

Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option Comparison Chart

Here is a comparison between the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) for the 2026 summer season. Please use the information below to determine which meal program best meets the needs of your summer season operation.

| Topic | Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) | Seamless Summer Option (SSO) |
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| Sponsoring Organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public or private nonprofit school food authorities (SFAs) Public or private nonprofit residential summer camps Units of local, municipal, county or state government Public or private nonprofit colleges or universities Private nonprofit organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public or private nonprofit school food authorities (SFAs) currently administering the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) |
| Times of Operation | <p>May–September for traditional school calendar areas, outside of the regular school year calendar</p> <p>October–April during unanticipated school closures</p> <p>During student vacations for schools on a continuous year calendar</p> | |
| Site Locations | Schools, community buildings, libraries, apartment complexes, parks, swimming pools, splash pads, churches, migrant centers and other public sites where children gather | |
| Eligible Participants | All persons who are 18 years of age and under and those persons over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs for persons with disabilities | |
| Establishing Site Eligibility | <p>May operate as:</p> <p>Open - sites that serve all children 18 and under in low-income areas on a first-come, first-served basis. To be eligible, the site must be located within an area where at least 50.0 percent or more of the children are certified eligible for free or reduced price meals based on school or census data.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Restricted Open – sites that serve children 18 and under in low-income areas that may limit attendance to address concerns with space, security, safety or control.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Closed Enrolled - sites that serve only an identified group of children, as opposed to the community at large. This might include students enrolled in a summer enrichment, activity or care program. Sponsors must establish that at least 50 percent or more of the individual children enrolled at the site are eligible for free or reduced price meals OR the site is located in an area eligible region based on school or census data.</p> | |

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| | <p>OR</p> <p>Camp (residential or non-residential day camp) – sites that offer regularly scheduled food service as part of an organized program for enrolled children. There is no required free or reduced price percentage. Sponsors must collect information to determine each individual child’s eligibility for free or reduced price meals.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Migrant – sites where the majority of children receiving meals are from families of migrant workers. To confirm migrant status, the sponsor must submit information obtained from a migrant organization that certifies that a majority of the children attending the site are children of migrant workers.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Conditional Non-congregate – rural sites with no congregate meal service that are not camps and are not located in areas in which poor economic conditions exist. Sponsors may claim reimbursement only for meals served to enrolled children who meet the eligibility standards for free or reduced price meals.</p> | |
| Reimbursement Rate | <p>Meals are reimbursed at the SFSP Reimbursement Rates (2026):</p> <p>Breakfast -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$3.1975 (self-prep or vended-rural) ● \$3.1375 (vended-urban) <p>Lunch/Supper -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$5.6000 (self-prep or vended-rural) ● \$5.5100 (vended-urban) <p>Snack -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$1.3250 (self-prep or vended-rural) ● \$1.2950 (vended-urban) | <p>Meals are reimbursed at the free NSLP and SBP Reimbursement Rates:</p> <p><u>NSLP/SBP rates through June 30:</u></p> <p>Breakfast -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$2.46 ● \$2.94 (Severe Need) <p>Lunch/Supper* -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$4.69 ● \$4.71 (Severe Need) <p>Snack -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● \$1.26 <p>*Includes performance-based reimbursement of \$0.09</p> <p><u>NSLP/SBP rates effective July 1:</u></p> <p>SY 2026-27 rates will be released closer to July 1, 2026.</p> |
| Meal Reimbursement for Children | <p>Open and Closed Enrolled sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All meals served to eligible children are reimbursed at the appropriate SFSP rate | <p>Open and Closed Enrolled sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All meals served to eligible children are reimbursed at the appropriate NSLP or SBP free rate |

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| | Camp and Conditional Non-congregate sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meals are reimbursed at the appropriate SFSP rates for children eligible for free or reduced price meals ● No reimbursement is provided for meals served to children approved for paid status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May charge for these meals ○ May cover them with other non-program funds | Camp and Conditional Non-congregate sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meals are reimbursed at the appropriate NSLP or SBP free rate for children eligible for free or reduced price meals ● No reimbursement is provided for meals served to children approved for paid status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ May charge for these meals ○ May cover them with other non-program funds |
| Meal Types | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Breakfast ● Lunch ● Snack (AM or PM) ● Supper | |
| Maximum Number of Meals Served | Open, Closed Enrolled and Conditional Non-congregate sites (per day, per child): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Up to 2 meals <i>or</i> ● 1 meal and 1 snack <i>or</i> ● 2 snacks ● Lunch and supper cannot be reimbursed for the same day for the same site Camp and Migrant sites: Up to 3 meals/snacks per child, per day | |
| Meal Pattern | SFAs can elect to follow the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NSLP Meal Pattern ● SBP Meal Pattern <p style="text-align: center;"><i>or</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SFSP Meal Pattern Non-SFA sponsors must follow the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SFSP Meal Pattern | SFAs must follow the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NSLP Meal Pattern ● SBP Meal Pattern |
| Offer Versus Serve (OVS) | OVS is allowed for SFAs. Non-SFA sponsors may utilize OVS, on a case-by-case basis, if a state waiver request is approved. | OVS is allowed |
| USDA Foods | Available to program sponsors who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare their own meals ● Purchase meals from an SFA that participates in NSLP ● Are SFAs that procure their meals from the same FSMC that provides their NSLP/SBP meals | Available to SFAs that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare their own meals ● Purchase meals from an SFA that participates in NSLP ● Procure their meals from the same FSMC that provides their NSLP/SBP meals |

