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Area **Memo: Meals/  
Food Service**  
Programs **SFSP**

## Meal Service Requirements in the Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers (Revised)



### Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidance on meal service requirements in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). This memorandum currently supersedes USDA Policy Memorandum SP 052016, SFSP 05-2016, *Meal Service Requirements in the Summer Meal Programs, with Questions and Answers*, November 12, 2015 and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) Policy Memorandum, *Summer Meal Programs Meal Service Requirements Q&As – December 11, 2015*. Parts of this memorandum were rescinded pursuant to USDA Policy Memorandum, SFSP 01-2019. The revisions included guidance on the updated CACFP meal patterns and the impacts on the SFSP, guidance on the order in which meals must be served to be eligible for reimbursement, and flexibilities on the timing of meal service when extenuating circumstances occur.

This memorandum was also revised to cite regulatory language codified pursuant to the September 19, 2022 Final Rule - Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program. Pursuant to 7 CFR 225.16(f)(1)(ii), only School Food Authority (SFA) sponsors are permitted to utilize offer versus serve. SFAs must apply the use of offer versus serve under the rules followed for the National School Lunch Program or the SFSP. In addition meal service time guidance is provided as well as guidance pertaining to taking food items off-site for consumption.

As a result of the Interim Final Rule, Establishing the Summer EBT Program and Rural Non-Congregate Option in the Summer Meals Program, revisions to this memorandum were made to conform to current SFSP regulations regarding meal service time requirements for rural non-congregate SFSP sites.

# Legal Authority

7 CFR 225; Interim Final Rule, Establishing the Summer EBT Program and Rural Non-Congregate Option in the Summer Meals Program; Final Rule - Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program; USDA Policy Memorandum SFSP 01-2019 (rescinding parts of USDA Policy Memorandum SP 10-2017, SFSP 06-2017)

## Cross reference/See also

DECAL Policy Memorandum, *Summer Food Service Program Memoranda – Waiver Rescission, March 28, 2019 (v.3)*

## I. General Meal Service Requirements

### Meal Service Times

In an effort to simplify Program management, in October, 2011, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) issued a waiver of meal service time requirements under 7 CFR 225.16(c) At that time, there were no Federal time limits placed on the duration of a meal service and no Federal requirements pertaining to the amount of time that must elapse between the beginning of one meal service and the beginning of the next which provided sponsors greater flexibility to meet local needs. However, sponsors were to continue to establish meal times for each site and provide this information to the State agency to allow for effective oversight [7 CFR 225.6(c) (2)(ii) and (3)(ii)].

### Current Meal Service Times Requirements

On September 19, 2022 the Final Rule - Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) ("Final Rule") was issued which advised of the codification of rules regarding meal service times in the SFSP. Federal regulation, 7 CFR 225.16(c), advises of the following:

- **Documentation of meal service times:**
  - Meal service times must be established by sponsors for each site;
  - Included in the sponsor's application; and
  - Approved by DECAL.
- **Timing of meal services:**
  - Breakfast meals must be served at or close to the beginning of a child's day, and cannot be served after lunch or supper.
  - At all sites except residential camps, meals services must start at least one hour after the end of the previous meal or snack.

DECAL must approve any permanent or planned changes in meal service times; however, a State agency may approve meal services outside the prior approved meal service times or dates/days of operation only if an unanticipated event, outside of the sponsor's control, occurs (ex. delayed meal deliveries, inclement weather that delays the start of the meal service, delayed public transportation utilized by participants, and other incidents as deemed appropriate by the State agency). Sponsors must notify their Application Specialist of the

unanticipated event by phone or email within 24 hours of that event. DECAL may request documentation to support approval of meals claimed when an unanticipated event occurs. If documentation of an unanticipated event is requested by DECAL and no documentation is provided by the sponsor, the meals served outside the prior approved meal service times or operation dates/days will not be eligible for reimbursement.

Meals served outside the prior approved meal service times or prior approved dates/days of operation are not eligible for reimbursement. With the exception of the above-mentioned unanticipated event requirements, DECAL cannot retroactively approve changes of meal service times or operation dates/days to accommodate meals that have already been served.

- **Timing of meal deliveries:**

- If meals are not prepared on site, meal deliveries must arrive before the approved meal service time; and
- Must be delivered within one hour of the start of the meal service if the site does not have adequate storage to hold hot or cold meals at the temperatures required by State or local health regulations.

It should be noted that per the Final Rule, the USDA determined that it would be beneficial to SFSP participants and sponsors for the timing of meals that students have when school is not in session to more closely align with the meal service that students have when school is in session. USDA recognizes that some sponsors have found it useful to serve breakfast at unconventional hours. However, having summer meal services that mirror those held during the school year, such as holding breakfast service before lunch, reduces confusion in program operations and provides program participants with a consistent meal service experience year-round.

However, FNS encourages sponsors to establish meal service times that best accommodate operational requirements and the needs of participating children. Additionally, FNS encourages State agencies to approve meal times that give sponsors flexibility to accommodate operational challenges, such as children arriving early or late for meal service, while fulfilling Program requirements. One best practice that FNS encourages is for sponsors and State agencies to implement approving a longer meal service time, for example from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., but advertising a shorter meal time, such as 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. This allows sponsors to serve children who may arrive early or late for the advertised meal time, but still operate within the approved meal service time.

