

USDA Summer Meals Study

When school is out in the summer months, USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) provide free meals to children at schools, churches, boys and girls clubs, and other venues in low-income communities.

In the summer of 2018...

80%

of children in low-income households lived within 1 mile of an urban summer meals site or 10 miles of a rural summer meals site.

27%

of children in low-income households living near a summer meals site received free meals there.

45%

of households with children living near a summer meals site were **food insecure**.

Summer Meal Programs typically ran for 7 weeks, from June through August.

83%



of summer meal sites were open to all children.

66%



of summer meal sites offered two meal/snack services.

48%



of summer meal sites were schools.

89%



of summer meal sites offered fresh fruits and vegetables twice a week or more.

55%



of summer meals were served to elementary age children.

85%



of summer meal sites had accommodations for special dietary needs/allergies.

90% ★★★★★

of participant caregivers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program.

46%



of nonparticipant caregivers did not send their children to the summer meal program closest to their home because **they did not know about the site**.

“This is such a fantastic program. We find that, even though we do much publicity, there could be more awareness of this meal program via television commercials or radio advertisements from the State/government agencies involved.”

Program Sponsor

Strategies for Success

OFFER ACTIVITIES

“I would like the program to have things that keep them active, exercise-wise and also things that could prepare them for the next school year to keep them out of trouble.”

Caregiver

“Our summer meal participation has declined over the years due in part to the district’s lack of money to provide activities for kids that are not part of an enrolled program going on at the district.”

Program Sponsor


OFFER TRANSPORTATION

“I know the first thing I would look for is transportation because I know I don’t have reliable transportation. We don’t necessarily live in an area where I would feel comfortable with my child even walking to the bus stop. So the public transportation isn’t an option either.”

Caregiver

“This year we have reached out to another site to open, but have not had much success in achieving this. I am saddened by this, as I know there are children in this mobile home park who are not able to have transportation to the summer meal site at the school.”

Program Sponsor

SERVE PARENTS & ALLOW CHILDREN TO TAKE FOOD HOME

“Because it’s so sad to have them [parents] sit watching their children eat and they’re picking off their plate. To me that’s sad. I understand the limits of the program. If you’re going to impact hunger you want to do it in a way that makes people feel better, not feel bad. That parent can’t feel good that he’s taking his child’s food.”

Program Sponsor

“If we are having a driving rain, or if it’s 120 degrees heat index, the kids have to wait outside in the rain or in that incredible heat, as do the adults that brought them, which is even more of a problem if they walked. We need the flexibility to let the kids take the lunch home on those days.”

Program Site


SIMPLIFY PAPERWORK & INCREASE MEAL REIMBURSEMENT RATES

“I think the paperwork and documentation rules have become almost burdensome for the organizations that are involved now—the scrutiny and the technique—the technicality of it. I know that there has to be accountability and a proper way of doing it, but I think that there should be more modern ways of training so there would be more emphasis on prevention than policing.”

Program Sponsor

“It’s challenging to find vendors to participate in the program due to the reimbursement rates. Food cost increases yearly and sometimes two or three times a year and the reimbursement rates do not support these changes.”

Program Sponsor

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Publications:

- Vericker, T., Rothstein, M., Zimmerman, T., Gabay, M., et al. (2021). USDA Summer Meals Study Summary. Prepared by Westat, Contract No. AG-3198-K-16-0033. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Available online at: [USDA Summer Meals Study | Food and Nutrition Service](#)
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