Happy Helpings
Rural Non-Congregate Option
Application and Instruction Guide

Overview

Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the SFSP

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 included significant policy changes including the authorization of a permanent, non-congregate meal service through the SFSP for meal service sites that meet the following criteria:

- The site must be located in an area designated as ‘rural’; and
- The site must be located where there is no congregate meal service available to SFSP participants.

SFSP sponsors must be approved by DECAL to serve non-congregate meals at rural sites. This approval process occurs during the SFSP application process.

Sponsors may have the option to serve rural non-congregate meals via household delivery, parent/guardian pick-up, for multiple days and through bulk distribution.

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Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the SFSP

On December 29, 2023, USDA established the Rural Non-Congregate Option in Summer Meal Programs as a permanent option for sponsors who qualify. To be eligible, sponsors must continue to meet the requirements outlined in USDA regulations 7 CFR 225.14.

Sponsors must also be in “good standing” meaning, the status of a program operator that meets its Program responsibilities, is current with its financial obligations, and, if applicable, has fully implemented all corrective actions within the required period of time.

Specifically:

Sponsors that experienced serious deficiencies in prior years may be approved to operate non-congregate meal services, if, to the satisfaction of the State agency, the sponsor has taken appropriate corrective actions to prevent recurrence of the deficiencies. This includes sponsors with outstanding Program balances.

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Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the SFSP

The following chart serves as a complete application and instruction guide for sponsors' use when seeking approval and use of the rural non-congregate option.

To access USDA's interim final rule establishing the SFSP rural non-congregate option and to access additional rural non-congregate guidance, click the links below:

- Interim Final Rule: Establishing the Summer EBT Program and Rural Non-Congregate Option in the Summer Meals Program
- Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services in the Summer Food Service Program
- Implementation Guidance for the Rural Non-congregate Option Provisions of the Interim Final Rule, Establishing the Summer EBT Program and Rural Non-congregate Option in the Summer Meal Programs
- Rural Designations in the Summer Meal Programs – Revised
- Charging for SFSP Meals at Camps and Conditional Non-Congregate Sites

Getting Started

RURAL NON-CONGREGATE

Purpose

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328), established a permanent non-congregate summer meal service option for rural areas with no congregate meal service available.

Non-congregate meal services are food services at which meals are provided for children to consume all the components off site.

In order for a meal service site to be eligible and approved for rural non-congregate meal service flexibilities, the site's location must meet the following criteria:

- Criteria 1: The site must be located in an area designated as 'rural';
- Criteria 2: The site must be located where there is no congregate meal service available to SFSP participants.
- Criteria 3: The site meets the definition of an 'area in which poor economic conditions exist' as per Program regulations at 7 CFR 225.2

Required Application Documentation

- Sponsors must:
  - Indicate in the site application in GA Atlas under Item #20 that the geographic location of the site is 'rural'.
    - Sponsors can determine if a site is 'rural' by using the FNS Rural Designation Map. Those areas shown in green on the map will be considered 'rural'.
  - Submit documentation supporting the site's rural designation in the Attachments section in GA ATLAS.
  - Indicate in the site application in GA ATLAS under Item #22 that the sponsor would like to serve non-congregate meals at that site.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer if the site will only operate non-congregate meal services or congregate and non-congregate meal services.
  - Indicate in the site application in GA ATLAS under Item #25 if there are any other SFSP or SSO sites within the same area. If so, sponsors should list the sites that are within ¼ mile of the their proposed SFSP site.
  - Indicate in the site application in GA ATLAS under Item #31 that the site location is in an area in which 50% of the children are from households that are eligible for free or reduced meals.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer of which meal types (i.e. Breakfast, lunch, snack) will be served at the rural non-congregate site.

Additional Information about Flexibility

- Sites can operate both congregate and non-congregate meal services. The proposed site must only conduct a non-congregate meal service (e.g., breakfast, snack, lunch, supper) when the site is not providing that same meal service in a congregate setting. For example, an SFSP site cannot serve congregate and non-congregate breakfast meals but could serve a congregate breakfast and a non-congregate lunch.

- Approved rural non-congregate meal service sites must establish meal service times for each site in the site application; however, the following meal service time requirements are not applicable to rural non-congregate sites:
  - 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.

- Second meals may not be served as part of a non-congregate meal service.