\* Please note that meal service requirements, including meal times, differ for school food authorities (SFA) participating in the SSO. Specifically, schools operating SSO must adhere to the NSLP and SBP meal time and meal pattern requirements. These requirements are outlined in the 2017 Edition of Questions and Answers for the National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/policy>.

### **Rural Non-Congregate Sites and Meal Service Times Requirements**

Per 7 CFR 225.16(b)(5)(iii), sponsors of sites that are approved to provide non-congregate meals in rural areas with no congregate meal service must comply with meal service time requirements; however, not all meal service time requirements pertaining to SFSP are required of rural non-congregate sites.

Approved rural non-congregate meal service sites must adhere to the following meal service time

requirements per 7 CFR 225.16(c):

- Meal service times must be established by sponsors for each site, included in the sponsor's application, and approved by the State agency;
- Meals served outside the prior approved meal service time or prior approved dates/days of operation are not eligible for reimbursement; however meals may be approved for reimbursement by the State agency only if an unanticipated event, outside the sponsor's control, occurs. State agencies may request documentation to support approval of meals claimed when an unanticipated event occurs. Please review the applicable information/procedures regarding unanticipated events under the above-mentioned 'Current Meal Service Times Requirements'.
- The State agency must approve any permanent or planned changes in meal service times.

The following SFSP meal service time requirements are not applicable to approved rural non-congregate sites per 7 CFR 225.16(c):

- Breakfast meals must be served at or close to the beginning of a child's day. Three component meals served after a lunch or supper meal service are not eligible for reimbursement as a breakfast;
- Meal services must start at least one hour after the end of the previous meal or snack;
- Meal deliveries must arrive before the approved meal service time; and
- Meals must be delivered within an hour of the start of the meal service if the site does not have adequate storage to hold hot or cold meals at the temperatures required by the State or local health regulations.

## **Number and Type of Reimbursable Meals**

Restrictions in SFSP on the number and type of meals that may be served each day, as established by 7 CFR 225.16(b), are as follows:

- With State agency approval, sponsors of open, restricted open, and enrolled sites may serve up to two meals each day. Meal combinations consisting of a lunch and supper are not allowable. Allowable combinations include:
  - Breakfast and lunch
  - Breakfast and supper
  - Breakfast and snack
  - Lunch and snack
  - Supper and snack
  - Two snacks
- With State agency approval, camp or migrant site sponsors may serve up to three meals each day. Allowable combinations include:
  - Breakfast, lunch, and supper
  - Breakfast, lunch, and snack
  - Breakfast, supper, and snack
  - Lunch, supper, and snack

- **Please Note:** DECAL cannot retroactively approve changes in meal types to accommodate meals that have already been served.

## II. Types of Meal Service

### Offer Versus Serve for SFA Sponsors

Offer versus serve (OVS) is a concept that applies to menu planning and meal service which allows children to decline some of the food offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper, excluding snacks. The goals of OVS are to simplify Program administration and reduce food waste and costs while maintaining the nutritional integrity of the SFSP meal that is served. **Pursuant to 7 CFR 225.16(f)(1)(ii), only school food authorities (SFAs) that are SFSP sponsors may utilize OVS.**

For a meal to be eligible for reimbursement, all food components in the required minimum serving sizes must be offered. A food component is one of the food groups that comprise a reimbursable meal. SFSP sites must always offer all the food components that comprise a reimbursable meal in at least the minimum required amounts. A food item is a specific food offered within the food components comprising the reimbursable meal. For example, separate ½ cup servings of peaches and pears are two food items that comprise one component, the fruit and vegetable component.

Participating SFA sponsors wishing to utilize OVS must complete and submit to DECAL the *Offer Versus Option for School Food Authorities (SFA)* form that can be found [here](#) and on DECAL's website.

All SFAs participating in SFSP that elect to follow the SFSP meal patterns are required to follow the SFSP OVS requirements. Due to the distinguishing nature of the SFSP and NSLP, including variations in settings and resources, the OVS requirements in SFSP are different from the OVS requirements in NSLP. In order to ensure that children are receiving enough food to meet their nutritional needs, OVS requirements in SFSP are as follows:

- **Breakfast.** The following four items must be offered from all three components specified in the meal pattern:
  - One serving of fruit/vegetable,
  - One serving of bread/bread alternate,
  - One serving of fluid milk, and
  - One additional serving of fruit/vegetable, bread/bread alternate, or a serving of a meat/meat alternate.

All the food items offered must be different from each other and a child may be permitted to decline one food item.

- **Lunch or Supper.** The following four food components must be offered through at least five different food items from all four components specified in the meal pattern:
  - One serving of meat/meat alternate,
  - Two servings of fruit and/or vegetables (two different food items),
  - One serving of bread/bread alternate, and
  - One serving of fluid milk.

All the food items offered must be different from each other and a child may be permitted to

decline two components.

Offering two servings of the same food item is not permissible under OVS in SFSP. All food items offered must be different from each other. For example, a breakfast menu that includes a serving of milk, a serving of fruit, and two servings of toast is not a reimbursable meal under OVS in SFSP because the toast is two of the same food item. Similarly, if the breakfast menu included two different kinds of cereal rather than toast, it would still not be a reimbursable meal because the cereals, although not identical, are the same food item. Additionally, a larger food item that is worth two servings in weight, such as a two ounce muffin, counts as only one food item under OVS in SFSP, not two. Offering different food items supports and encourages the practice of offering a variety of food choices for children, which increases the likelihood that children will select foods they prefer and reduces waste.

