one of the main ways that children learn, develop, and grow. Each new phase of physical activity development brings new opportunities for learning and development. An infant might explore by touching, grasping, banging something, or crawling. A toddler might explore by walking or climbing. Young children are naturally curious and excited to learn about their surrounding environment.

According to CDC, physical fun such as free unstructured games during playtime helps develop children's motor and coordination skills, prevent childhood obesity, and build social and emotional intelligence. A child builds their confidence in a safe enjoyable environment.

Enjoy these fun ideas to get our younger children moving:

- Provide child-friendly sports equipment, like **balls**, **poly spots** or **throwable beanbags**.
- Make time for **outdoor play** at a park or **playground**, in the backyard, on a beach or at a football field. Moving around on various surfaces develops strength, balance, and coordination.
- Make an obstacle course or **treasure hunt**.
- Provide chalk to draw outside with a child.
- Go for a **nature walk**. This gets a child moving, and they can also collect leaves, sticks, or pebbles for crafts or pretend play when you get home.
- Younger children can practice coordinating the small movements of their fingers through playdough, blocks, and drawing activities.

Providing children with plenty of opportunities to play is one of the best ways to help them grow into curious, creative, healthy, and happy adults equipped with the skills they need today.

Integration:

- **Georgia's Early Care and Learning Standards (GELDS)– Songs, movement, and play**
- **Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS)**
- **Playgrounds in Georgia**
- **Active Play: Healthy Habits Start Early**
- **CDC – Making Physical Activity a Part of a Child's Life**

Education:

- **Read** aloud, ***Are You Ready to Play Outside?*** by Mo Willems.
- **Watch** the video on Movement and Play: **Play-based Learning with Dr. Peter Gray**.
- **Talk** with families about ways to bring parents, educators, and communities promote physical activity on movement and play all year round, whether at home, outside, in their local community, at your childcare site, or at their local community recreational areas.
- **Bonus:** Share #ActivePlay, #OutdoorGames, #MovementandPlay, #MoveYourWay, and #LovePlay pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What is movement and play in early childhood?
- How do you engage parents, educators, and staff to engage in physical activity (indoor/outdoor)?



- How do you play with children of different ages?
- Why are family engagement, movement, and play important in physical activity?

Share your #ActivePlay, #OutdoorGames, #MovementandPlay, #MoveYourWay and #LovePlay 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](https://www.doe.ga.gov/harvest-of-the-month).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
September	Harvest of the Month: Peppers
September 26	Deadline to Submit: No Kid Hungry: Non-Congregate Summer Meals Sponsor Survey
September 30	Deadline to submit Happy Helpings Survey
October 31	Deadline to submit Happy Helpings Annual Year-End Reconciliation

Decal Download

Adaptive Learning Mini-Grants

DECAL's Inclusion and Behavior Support Program has introduced an exciting initiative, the Adaptive Learning Mini Grant. It's an opportunity that will assist in building inclusive environments where every child, regardless of ability, can thrive. In this episode we will hear from both staff members and a grant recipient, exploring their perspectives, experiences, and the real-world impacts of this program.



Joining us on this episode of DECAL Download to talk about the Adaptive Learning Mini Grants is Peggy Sutton, the Inclusion and Behavior Support Regional Supervisor, and Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist, Jenn Dover and Esther Whitaker. We are also joined by Shaheen Ehani, the Director at Kids Galaxy of Marietta, and Abby Brooke, the Assistant Director of Doodlebugs Childcare. Both are recipients of the grant. Our final guest is

Stephanie Royal, she is a parent whose child attends Doodlebugs Childcare.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Added New Sites After Application Approval](#)
- [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?](#)
- [2025 SFSP Reimbursement Rates](#)
- [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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