CONDITIONAL NON-CONGREGATE

Purpose

Designed for a site to conduct a non-congregate meal service for eligible children in an areas where no congregate meals service is available and that "does not meet the definition of *areas in which poor economic conditions exist*," and is not a camp.

Conditional non-congregate sites must establish eligibility per child (individually) based on income standards (IES Forms) or individual school data.

All conditional non-congregate sites must meet the definition of 'rural' and be located where there is no congregate meal service available to SFSP participants. Sponsors must follow steps to support the 'rural' status and location in the site application as per the previous page regarding Rural Non-Congregate sites.

Sponsors may only claim reimbursement for meals served to children who meet the Program's income standards where that eligibility is documented.

Required Application Documentation

- Sponsors must:
  - Be prepared to advise the Application review of the need for the site to be deemed a conditional non-congregate.
  - In the Site application in GA ATLAS under Item #30 – Site Type, select 'closed enrolled.' In the related comment box, indicate that this site will be conditional non-congregate.
  - Under item #31 in the site application, if the site will establish individual child eligibility by IES form, the sponsor should select 'Income Application.' If the site will establish individual child eligibility by school data, the sponsor should select 'Shared School Eligibility Information'.
    - Submit an MOU or written agreement for sites using school data for individual participant eligibility. SFA sponsors are exempt from submitting MOUs or written statements.
    - If establishing individual child eligibility via IES Forms, collect IES forms from eligible children to support claim for reimbursement.
  - Under 'Site Operations' in the site application, dependent on the selected meal type, enter the average daily participation (to only factor income eligible children). Sponsors should enter the 'Maximum Number of Meals'. This number should equal the total number of income eligible children.
  - Complete and upload the Conditional Non-Congregate Certification Statement in the Attachment List in GA ATLAS.

Additional Information about Flexibility

- For Conditional Non-Congregate sites that charge for meals:
  - Charging non-Program eligible children for SFSP meals is allowable under SFSP regulation. Non-Program eligible children are those that do not qualify for free or reduced-priced meals.

- Sponsors of conditional non-congregate sites that charge non-eligible children for SFSP meals must submit:
  - The Conditional Non-Congregate Pricing Policy Statement (Part III) located on the Conditional Non-Congregate Certification Statement.
  - The sponsor's hearing procedures within the Attachment List in GA ATLAS.

- Sponsors cannot charge Program Eligible children for meals, those children that do qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

- The following will result in a finding and potential meal disallowance for Conditional Non-Congregate sites:
  - Failure to maintain individual eligibility school data or IES forms to support each child's eligibility;
  - Claiming meals served to children that do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals; and/or
  - Failure to adhere to all other conditional non-congregate site requirements.

HOME DELIVERY

Purpose

Designed to deliver meals directly to homes of eligible children. Delivery could be completed by mail, delivery service, or hand-delivered.

For home delivery to homes that do not meet area eligibility, eligibility per child (individually) must be established based on income standards (IES Forms) or individual school data. For homes that are not area eligible, sponsors may only claim reimbursement for meals served to children who meet the Program's income standards where that eligibility is documented.

Required Application Documentation

- Sponsors must:
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer that the site will operate home delivery.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer of what meal types (i.e., Breakfast, lunch, snack) will be served by home deliveries.
  - Complete Parts I and II of the SFSP Home Delivery Statement and upload the document in the Attachments section of GA ATLAS.
  - Upload meal delivery schedules and meal delivery home address locations in the Attachments section of GA ATLAS.
  - Submit an MOU or written agreement with a school, if using school data to establish individual children eligibility. SFA sponsors are exempt from submitting MOUs or written statements. **(For home addresses that are not area eligible).**
  - If establishing individual child eligibility via IES Forms, collect IES forms from eligible children to support claim for reimbursement. **(For home addresses that are not area eligible).**

Additional Information about Flexibility

- Each home would not be considered a separate site requiring a separate site application. The home delivery route, as a whole, would be considered the 'site' for the purposes of site requirements and the site application in ATLAS.
- Individual home locations (actual addresses) for which meals are to be delivered must be designated as 'rural'.
- Sponsors must obtain and maintain written consent from the eligible participant's parent or guardian that the household wants to receive delivered meals. This consent must be obtained prior to providing meals to children.
- Sponsors must not exceed the maximum number of meals per child per day.
- Sponsors must establish individual household eligibility, if the home's location is not area eligible. Individual eligibility may be established through individual participant school data accompanied by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a school food authority (SFA) or through IES forms.