OVS is an option for SFA sponsors, not a requirement. SFA sponsors must indicate their intention to utilize OVS on the sponsor or site application. State agencies may not institute a statewide ban on OVS. However, specific SFA sponsors may be restricted from utilizing the option on a case by case basis. If a State agency denies a SFA sponsor's request to use OVS in SFSP, the SFA sponsor may not appeal the decision. The SFA sponsor may submit another request the next operating year.

SFA sponsors that elect to use the NSLP or School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal pattern and SFAs operating SSO are required to follow the OVS requirements of NSLP and SBP. For more information, see 7 CFR 210.10(e), 7 CFR 220.8(e), and SP 57-2014, Updated Offer versus Serve Guidance for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program in School Year 2014-2015 at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-versus-serve-guidance-national-school-lunch-program-and-school-breakfast-program>.

### **OVS and Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services**

As with congregate meal services, only SFAs may operate OVS at non-congregate meal service sites. SFAs are reminded when implementing OVS, a child or parent, if the site is approved for parent/guardian pick-up, must be able to decline component(s)/food item(s) offered as per OVS requirements.

### **Family Style Meal Service**

Family style is a type of meal service that allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults setting the example. Camps and closed enrolled sites in SFSP have the option of utilizing family style meal service. Both camps and closed enrolled sites provide the stable environment required for a successful family style meal service to provide nutritious meals to children and promote healthy eating habits through the personal example provided by supervising adults.

FNS Instruction 783-3, Revision 1, Family Style Meal Service in the Summer Food Service Program, issued in August 1986, limits the family style meal service option to camps, which are stated as the only appropriate setting due to a camp's stable environment for enrolled children. In December 2000, the definition of closed enrolled sites was codified in 7 CFR 225.2 as a site open only to enrolled children, as opposed to the community at large. Because closed enrolled sites provide a stable environment for enrolled children and an appropriate setting for family style meal service, FNS extended the option of family style meal service to closed enrolled sites in the SFSP in summer 2015. However, family style meal service is still prohibited at open and open restricted sites in the SFSP.

Family style meal service affords sponsors latitude in the size of the initial servings because replenishment



is immediately available at each table. In SFSP, this latitude must be exercised in compliance with the following practices, at a minimum:

1. A sufficient amount of food must be placed on each table to provide the required portions of each of the food components, including milk, as outlined in 7 CFR 225.16, for all children at the table and to accommodate Program adults supervising the meal service, if they eat with the children.
2. Children are allowed the choice in selecting foods and the size of the initial serving. Children should initially be offered the full required portion of each meal component.
3. When a child does not initially accept the full required portion of a meal component, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each child to accept the service of the full required portion for each food component of the meal pattern. For example, if a child initially refuses a food component, or initially does not take the full required portion of a meal component, the supervising adult should offer the food component to the child again.

As a reminder, all meal components must be served at the same time including when meals are served family style. These requirements are in line with family style meal service guidance in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Family style meal service allows children to identify and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus, while developing a positive attitude toward nutritious foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits. Even when a complete family style meal service is not possible or practical, it may be useful to offer a component or components in a family style manner, particularly when smaller children are being served or when a new food item is being introduced.

## **Multi-Day Distribution at Approved Rural Non-Congregate Sites**

Multi-day meal distribution is an available meal distribution method for SFSP sponsors that are eligible for rural non-congregate meal services. This distribution option may be used with either the meal pick-up or home delivery meal service methods. The distribution must only be conducted for the allowable number of reimbursable meals for up to a 10-calendar day period per 7 CFR 225.6(h)(3)(v) and 7 CFR 225.16(i)(1).

Sponsors electing this option must have documented procedures, submitted with their application, that will ensure that the proper number of meals are distributed to each eligible child, per 7 CFR 225.16(i)(1). It should also be noted, a non-congregate meal service operation distributing more than the daily meal limit when multi-day meal service is used is a serious deficiency included within 7 CFR 225.11(c)(4).

With multi-day meal distribution, sponsors may provide multiple unitized meals to participants or provide food items in bulk. Bulk food items in the non-congregate meal service would be considered specific food items provided in larger quantity than required for a single meal service. For example, a loaf of bread and a package of luncheon meat may be distributed as bulk items instead of pre-assembled into individual sandwiches. A unitized meal is a meal that is individually portioned, packaged, and served as a unit; beverages such as milk or juice may be packaged separately, but served with the unitized meal.

### **Bulk Distribution of Food Items**

Per 7 CFR 225.16(i)(3), approved self-preparation sponsors may provide bulk food items; and if electing to distribute food items in bulk, sponsors must meet the safety, service, and integrity standards of the SFSP.

State agencies and sponsors are required to ensure the following with regard to bulk meal distribution per 7 CFR 225.16(i)(3):

- The maximum number of reimbursable meals provided to a child does not exceed the number of meals that could be provided over a 5-calendar day period; and
- Required food components in the proper minimum amounts for each reimbursable meal are being served;
- Food items that contribute to a reimbursable meal are clearly identifiable;
- Menus are provided and clearly indicate the food items and portion sizes for each reimbursable meal; and
- Food preparation, such as heating or warming, is minimal. Sponsors may offer food items that require further preparation only with State agency and FNS approval.

