

Rural Non-congregate Meal Service Option in the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option March 2023

Purpose: To provide broader access to nutritious meals in the summer months, when school is not in session, in areas where it is more difficult for children to participate in congregate meals or when there is a lack of facilities to host congregate meals. There are benefits of congregate meal service, which often also provide enrichment activities. Sponsors are encouraged to continue to provide these opportunities when feasible. **The rural non-congregate option is not intended to replace congregate meal service.**

Below are some instances when to offer non-congregate meals:

- After summer programming has ended (i.e., summer school, recreation program, etc.). When enrolled programming ends it may not be feasible to continue to offer summer meals as children do not have easy access to the site.
- When a rural area does not have a facility to use to host a congregate site, non-congregate meals could be offered all summer.
- When a sponsor cannot staff a congregate program but has enough resources to prepare and provide non-congregate meals once or twice a week.
- When the only other summer meal sites nearby, are closed to community participation and there are no other means to host a congregate site.

Sponsors can provide non-congregate summer meals in rural areas that do not have congregate meal service. Non-congregate meals cannot be provided in *non-rural* areas for reasons that include lack of transportation, safety concerns, lack of a location to serve meals, or other similar reasons.

The following guidance is for summer 2023. USDA will be issuing regulations which may change how non-congregate meals operate starting in summer 2024.

Sponsors opting to provide non-congregate meals this summer are required to:

1. Send an email to sfsp@dpi.wi.gov indicating that you wish to serve non-congregate meals. A consultant will contact you to discuss your plan.
2. Complete the Rural Non-congregate Integrity & Meal Service Plan – this will be provided after speaking with the consultant,
3. Notify the Health Dept of the Non-congregate Sites (location, meal times, prep location, delivery method, etc.) and submit a copy to DPI,
4. Follow instructions for updating your Sponsor and Site Application(s), provided by DPI upon approval of the Integrity & Meal Service Plan.

Sponsor & Site Eligibility/Application Process

Sponsors eligible to operate a non-congregate meal service include:

Any service institution that meets the definition of sponsor in Program regulations (7 CFR 225.2), is eligible to apply to operate non-congregate meal service through their SFSP State agency. This includes:

- Public and private nonprofit school food authorities;
- Units of local, municipal, county or State government;
- Tribal Governments; and
- Private, nonprofit organizations.

State agencies must determine whether individual sponsors are financially and administratively capable of operating a non-congregate meal service in line with SFSP requirements.

Residential & Day Camps

Camps cannot offer non-congregate meal service if congregate meal service is available. As defined in 7 CFR 225.2, camps must provide a regularly scheduled food service as part of an organized program for enrolled children; such programming is generally understood to be congregate in nature.

Non-congregate Site Eligibility – Rural & Area Eligible

Sponsors can provide non-congregate summer meals in rural areas that do not have congregate meal service. If the rural area is 'area eligible,' meaning it is located within the attendance area of a school that has 50% of its children eligible for free and reduced-price meals OR within a census tract that qualifies, then meals for all children may be claimed for reimbursement.

New sites must be eligible using Wisconsin October 2022 school free and reduced data or FY2023 Census Data. Returning sites may continue to use free/reduced data from prior years, as long as it is within the 5-year eligibility period.

The definition of 'rural' in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) regulations (7 CFR 225.2) is: *(a) any area in a county which is not a part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area or; (b) any "pocket" within a Metropolitan Statistical Area which, at the option of the State agency and with FNS concurrence, is determined to be geographically isolated from urban areas.* The Rural Designation Map will be used to determine if a proposed site is within a rural area: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/rural-designation>.

Non-congregate Site Eligibility – Rural & NOT Area Eligible

When the rural area is not area eligible, the sponsor may provide non-congregate meals to children, however, will only be reimbursed for those meals served to children that qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Individual eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals may be determined by using individual eligibility determinations through school data or by following the household application process for the SFSP, as described in the [Documenting Participant Eligibility](#) resource. When serving meals to children in areas that are not area eligible, the sponsor must be sure to prevent overt identification of those eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Meal Service Requirements

Types and Number of Meal Services Allowed

Eligible sponsors and sites may provide up to two non-congregate meal services, in any combination other than lunch and supper, for any day of the week, in which congregate meal service is not available. This includes weekends.

Distribution for Multiple Days

Sponsors may be approved for multi-day distribution of meals for the allowable number of reimbursable meals that would be provided over a 10-day calendar day period. Although the 10-day period is mentioned in USDA guidance, sponsors are encouraged to provide meals more frequently. Consider that fewer distribution days may limit program access, food quality, the inability of a child to pick up a meal, etc. When developing the non-congregate service plan, take

into consideration the information provided in USDA's [Offering Multiple Meals as Part of Summer Non-congregate Meal Service](#) guidance.