PARENT GUARDIAN PICKUP

Purpose

Allows parents or guardians to pick-up Program meals on behalf of their eligible children.

Children are also allowed to pick-up meals for themselves at rural non-congregate meal sites; however, children are not allowed to pick-up meals for other children, including siblings. It is also important to note that only parents and guardians can pick up meals for their children. Parents and guardians cannot pick up meals for other parents' and guardian's children.

Required Application Documentation

- Sponsors must:
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer if your site will operate parent/guardian pick-up.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer of what meal types (i.e., Breakfast, lunch, snack) will be served as parent/guardian pick-up.
  - Complete Part I and III of the Parent/Guardian Pick-up Procedures Statement and upload the document in the Attachments section in GA ATLAS.

Additional Information about Flexibility

- On a case-by-case basis, DECAL may prohibit a sponsor from using this option, if it appears the sponsor cannot ensure program requirements are met. *Prohibiting a sponsor from this option is not appealable.*
- A 'guardian' is defined as: (1) A legal guardian of a minor, where the guardian has power over the minor the same as a parent, standing in the place of the parent (O.C.G.A. 29-2-21(a)); (2) A state-regulated foster parent; or (3) An adult who maintains a caregiver relationship with a child on the day of meal service. These adults can be relatives or other adults who provide supervisory care for children on the meal service day. The child does not need to share a residence with the guardian; however, the guardian must provide supervisory care for the child at the child's residence or the guardian's residence on the meal service day. NOTE: A "meal service day" is any day a meal is to be picked up from an SFSP site for delivery to a SFSP child participant.
- The following would not be considered 'guardians' and cannot pick up meals on behalf of other parents' or guardians' children:
  - Adults that do not provide supervisory care for a child at the child's or adult's residence on the meal service day.
  - Childcare providers of formally enrolled children (i.e., DECAL licensed day care homes, DECAL licensed childcare centers, informal care providers registered with CAPS).
  - Childcare providers of related or unrelated groups of children for which parents agree to the care (e.g., a camp, vacation bible school, summer tutoring services, athletic/auxiliary summer training events such as football, cheerleading, and band camps, or recreation sport teams).
- DECAL recommends that sites implement one of the two following verification processes:
  - Ask the parent/guardian to present forms of valid child or adult identification (ID); or
  - A daily parent/guardian pickup roster used to collect the parent and/or guardian name, number of participants in the household, and names of participants in the household. For adults that meet the definition of 'guardian' but are not legal guardians of minors or state-regulated foster parents, sponsors should collect the guardian's name and the names and numbers of the participants for which the guardian is providing supervisory care.

MULTI-DAY DISTRIBUTION

Purpose	Required Application Documentation	Additional Information about Flexibility
Allows sponsors to distribute multiple meals up to the allowable number of reimbursable meals that would be provided over a 10-calendar day period.	• Sponsors must: ○ Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer that the site will operate multi-day distribution. ○ Indicate in the site application only the actual day(s) that meals will be distributed. For example, if a site distributes meals on Monday for 5 days, only Monday should be selected as the day of meal service. ○ Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer the number of days' worth of meals that will be distributed. ○ Upload in the Attachments section of GA ATLAS, written procedures that ensure that the proper number of meals are distributed to each eligible child. ○ Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer of what meal types (i.e., Breakfast, lunch, snack) will be served during multi-day distributions.	• Distributing more than the daily meal limit when multi-day meal service is used is considered a **serious deficiency** which is grounds for disapproval of applications and for termination when the violation is recorded at a significant proportion of the sponsor's sites. • On a case-by-case basis, DECAL may prohibit a sponsor from using this option, if it appears the sponsor cannot ensure program requirements are met. *Prohibiting a sponsor from this option is not appealable.* • Sponsors must ensure enough food items are distributed to meet meal pattern and serving size requirements.

BULK FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Purpose

Allows sponsors to provide bulk foods that meet the meal pattern requirements for each meal service type for **up to 5 calendar days.**

Bulk items are considered specific food items provided in larger quantity than required for a unitized meal. 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.