Sponsors should also follow the USDA guidance, [Offering Multiple Meals as Part of Summer Non-Congregate Meal Service](#).

For further information regarding rural non-congregate meals, please see the DECAL memorandum, [Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the Summer Food Service Program](#).

### III. Meal Pattern Flexibilities

#### Age-Appropriate Meals

FNS recognizes that the SFSP meal pattern minimum serving sizes, which are designed for children ages 6 through 12 years old, may not be suitable for all children attending the summer site. Active teenagers may be hungrier than younger children and feel that the portion sizes are too small. Conversely, for children younger than 6 years old, the serving sizes may be excessive. Under these circumstances, SFSP sponsors may be approved to follow more age-appropriate meal patterns.

- **Meals for Children 12 through 18 years old.** Because teenagers have greater food needs, SFSP regulations allow sponsors to serve larger portion sizes than the minimum serving sizes specified in the SFSP meal pattern [7 CFR 225.16(d)]. Additionally, sponsors serving teenagers may serve the adult-size portions found in the CACFP regulations under 7 CFR 226.20(c). It is important to note that there are no maximum limits on any of the food components in the SFSP meal pattern. As a reminder, extra foods may always be served to improve the nutrition of participating children, in addition to the food necessary to meet the meal pattern requirements. However, meals containing additional foods or larger portion sizes than the minimum required serving size receive the same reimbursement rate as regular SFSP meals. See question number 5 in Attachment A for more information about serving larger portion sizes and additional foods.
- **Meals for Children Under 6 Years Old.** The SFSP regulations allow State agencies to authorize sponsors to follow the CACFP meal pattern requirements [7 CFR 226.20] for children under six years old, which include smaller portions sizes than are indicated in the SFSP meal pattern [7 CFR 225.16(f)(2)]. The sponsor must be able to ensure that each age group is receiving the appropriate minimum serving sizes indicated in the CACFP meal patterns. Food should always be of a texture and a consistency that is appropriate for the age and development of the children being served. For example, fruit should be cut into smaller pieces so that it is easier for younger children to eat.



- **Infants.** If a sponsor wishes to serve infants (birth to 11 months of age), they must first receive approval from their State agency [7 CFR 225.16(f)(2)]. Once approved to serve meals to infants, sponsors must follow the CACFP infant meal pattern requirements [7 CFR 226.20(b)].

Sponsors that follow the CACFP meal pattern requirements must be that the CACFP meal pattern requirements were updated. On April 25, 2016 USDA's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) published the final rule "Child and Adult Care Food Program: Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010" (81 FR 24348) to update the CACFP meal patterns in 7 CFR 226.20. Program operators, including SFSP sponsors and CACFP centers and day care homes that follow the CACFP meal patterns, were to comply with the updated meal patterns no later than October 1, 2017. SFSP sponsors following the CACFP meal patterns were to comply with the updated meal patterns in Summer 2018.

## Historical Information on the Updated CACFP Meal Pattern Requirements

Similar to CACFP centers and day care homes, FNS recognized that some SFSP sponsors may have been interested in implementing the updated CACFP meal patterns in Summer 2017. In recognizing the benefits of and Program operators' interest to have implemented the updated meal patterns prior to October 1, 2017, FNS provided guidance on how to implement the updated meal patterns in the memorandum SP 42-2016, CACFP 14-2016 *Early Implementation of the Updated Child and Adult Care Food Program Meal Pattern Requirements and the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs' Infant and Preschool Meal Patterns* ([http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP42\\_CACFP14\\_2016os.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP42_CACFP14_2016os.pdf)).

The early implementation options outlined in SP 42-2016, CACFP 14-2016 were also available to SFSP sponsors following the CACFP meal pattern requirements. State agencies were provided expansive discretion to determine what was feasible for their CNP operators in relation to implementing the updated CACFP meal patterns. Therefore, SFSP sponsors could have taken advantage of any specific allowances a State agency elected to allow state-wide prior to October 1, 2017 and claim those meals for reimbursement. In addition, State agencies may have approved SFSP sponsors to implement the entire updated CACFP meal pattern requirements in Summer 2017.

FNS emphasized that State agencies could not disallow meals solely because they were not compliant with the updated CACFP meal patterns until the updated CACFP meal patterns were implemented on October 1, 2017. This would have applied even for those States choosing to implement one or both of the early implementation options in SP 42-2016, CACFP 14-2016. In all cases, meals that met the current CACFP meal pattern requirements were not be disallowed prior to October 1, 2017.

## SFAs Participating in SFSP

SFAs participating in SFSP are allowed the flexibility of following the NSLP or SBP meal pattern requirements instead of the SFSP meal patterns [7 CFR 225.16(f)(1)(i)]. SFAs may begin following the NSLP or SBP meal pattern requirements at any time during the year. If an SFA chooses to make this switch, the SFA must notify its State agency, but the SFA does not need prior approval from the State agency. This flexibility allows SFAs to seamlessly continue implementation of NSLP or SBP meal pattern requirements year-round.

Participating SFA sponsors must complete and submit to DECAL the *Offer Versus Option for School Food Authorities (SFA)* form attached to this memorandum and located on DECAL's website advising of which meal pattern will be used in their SFSP Programs.