Combining non-congregate and congregate meal services at the same site.

Non-congregate meal service may be provided when congregate meal service is not available. For example:

- A site that only offers breakfast through a congregate meal service may be approved to provide a lunch through non-congregate meal service.
- A congregate site that serves lunch and breakfast three days a week may be approved to provide non-congregate meals for days with no congregate service, including weekends.
- A congregate site that ends programming may be approved to provide non-congregate meals on the last day for up to a ten-day period following their last congregate meal service day (provided that the ten days are included in the site's approved service period).

A separate Site Application must be completed for the non-congregate meal.

Meal Pattern Requirements

Non-school sponsors must follow the SFSP meal pattern requirements. SFA SFSP sponsors may utilize the NSLP and SBP meal pattern requirements. SSO sponsors are required to meet all the requirements of the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. All documentation such as production records, CN labels, product formulation statements, invoices, etc., must be maintained support that meal pattern requirements were met.

Non-congregate Meal Models

Home delivery and meal pick-up options may be used for summer 2023. Sponsors will be approved to use these models with the assurance that accountability and program integrity are maintained.

Home Delivery-This non-congregate meal service model is designed to deliver meals directly to homes. Delivery could be completed by mail or delivery service or could be hand-delivered by the sponsor's staff, volunteers, or others.

Meal Pickup-This non-congregate meal service model is designed to provide packaged meals that are taken home for children to eat later. Examples of meal pickup include "grab and go," curbside service, or take-home backpacks. Meal pickup is available to all children when the pick-up site is in an area-eligible area, or to children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals when the pick-up site is in an area that is not area-eligible. Meals must be packaged and portioned to allow children to carry the food from the SFSP site to their home.

Food safety is important for all meal service models. Sponsors should ensure food selections and packaging promote food safety; sponsors should also include instructions on at-home storage and preparation. As with congregate SFSP meal service, sponsors must ensure non-congregate meal packages meet State and local health and safety requirements.

Home Delivery Requirements

1. Sponsors eligible to home deliver meals are SFAs or non-SFAs with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an SFA to use the SFA's student data as the basis for establishing their eligible population.

2. Sponsors that are approved to provide a non-congregate meal service using the home delivery model must be able to identify and invite households of eligible children to participate in the meal delivery service and obtain written consent from the eligible child's parent or guardian that the household wants to receive delivered meals. Written consent could include hard copy, email, or other electronic means of communication. In addition, sponsors must confirm the household's current contact information and the number of eligible children in the household to ensure the correct number of meals are delivered to the correct location.
3. Sponsors must protect the confidentiality of participants and their households throughout the process in accordance with confidentiality and disclosure provisions in the National School Lunch Act and SFSP regulations (7 CFR 225.15(f)-(l)). Part 5 of the *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*, provides specific guidance on applying the statutory and regulatory requirements, and is available online at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/eligibility-manual-school-meals>. Sponsors that are not SFAs must have MOUs on the proper handling and storage of student data with applicable SFAs that ensure consistency with the above stated confidentiality requirements. SFAs are not required to agree to enter into MOUs with requesting non-SFA sponsors.
4. Meals may be individually prepared, ready-to-eat or provided in bulk, provided that the sponsor can meet the safety, service, and integrity standards of the Program. Bulk meals may look different than what was allowed during the COVID-19 waivers, as the SFSP a meal program and is not intended to be a food delivery service. Sponsors must develop menus following the guidance at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offering-multiple-meals-part-summer-non-congregate-meal-service>. Sponsors should consider whether households have access to refrigeration, stoves, microwaves, etc., when providing food that requires cold storage or further preparation, such as reheating. All non-congregate menus will be required to be submitted to DPI for approval.
5. The child does not need to be present at the time of delivery, as long as the sponsor has obtained the household's written consent to deliver meals and has verified the current address. If the meals are shelf-stable, no one need be present, as long as the address has been verified. Sponsors must consider state and local food safety requirements and best practices when designing their meal service.