Required Application Documentation

- Sponsors must:
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer that the site will operate Bulk Meal Distribution.
  - Indicate in the site application only the actual day(s) that meals will be distributed. For example, if a site distributes meals on Monday for 5 days, only Monday should be selected as the day of meal service.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer the number of days' worth of meals that will be distributed.
  - Be prepared to advise the Application Reviewer of what meal types (i.e., Breakfast, lunch, snack) will be served during bulk meal distributions.

Additional Information about Flexibility

- Bulk meal distribution is only available to self-prep sponsors.

- On a case-by-case basis, DECAL may prohibit a sponsor from using this option, if it appears the sponsor cannot ensure program requirements are met. *Prohibiting a sponsor from this option is not appealable.*

- Sponsors must:
  - **Ensure food preparation such as heating or warming is minimal and should not require cooking and/or baking.**
  - Ensure the required food components in the proper minimum amounts for each reimbursable meal are being served;
  - Foods contributing to the reimbursable meal are clearly identifiable;
  - Provide menus that clearly indicate the food items and portion sizes for each reimbursable meal;
  - Ensure 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.

- Sponsors cannot exceed the designated time-period approved to provide multi-day meals.

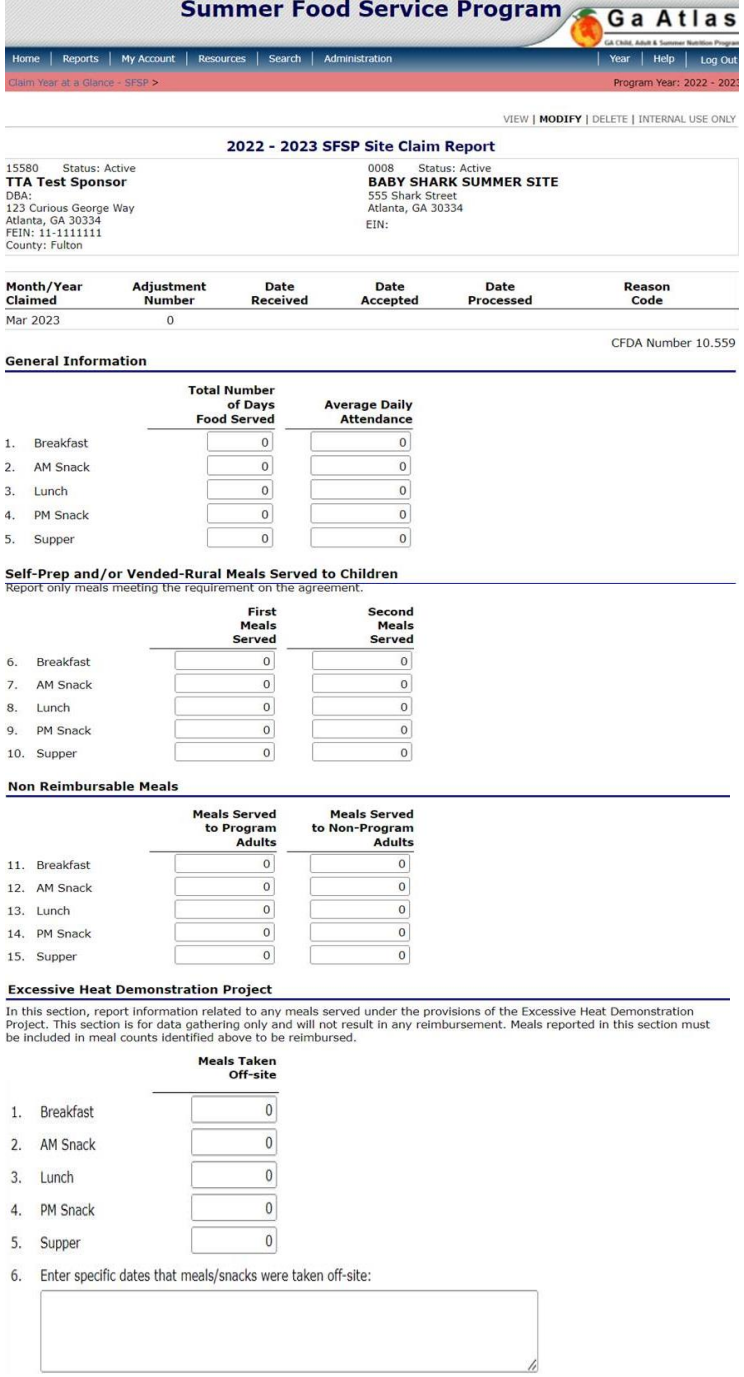
Submitting a Claim for Reimbursement for Rural Non-Congregate Sites