## Meals Served to Adults

Sponsors have the discretion to serve meals to anyone. Only meals served to children may be claimed as reimbursable meals. Along with children ages 18 years and younger, SFSP regulations at 7 CFR 225.2 also defines children as persons over 18 years of age who are determined by the State or local educational agency or a local public education agency as having a mental or physical disability and who participate during the school year in a public or private non-profit school program established for the mentally or physically disabled. Therefore, meals served to any person who meets the above definition may be claimed as reimbursable meals.

Meals served to adults, other than those provided for in 7 CFR 225.2, must be reported differently than those served to children, depending on the classification of the adult served, as either a Program or a non-Program adult. The classification between the meal services requirements are as follows:

- *Program Adults* work directly with the meal service at the site as either volunteers or paid employees. Meals may be served free to adults who meet this definition. Meals served to Program adults cannot be claimed for reimbursement but they may be counted as an operating costs [7 CFR 225.9(d)(5)].
- *Non-Program Adults* do not work in any direct way with the meal service at the site, such as a parent or guardian. Sponsors have the option to serve meals to non-Program adults at no charge or charge the full cost of the meal. The cost of meals served to non-Program adults may be counted as part of the sponsor's operating costs only if the adult pays, or non-Program funds cover, the full cost of the meal and the money received is reported as income to the Program [7 CFR 225.2 definition of Income accruing to the program]. If meals are served to non-Program adults, sponsors must either charge the adults at least the full cost of the meal, (including food and non-food supplies, labor, and the value of commodities), or use other non-Program funds to cover the cost of these meals. When using non-Program funds to cover the cost of these meals, the sponsor may include those funds as Program income and pay for these meal costs from its nonprofit food service account.

Additionally, when a sponsor chooses to serve meals to adults, the following rules must be observed:

- All children (including any person who meets the definition of children in 7 CFR 225.2) must be fed first;
- Income from the sale of adult meals and non-Program funds used to pay for adult meals must be documented as income to the Program to offset documented costs; and
- Meals served to children (including second meals), Program adults, and non-Program adults must be counted and recorded separately on the daily meal count form.

The calculation of meal costs should be based on the full cost of producing the meal (i.e., food, supplies, labor, and other costs incurred by the sponsor). Sponsors also should include the value of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foods used to prepare the meal or this value may be based on the current year annual entitlement per meal value of USDA Foods.

## Leftover Meals

All sponsors must plan, prepare, and order meals with the objective of providing one meal per child at each meal service, and must ensure that entire meals and food components are not leftover and unusable on a frequent basis. Sponsors should regularly monitor and compare site reports on the number of attending

children and the number of delivered meals to reduce waste and cost. When sites have leftover food, sponsors should promptly adjust orders to more accurately reflect the actual number of meal service participants. Additionally, all alternatives permitted by Program regulations and State and local health and sanitation codes should be exhausted before discarding food.

FNS encourages State agencies to support efforts by sponsors to minimize food waste. Some options may include:

- *Transferring Meals*: Extra meals may be transferred, if allowed by the local health code, from one site with excess meals to another site with a shortage.
- *Seconds*: When all children in attendance at the site have received one meal, sponsors may serve and claim reimbursement for second servings of complete meals of up to two percent of the number of first meals served to children, for each meal type, for all sites, during a claiming period [7 CFR 225.9(d)(4)]. Note, second meals may be disallowed if the State agency determines that the sponsor has failed to plan and prepare or order meals with the objective of providing only one meal per child at each meal service [7 CFR 225.15(b)(4)].
- *Share Table*: Sponsors may designate a "share table" or stations where children may return whole items that they choose not to eat, provided that this is in compliance with local and State health and safety codes. Unopened, unused, whole food items left on the share table are then available to other children who may want additional helpings. This practice may be facilitated by serving meal components that can be easily "recycled." For example, if an apple is served as part of a meal, a child can return the apple to the share table.
  - When equipment is available, complete meals and nonperishable components that remain on a share table may be appropriately stored for later service. All recycled food items must be stored in accordance with State and local health and safety codes and must be documented. Please check with your State and local health department or food service codes regarding sharing tables. For more information, please refer to SP 41-2016, CACFP 13-2016, SFSP 15-2016 Memorandum, *The Use of Share Tables in Child Nutrition Programs*, June 22, 2016 located at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/use-share-tables-child-nutrition-programs>.
- *Donations*: When it is not feasible to reuse leftovers or store food, FNS encourages sponsors to consider donating it to non-profit organizations working to address hunger in the community, such as homeless shelters, food banks, and food pantries. Sponsors may also choose to send comply with State and local health and sanitation codes.
  - Although donated meals, including non-reimbursable meals or meal components sent home with children, may not be claimed for reimbursement in the SFSP, food donation avoids unnecessary waste and can save expensive disposal and storage costs. Additionally, by collaborating with other hunger organizations, sponsors can expand the reach of these important programs and build networks that better serve the community. Sponsors should refer to SP 11-2012, CACFP 052012, SFSP 07-2012, *Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs*, February 3, 2012, at [Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs | Food and Nutrition Service](#), for more information.

## Taking Meal Components Offsite

SFSP regulations require sponsors to ensure children consume meals at the site [7 CFR 225.6(e)(15)].