Pick-up Requirements

1. Meals may be individually prepared, ready-to-eat or provided in bulk, provided that the sponsor can meet the safety, service, and integrity standards of the Program. Bulk meals may look different than what was allowed during the COVID-19 waivers, as the SFSP a meal program and is not intended to be a food delivery service. Sponsors must develop menus following the guidance at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offering-multiple-meals-part-summer-non-congregate-meal-service>. Sponsors should consider whether households have access to refrigeration, stoves, microwaves, etc., when providing food that requires cold storage or further preparation, such as reheating. All non-congregate menus will be required to be submitted to DPI for approval.
2. Consent to receive meals is not required when using the Meal Pick-up model. Standard public notification of meals is all that is required.
3. Meals may be distributed to parents or guardians to take home to their children. Sponsors opting to distribute meals to parents or guardians must maintain accountability and program

integrity. This includes processes to ensure that meals are only distributed to parents or guardians of eligible children, and that duplicate meals are not distributed to any child.

Offer versus Serve

Sponsors may use offer versus serve (OVS) with State agency approval. When using OVS in a non-congregate setting, sponsors should consider the unique service situations of each site, as well as each site's ability to follow appropriate safety measures. All required meal components or food items must be offered, and all participants must have the opportunity to select a reimbursable meal. Sponsors that want to use OVS must think creatively about how to implement this flexibility while ensuring that all meal service requirements are met.

Meal Service Times

Sponsors will need to establish meal service times (i.e., pick-up or distribution times) and enter that into the SFSP Site Application for DPI approval. Sponsors offering a non-congregate meal service are not required to serve breakfast in the morning or allow one hour between the end of one meal service and the start of the next. Whenever there is a need to change the non-congregate site meal service times, sponsors must update the Site Application and resubmit for approval.

Special Dietary Needs

Sponsors are still required to provide meal modifications for participants with disabilities when serving non-congregate meals. When planning a non-congregate meal service, program operators should consider how individuals who require meal modifications will be identified and served appropriately. Individual substitutions may also be made at a sponsor's discretion for a child with a non-disability medical or other special dietary need. Households should have a way of notifying the sponsor of the need for individual substitutions due to medical or other special dietary needs.

Non-program Adult Meals and 2nd Meals for Children

Meals may be provided to non-program adults but need to be counted separately and recorded as non-program adult meals on the meal count form. Non-program adult meals are not eligible for reimbursement, therefore the adult or another non-federal funding source must cover the cost of the meal.

Second meals for children are not allowed under non-congregate meal service.

Monitoring Sites

Non-congregate sites are required to be monitored by the sponsor, following the same requirements used for congregate sites. Monitoring requirements are outlined in the [Monitoring Sites](#) resource. All non-congregate sites that did not operate in 2022 are to be considered new. Non-congregate Site Monitoring Forms will be posted under the Monitoring Sites section of the [SFSP Materials and Resources](#) page.

Civil Rights

Non-congregate meal service must follow the same civil rights requirements as non-congregate meal service sites. All persons working with the non-congregate meal service are required to receive civil rights training.

Notification to the Community – DPI will issue a state-wide media release for all sponsors this year, however sponsors that have open and restricted open sites should continue to make the

community aware of the meal sites, dates of operation and times of meal services, including delivery and/or pick-up times.

“And Justice for All” (AJFA) Posters - The AJFA poster must be prominently displayed (such as in a window) on all vehicles making door-to-door drop deliveries at homes, and in all pick up facilities and locations providing non-congregate meal service in rural areas. And Justice for All Posters are only available online at this time, to print: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/ajfa-green-030223.pdf>. State agencies and sponsors must ensure that outreach strategies and meal service does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Race and Ethnicity Data Collection – Race and Ethnicity data collection is required for non-congregate sites. Due to the nature of the service, it may not be possible to collect data from participants directly. In that case, completing the Race and Ethnicity Data Form using aggregate data is acceptable. Complete instructions can be found under the Civil Rights section on the [Materials & Resources](#) page.

Accurate Meal Counting

Non-congregate meals must be counted at the point of service, by type, using meal count forms provided by DPI on the [SFSP Materials & Resources](#) page, under the Accurate Meal Counting section.

Program Reimbursement

Non-congregate meals will be reimbursed at the same rate as congregate meals. There is no additional funding provided for non-congregate meal service. Each location serving non-congregate meals is required to have an approved site application. If a location serves both congregate and non-congregate meals, the location will need to have one site application for the congregate meal service and one site application for the non-congregate meal service. The meals will be reported on their respective site claims. Follow the claim instruction provided under the Program Reimbursement section of the [SFSP Materials & Resources](#) page.

Financial Management

The budget submitted within the sponsor application must be updated to include non-congregate meals. The cost of food, non-food supplies, food service labor, transportation of meals, etc., related to non-congregate meal service are allowable SFSP expenses. Sponsors are required to include these costs within the Non-Profit Food Service Account and maintain expense documentation, just as it is required for congregate meals. Refer to the [Financial Management](#) resource for more information.