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| Food Production Records | Food production records are not required but the sponsor must maintain documentation of the meals served. This recordkeeping could be via production records or a detailed menu plan with identified portion sizes. | Food production records are required |
| Meal Service Times | <p>For a congregate on-site meal service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breakfast must be served at the beginning of the day • breakfast cannot be served after a lunch or supper service • a minimum of 1 hour must elapse between the end of one meal and the beginning of another | <p>For a congregate on-site meal service, meal times for breakfast and lunch must follow the times in the SBP and NSLP regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • breakfast must be served in the morning hours • lunch must be offered between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. • snacks must be adequately spaced between other meal service times to minimize food waste and ensure good nutrition practices |
| Meal Service Options | <p>Congregate on-site meal service – a food service at which meals that are provided to children are consumed on site in a supervised setting.</p> <p>Non-congregate to-go meal service – a food service at which meals are provided for children to consume all of the components off-site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to <i>rural</i> areas with <i>no</i> congregate meal service • Grab-and-Go • Curbside Service • Take-home backpacks • Home delivery | |
| Can food be taken off-site from a congregate meal service? | Yes, sponsors may allow a child to take one fruit, vegetable or grain item off-site for later consumption, if health and sanitation regulations are followed and adequate supervision is in place. Sponsors may NOT allow a child to take milk off-site for later consumption. | |
| Point of Service (POS) | <p>Meals must be counted at the point where meals are distributed using a meal count tally form, electronic POS, roster or clicker.</p> <p>In a Camp or Conditional Non-congregate site, meal participation must be collected on a roster with student's names or by utilizing an electronic POS.</p> | |
| Second Meal Claiming | <p>All SFSP sites must plan and prepare for one meal, per child, per meal service</p> <p>Sponsors may be reimbursed for second meals or snacks, up to 2% of the total claimed</p> | <p>All SSO sites must plan and prepare for one meal, per child, per meal service</p> <p>SFAs may not claim reimbursement for second meals or snacks</p> |

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| | Second meals in a rural non-congregate meal service are not allowed | |
| IowaCNP Application Requirements | Sponsors must complete the full SFSP application packet in the SFSP module in IowaCNP | SFAs must complete SSO site application(s) in the current School Nutrition Program (SNP) application packet in IowaCNP |
| Application Deadline | May 1 | |
| Training Requirements | <p>Sponsors are required to participate in annual State agency SFSP sponsor training. If operating a rural non-congregate model, sponsors are also required to attend the State agency rural non-congregate training.</p> <p>Sponsors are required to provide training to administrative and operational staff.</p> | <p>If operating a rural non-congregate model, SFAs are required to attend the State agency rural non-congregate training.</p> <p>No additional State agency training is required.</p> <p>SFAs are encouraged to provide training to administrative and operational staff related to summer season and school year operational differences.</p> |
| Notification to the Community/ Outreach | <p>A media release to announce the availability of free meals, the nondiscrimination policy and complaint procedure is required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsors of camps and closed enrolled sites must notify participants or enrolled children of the availability of free meals and not the community as a whole. <p>Sponsors are required to conduct outreach to inform families about the availability and location of free meals for students via the SFSP. This information can be shared through the school website, flyers, email communication, newsletters, social media or other means of communication.</p> | <p>A media release may be completed but is not required.</p> <p>SFAs are required to conduct outreach to inform families about the availability and location of free meals for students via the SSO. This information can be shared through the school website, flyers, email communication, newsletters, social media or other means of communication.</p> |
| Health Dept Notification | Sponsors must send a notification letter to the health department listing each site that is operating in the summer season. | Not required |
| Monitoring Requirements of SFA or Sponsor | <p>SFSP internal site monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-operational visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New sites and sites with operational problems | SFAs are required to review each SSO site at least once, annually, during summer season operations. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sponsor site visit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New sites and sites with operational problems ○ Within first two weeks of operation ● Site review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All sites ○ Within first four weeks of operation ○ Can be conducted in conjunction with sponsor site visit <p>Sites switching from congregate meal service to rural non-congregate are considered “new” sites, including those switching to a hybrid service.</p> | <p>The SFA must review the site’s compliance with meal counting, claiming, meal pattern and food safety requirements.</p> |
| Monitoring Requirements of State Agency | <p>The State agency must conduct an administrative review of sponsors at least once every 3 years.</p> | <p>The State agency must conduct an administrative review consistent with NSLP/SBP requirements. The State agency must include the review of one SSO site as part of the school year administrative review.</p> |

If you have any questions, please contact your [Regional School Nutrition Consultant](#) or Stephanie Dross at stephanie.dross@iowa.gov

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1. **mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:** Program.Intake@usda.gov

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