Therefore, meals must be consumed onsite in order to be eligible for reimbursement, unless the meal is served on a State agency approved field trip or offsite consumption is otherwise approved by FNS. In extenuating circumstances, sponsors may allow offsite consumption of meals as long as meals taken offsite are not claimed for reimbursement. Failure to meet this "congregate feeding" requirement results in the disallowance of meals and may lead to a determination of serious deficiency of the sponsor's operation of the Program [7 CFR 225.11(c)(4)].

However, as per 7 CFR 225.16(h) sponsors may allow a child to take one fruit, vegetable, or grain item off-site for later consumption without prior State agency approval provided that all applicable State and local health, safety, and sanitation standards will be met. Sponsors should only allow an item to be taken off-site if the site has adequate staffing to properly administer and monitor the site. In addition, the food item taken off-site must be from the child's own meal or left on a "share table" by another child who did not want it. A State agency may prohibit individual sponsors on a case-by-case basis from using this option if the State agency determines that the sponsor's ability to provide adequate oversight is in question. The State agency's decision to prohibit a sponsor from utilizing this option is not an appealable action.

Originally, FNS permitted sponsors to allow children to take only a fruit or vegetable off site with prior State agency approval. In October 2013, FNS extended this option to all sponsors without prior State agency approval and expanded the eligible food items to include grains [SFSP 08-2014 SP 08-2014 Meal Service Requirements, November 12, 2013]. In September 2022, the Final Rule - Streamlining Program Requirements and Improving Integrity in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) codified the flexibility for off-site consumption of a fruit, vegetable, or grain item by SFSP participants.

It is important to keep in mind that congregate meal services are limited to the requirements noted above regarding the particular items that may be taken off-site. Sites must be approved by DECAL to conduct rural non-congregate meal services in order for a child to take all required meal components off-site for later consumption.

## Questions and Answers

### Meal Service Requirements in Summer Meal Programs

#### A. Meal Service

- 1. What are some ways sponsors can improve the quality of the meals they serve?** There are a variety of strategies and resources available to help improve the quality of meals served in SFSP. *First*, sponsors should, as much as possible, purchase foods that align with the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans for grains, and whole fruits and vegetables. Nutrient dense foods are the basis of a healthful eating pattern and are typically more filling than refined grains and juice. Sites with additional funds available are encouraged to use the funds to improve the reimbursable meals served by using fresher, healthier, more nutritious products, such as whole fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and unprocessed cheeses. *Second*, sponsors can tap into local seasonal harvests to serve a variety of nutritious foods in their freshest state. Incorporating local foods into summer meals keeps meals tasting great, and can also offer an educational opportunity to engage children in your program. For more information on finding and buying local foods, visit the Farm to Summer website at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/farm-summer> and the appropriate Farm to Summer sections of the Summer Meals Toolkit at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>. *Third*, sponsors should review SP 06-2016, SFSP 06-2016 (version 2), Promoting Nutrition in Summer

Meal Programs, with Best Practices, Summer Meals Toolkit [<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summermeals-toolkit>], Team Nutrition Resource Library [<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resource-library>], and Healthy Meals Resource System [[https://theicn.org/cnss/child-nutrition-program-operator-submitted-resources/?gv\\_search=&filter\\_31=&filter\\_32=cacfp&filter\\_14=&gv\\_start=&gv\\_end=&mode=all](https://theicn.org/cnss/child-nutrition-program-operator-submitted-resources/?gv_search=&filter_31=&filter_32=cacfp&filter_14=&gv_start=&gv_end=&mode=all)] for additional tips and ideas on how to improve the quality of meals, such as working with vendors or hosting taste tests to help introduce and get children excited about new foods and menus.

2. **May a SFSP site serve breakfast later in the morning, such as from 10 am to 11 am, to accommodate teenagers who may wake-up later?** Yes. A site may offer breakfast as the initial meal service later in the morning. FNS encourages sponsors to establish meal service times that meet the needs of participating children. However, sponsors may not claim a breakfast, or "three component meal," after a lunch meal has been served. Note: As per 7 CFR 225.16(c)(2), breakfast meals must be served at or close to the beginning of a child's day. Meal times for breakfast must be established based upon this regulation. Please note that 7 CFR 225.16(c)(2) is not applicable to sites approved to conduct rural non-congregate meal services.
3. **May a school or site participating in SFSP as an open site serve meals to academic summer school students first and then serve meals to children coming from the community (i.e., staggered meal service times)?** Yes. Staggered meals are allowable at school sites participating in SFSP as long as the meal service is the same (i.e., food served, length of serving time, eating area, etc.) for both the summer school students and community children.
4. **If a child does not finish his or her meal can the sponsor let the child take the rest of the meal home?** Children may be permitted to take one leftover fruit, vegetable, or grain item offsite for later consumption. If the leftover food component is not a fruit, vegetable, or grain that is permitted to be taken offsite, the sponsor may allow the child to take those leftovers offsite but the sponsor may not claim reimbursement for that meal.
5. **Can sites serve larger portion sizes than what is required in the meal pattern or additional foods that are not included in the meal pattern?** Yes, sites may choose to serve larger portions than the minimum required amount of each food component in the SFSP meal patterns. Because teenagers have greater food needs, sponsors may also choose to serve adult-size portions to older children. Adult-size portion provisions may be found in 7 CFR 226.20(c) of CACFP regulations and at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks>. Extra food may always be served to improve the nutrition of participating children (that is, in addition to the food necessary to meet the meal pattern requirements). Please note, though, that if a site chooses to purchase additional food with SFSP funds, the food must be a creditable food under the meal pattern requirements. If a site wishes to serve additional foods that do not meet SFSP meal pattern requirements, the site must use non-Program funds to purchase those foods [[SFSP 06-2012: Serving Additional Foods in the Summer Food Service Program , November 23, 2011](#)].
6. **When serving meals family style, can a child refuse to take a required meal component?** Yes. When serving meals family style children do not need to take all the required meal components in order for the meal to be reimbursable. If a child initially refuses to accept a food component, or does not initially take the full required portion of the meal component, supervising adults should offer the meal component to the child again.
7. **For SFSP, how many reimbursable meals may be served?** Open, restricted open, and closed enrolled sites may be reimbursed for serving up to two reimbursable meals or for a meal and a snack each day. The meals may be any combination of breakfast, lunch, supper or snack, except a sponsor may not be reimbursed for lunch and supper meals served at the same site, on the