FILING CLAIMS FOR REIMBURSEMENTS

Instructions

Sponsors must submit claims for reimbursement in the GA ATLAS web-based system to receive reimbursement for meals served during the claiming month. A complete and substantially accurate original claim must be submitted within 30 calendar days following the end of the claiming month. After a Sponsor has submitted an original claim for reimbursement within (30) calendar days following the end of the claiming month, the Sponsor will have up to two (2) opportunities to revise the original claim within the 30/60-day timeframe. The revision(s) to the original claim must be submitted through the GA ATLAS web-based system within (60) calendar days following the end of the claiming month. For additional guidance, see DECAL Policy No. SFSP/03-4, *30/60 Day Claim Procedure and Revised Claims Limitation for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).* To file a claim for reimbursement for meals served at Rural Non-Congregate Sites, please see the below instructions:

- For those sites that are eligible to serve and claim non-congregate meals in rural areas, sponsors must indicate under Item #22 in the site application that the site will serve rural non-congregate meals.
- Sponsors when ready to file a claim should add the name of the rural non-congregate site to the month's claim for reimbursement and:
    - Complete the claim information in the General Information, Self-Prep and/or Vended Rural Meals Section, and Non-Reimbursable Meals sections.
    - To account for the service of rural non-Congregate meals, sponsors will utilize the 'Excessive Heat Demonstration Project Section' of the site claim. Please note, this section will only be used to record the number of rural non-congregate meals served.
    - In the 'Excessive Heat Demonstration Project Section', sponsors will only enter the number of meals per meal type that were served via non-congregate meal services.
    - Item #6 may be left blank. Sponsors do not have to enter in specific dates when rural non-congregate meals were served.



Summer Food Service Program — Ga Atlas

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Claim Year at a Glance - SFSP > Program Year: 2022 - 2023

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2022 - 2023 SFSP Site Claim Report

15580 Status: Active
TTA Test Sponsor
DBA:
123 Curious George Way
Atlanta, GA 30334
FEIN: 11-1111111
County: Fulton

0008 Status: Active
BABY SHARK SUMMER SITE
555 Shark Street
Atlanta, GA 30334
EIN:

Month/Year Claimed	Adjustment Number	Date Received	Date Accepted	Date Processed	Reason Code
Mar 2023	0				

CFDA Number 10.559

General Information

	Total Number of Days Food Served	Average Daily Attendance
1. Breakfast	0	0
2. AM Snack	0	0
3. Lunch	0	0
4. PM Snack	0	0
5. Supper	0	0

Self-Prep and/or Vended-Rural Meals Served to Children

Report only meals meeting the requirement on the agreement.

	First Meals Served	Second Meals Served
6. Breakfast	0	0
7. AM Snack	0	0
8. Lunch	0	0
9. PM Snack	0	0
10. Supper	0	0

Non Reimbursable Meals

	Meals Served to Program Adults	Meals Served to Non-Program Adults
11. Breakfast	0	0
12. AM Snack	0	0
13. Lunch	0	0
14. PM Snack	0	0
15. Supper	0	0

Excessive Heat Demonstration Project

In this section, report information related to any meals served under the provisions of the Excessive Heat Demonstration Project. This section is for data gathering only and will not result in any reimbursement. Meals reported in this section must be included in meal counts identified above to be reimbursed.

	Meals Taken Off-site
1. Breakfast	0
2. AM Snack	0
3. Lunch	0
4. PM Snack	0
5. Supper	0

6. Enter specific dates that meals/snacks were taken off-site:

Contact Information

DECAL NUTRITION SERVICES CONTACT INFORMATION

For policy questions regarding Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services, please contact Policy Administrator, Melissa Stanley, at Melissa.Stanley@decal.ga.gov.

For application questions regarding Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services, please contact Application Services Manager, Demetria Thornton, at Demetria.Thornton@decal.ga.gov.

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