same day. Camps and migrant site may be approved for reimbursement of up to three meals, or two meals and a snack daily [7 CFR 225.16(b)]. There are also limits on the total number of meals that may be served each day. Sponsors may serve a maximum total average daily attendance of 50,000 children. However, the State agency may approve exceptions if the sponsor can demonstrate that it has the capability of managing a larger program [7 CFR 225.6(b)(6)].

8. **May a sponsor serve lunch and supper at the same site on different days?** Yes. A sponsor may serve lunch and supper at the same site as long as they are served on different days. For example, a site may serve breakfast and lunch Monday through Thursdays and snack and supper on Fridays.
9. **May a State agency prohibit sponsors from serving hot meals?** A State agency is not permitted to issue a blanket statement prohibiting all sponsors from serving hot meals. Similarly, a State agency may not require a site to offer hot meals. If a State agency wishes to limit the types of meals served, it may do so only on a case-by-case basis and must be based on health or safety reasons.
10. **May an SFSP site charge a fee to participate in the activity portion of its program?** Yes. Access to meal service at open sites, however, must be free. Although it is common for enrolled programs to charge for items such as t-shirts, bags, and other identifying items that are unallowable State administrative funds expenses, State agencies should ensure that any fees are reasonable and do not restrict access for low-income children. Please Note: Camps and conditional non-congregate sites may charge for meals served to non-Program eligible children per 7 CFR 225.6(i)(4).
11. **May a site sell a la carte items during a meal service?** Yes. The sale of a la carte items by SFSP sponsors or sites during a meal service is permitted. The non-Program and Program components of the food service operation must be tracked separately, accounting for the receipt, obligation, and expenditure of all SFSP funds. The sponsor must maintain accounting records documenting proper allocation between the Program and non-Program components of its food service operation and the State agency must ensure through the review process that all SFSP reimbursements are used solely for conducting non-profit food service operations.
12. **May sponsors participating in SFSP provide meals to children on the weekends?** Yes. The regulations do not restrict SFSP meal service to weekdays and States may not prevent sponsors from offering weekend meals. As with all sites, State agencies and sponsors must ensure that sites offering weekend meals are subject to site monitoring as required by the regulations [7 CFR 225.7(d) and 7 CFR 225.15(d)].
13. **When are food service management companies required to test for bacteria levels?** Bacteria level testing, as outlined in the regulations [7 CFR 225.6(h)(2)(v)], is only required if such testing is required of the food service management company by the local health (or similar) authority. If no such standard exists then none is required to be established.
14. **May a meal be claimed for reimbursement if it is used to test bacteria levels or temperature for food safety reasons but is not served to participating children?** Meals tested for bacteria levels or temperature and not served to participating children are allowable operating costs but may not be claimed for reimbursement. Per SFSP regulations [7 CFR 225.6)], only meals served to participants may be claimed for reimbursement. One of SFSP's serious deficiencies is claiming meals not served to participants [7 CFR 225.11]. This is why meals used to test for food safety are allowable operating costs but may not be claimed for reimbursement.
15. **How can sites encourage kids to consume healthy food offerings?** Sponsors participating in the



SFSP may request free printed nutrition education resources under USDA's Team Nutrition initiative at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/summer-food-summer-moves>. Summer Food, Summer Moves is a fun, hands-on resource kit designed to get kids and families excited about healthy eating and physical activity during the summer months. The kit is designed for use by summer meal site operators and focuses on using music, games, art, and movement to motivate kids and families to choose more fruits and vegetables, choose water instead of sugary drinks, get enough physical activity every day, and to limit screen time. The kit includes an Operator Activity Guide, educational posters, types of promotional fliers, family handouts, and an activity place mat. All materials are available in English and Spanish. State agencies may also request these materials. Questions about bulk ordering may be sent to [TeamNutrition@fns.usda.gov](mailto:TeamNutrition@fns.usda.gov).

## **B. SFSP Offer Versus Serve (OVS)- For SFA Sponsors Only**

1. **How many items may a child decline?** At breakfast, a child may decline any one item when four items are offered. However, a SFA sponsor may choose to offer additional food items beyond the requirements, such as cereal and toast (two grain items), orange slices and bananas (two fruit items), and milk (one milk item). In such cases, children still have to take at least three food items but may decline more than one food item. At lunch or supper, a child must take at least three food components so when five food items are offered a child may decline up to two food items. Within each component a sponsor may offer different items providing more choices for the child to select from and to decline more than two food items. However, a child must take at least three of the four food components for it to be a reimbursable meal, not just three different food items. For example, if chicken nuggets, yogurt, green beans, broccoli, rice, and milk are offered at lunch and a child selects chicken nuggets, yogurt (two food items in the meat/meat alternate food component) and rice (one item in the bread/bread alternate food component) the meal would not be reimbursable. It is the sponsor's responsibility to ensure that children understand which foods they may decline under OVS. This can be done through signage and instructions to children.
2. **What is a combination food?** Combination foods contain more than one food item from different food components that cannot be separated. An example is cheese pizza which contains three food items from different food components: servings of a bread alternate (crust), a serving of a vegetable (tomato sauce), and a serving of a meat alternate (cheese). Other examples of combination foods include soups, prepared sandwiches, and burritos.
3. **Under OVS, may a child decline a combination food?** It depends. For breakfast, a SFA sponsored site must offer at least four food items and a child must take at least three food items and decline only one; therefore a child may not decline a combination food at breakfast when four food items are offered. For example, if a waffle with strawberries (combination food with a grain and fruit/vegetable component), orange slices, and milk are offered, the child must take the waffle with strawberries in order for the meal to be reimbursable. If a site chooses to offer more than four food items, such as a waffle with strawberries, orange slices, cereal, and milk, the child would be able to decline the combination food (waffle with strawberries) but must take all other food items (orange slices, cereal, and milk) for a reimbursable breakfast. For lunch or supper, a site must offer the four required food components through at least five food items. The child must take at least three food components in order for the meal to be reimbursable. If a combination food contains three or more food components and five food items are offered (three of which are included in the combination food), a child may not decline the combination food. For example, if a pizza (combination food with three food items from three components: grain, vegetable, and meat), an apple, and milk are offered the child must take the pizza in order for the meal to be reimbursable. However, if a pizza (combination food with three food items from three

components: grain, vegetable, and meat), chicken strips, an apple, and milk are offered, the child would be able to decline the combination food but must take all other food components (the chicken strips, apple, and milk) for a reimbursable lunch or supper.

4. **Is a child required to take a fruit or vegetable in OVS?** A child is not required to take a fruit or vegetable when a SFA sponsored site is utilizing OVS. Under SFSP OVS, there are no specific food items or components that a child must take. A child must simply take three food items at breakfast and three food components at lunch or supper. For ease of implementation and to reduce food waste and cost, a child only needs to take one fruit or vegetable item to count towards the fruit and vegetable component at OVS lunch or supper meals. For example, if chicken tenders, green beans, rice, apple, and milk are offered at lunch and a child takes the chicken tenders, rice, and apple it would be a reimbursable meal. This provides greater flexibility and choice for children to select food items they are more likely to eat. It is important to note, though, that for a single fruit or vegetable item to count towards the minimum required serving size of a meal pattern, at least 1/8 cup must be offered [Food Buying Guide, [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/DBG\\_Section\\_2-VegFruits\\_2.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/DBG_Section_2-VegFruits_2.pdf)]. Therefore, the minimum amount a child could take of a fruit or vegetable is 1/8 cup, as long as the site offers another, different fruit or vegetable, to meet the required minimum serving size.
5. **If a SFA sponsored site is using OVS, how do monitors ensure enough food is provided?** During onsite reviews, monitors should observe the meal service and ensure that adequate components and serving sizes are provided so that all children are offered a reimbursable meal. Monitors also may review policies, training materials, receipts, menus, inventories, and invoices. Maintaining production records is not a Federal requirement in SFSP.
6. **When SFA sponsors utilize OVS, if a site runs out of a component, are all the meals served after the required component is no longer available disallowed?** Yes. If a site runs out of a food component, all meals served, after that point, must be disallowed if the site was unable to offer children a complete reimbursable meal. Sponsors are encouraged to have site supervisors communicate with one another so that components may be transferred from one site to another to avoid this situation.
7. **THIS QUESTION IS NO LONGER APPLICABLE AS PER 7 CFR 225.16(f)(1)(ii).** *May non-school sponsors purchase non-unitized meals from a food service management company (FSMC) when utilizing the OVS option?* Yes. Program regulations require all meals prepared by an FSMC to be unitized, with or without milk unless the State agency has approved a request for exceptions to the unitizing requirement for certain components of the meal. This request for an exemption could be granted when a sponsor notifies the State of its plans to utilize the OVS option. State agencies are encouraged to provide a prototype contract for sponsors that does not include the unitized meal requirement [7 CFR 225.6(h)(3)].
8. **Must SFSP SFA sponsors utilizing OVS use past service history to place future orders in order to adjust the amount of food ordered, if permissible under the FSMC contract?** Yes. The initial maximum approved level of meal service for all vended sites must be based on past service history [7 CFR 225.6(d)(2)(i)]. However, when utilizing OVS, for example, if the sponsor's order history shows that only 60 percent of the children take milk, fewer cartons may be ordered. The sponsor should be aware that any meals offered without milk are not reimbursable, so if the sponsor runs out of milk, no meals served after that point would be reimbursed. Therefore, FNS encourages sponsors and sites to err on the side of caution when placing food orders, to ensure all meals offered under OVS meet all SFSP meal requirements.

## Comments

For questions concerning this memorandum, please contact the Policy Administrator at (404) 651-8193.

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## Attachments

 [Offer Versus Serve Form](#)