United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

Park Office Center

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Alexandria
VA 22302

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SUBJECT: Promoting Nutrition in Summer Meal Programs, with Best Practices

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program's (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) were established to ensure that children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes and appreciates the important role Summer Meal sites play in alleviating food insecurity and hunger in those children most in need when meals are not available through the NSLP. Summer Meal sites also play a valuable role in helping children learn, grow, and stay healthy. By offering nutritious foods at summer sites, children learn how to build a healthy plate and establish healthy eating habits that may continue into adulthood.

In an effort to balance the need to provide meals to vulnerable populations with the need to contribute to the health and well-being of children, FNS strongly encourages sponsors to take steps toward serving nutritious and appealing meals at their summer sites. This memorandum highlights resources and strategies to improve the nutritional quality and appeal of the meals served to children in SFSP and SSO. Additionally, the Attachment provides best practices and tips on how to implement the best practices. Version 2 of this memorandum includes new resources and updates the best practices in the Attachment. This memorandum supersedes SP 06-2016, SFSP 06-2016 *Promoting Nutrition in Summer Meals*, November 12, 2015.

Revised

Nutrition Resources

Sponsors should, as much as possible, purchase and serve foods that align with the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (Dietary Guidelines), such as serving more nutrient dense foods like whole grains and whole fruits and vegetables, and less foods with added sugars and solid fats. FNS provides many resources to assist sponsors in offering healthier menu items and incorporating the best practices listed in the Attachment into their meal service.

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Revised

First, sponsors should watch FNS'*Serving High Quality Meals in Summer Meal Programs* webcast [http://www.fns.usda.gov/serving-high-quality-meal-summer-meal-programs]. It provides tips for working with vendors, information on how to procure local foods, and Team Nutrition Resources. Second, sponsors should review the *Summer Meals Toolkit* [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit] for healthy menu planning resources and strategies on how to offer meals with more whole grains, a greater variety of whole fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, and canned), local foods, fewer added sugars, and less sodium and solid fats.

Third, sponsors may visit the *Team Nutrition Summer Food, Summer Moves* Web site [http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/summer-food-summer-moves] for a free tip sheet on "Offering Healthy Summer Meals that Kids Enjoy" to share with summer meal site operators (in English and Spanish). Free nutrition education posters, placemats, parent handouts, and flyers are available as well to help site operators inform families about healthy food choices based on MyPlate and to provide fun activities to generate interest in summer meals.

Fourth, sponsors should also check out the *Healthy Meals Resource System* [https://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov]. Here, sponsors will find more menu planning tools, recipe ideas, and additional tips and ideas on how to improve the quality of Summer Meals, such as working with vendors or hosting taste tests to help introduce and get children excited about new foods and menus.

Finally, sponsors can visit the *MyPlate* website [www.choosemyplate.gov] for resources. *MyPlate* is an icon that acts as a reminder to help people make healthier food choices and reflects recommendations in the Dietary Guidelines. Nutrient dense foods (ex. whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans and peas, lean meats and poultry, and dairy products prepared without added solid fats, sugars, starches, and sodium) are the basis of a healthful eating pattern and are typically more filling than refined grains and juices. Resources found on the *MyPlate* website, such as the *MyPlate* 10 Tips Nutrition Education Series, can help sponsors identify healthier options to ensure menu choices contain the most nutrients children need to grow and be healthy. Offering healthier choices gives children more of the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients they need for health.

Local Foods

Sponsors can further improve the quality and appeal of their meals with local products. Summer is a great time to incorporate the bountiful harvest of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other local foods. Local foods span the entire meal, from fruits and vegetables to dairy, grains, meat, eggs, and beans. Sponsors can find seasonal products in their freshest state from a variety of sources:

- Direct from a farmer or food hub;
- Farmers markets;
- Community supported agriculture (CSA) programs;

- School or community gardens; and
- Through distributors or food service management companies.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guide, *Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs* [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods], showcases the many ways sponsors can find, buy, and serve local foods in Summer Meals.

Sponsors can also pair these local foods with fun nutrition and agriculture-based activities to keep children engaged in their programming. Local foods tie into numerous activities that keep children both nourished and engaged, as well as help children learn more about where their food comes from and build healthy eating habits. Possible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Growing or visiting edible gardens;
- Taking a farm field trip or hosting farm visits;
- Harvest of the Month or other special recognition of local foods; and
- Participating in taste tests or cooking demonstrations.

For more tips and ideas on how to increase the nutritional quality and build related enrichment activities into Summer Meals Programs see SP 07-2016, SFSP 07-2016: *Local Foods and Related Activities in Summer Meals Programs, with Questions and Answers*. Visit USDA's Farm to Summer website to find links to other helpful guidance and resources [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-summer].

Procurement and USDA Foods

Sponsors with vended meal sites should work with their food vendors when trying to implement the best practices listed in the Attachment. Any initial solicitations for food service management companies should specify the minimum meal pattern requirements that must be met, according to SFSP regulations. Sponsors can go further and create solicitations that include nutritional specifications that ask for healthier meal options, greater variety, and menus that are culturally and age appropriate.

Additionally, SFSP sponsors may be eligible to receive USDA Foods for use in summer meals, either directly from the State distributing agency or the local school food authority. USDA Foods meet the highest safety and nutrition standards, can help stretch food budgets, and meet meal pattern requirements. Fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, lean protein, including meat and poultry, and other healthy food choices are available from USDA Foods [http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd].

State agencies are reminded to distribute this information to Program operators immediately. Program operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agency contact information is available at

http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNS Regional Office.

Original Signed
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Child Nutrition Programs

Attachment

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING NUTRITION IN THE SUMMER MEAL PROGRAMS

FNS realizes that many sponsors may want to go further when it comes to serving healthier meals to children at summer sites. In recognition of this, FNS developed best practices to help sponsors serve more nutritious meals that are based on the Dietary Guidelines. Along with the best practices are ideas on how to accomplish them. Following these best practices allows sponsors to ensure that children are getting the optimal benefit from the meals they receive at summer sites. FNS applauds those sponsors that find ways to incorporate these best practices into their meal service.

As a reminder, be sure to follow State and local health and safety codes when preparing and serving meals and food items.

Vegetables and Fruit	Vary the vegetables served throughout the week. Aim to offer vegetables from each of these groups: • Dark green vegetables (ex. broccoli, spinach, and Romaine lettuce); • Red and orange vegetables (ex. carrots, red bell peppers, and tomatoes); • Beans and peas (legumes) (ex. black beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), lentils, split peas, pinto beans, and white beans); • Starchy vegetables (ex. corn, green peas, green lima beans, and potatoes); and • Other vegetables (ex. cabbage, celery, summer squash, and green beans).
	Offer more filling meals by adding extra vegetables. At self-prep sites, toss peppers, spinach, or cherry tomatoes into a pasta or add some extra broccoli, snap peas, or mushrooms to a stir-fry.
	Serve a variety of fruits and choose whole or cut-up fruits (fresh, frozen, or canned in 100% juice or water) more often than juice. Get creative and try fruits that are in season during the summer, like melons, berries, and cherries.
	Make at least one of the two required components of a snack a fruit or a vegetable. Try serving carrots with peanut butter, fresh or frozen mango with yogurt, or apple slices with low-fat cheese.
Meat and Meat Alternates	Offer a variety of different protein foods throughout the week, such as lean meats, poultry, fish, legumes, and nuts/nut butters. Keep it fun by adding themes to meals, such as a southwestern lunch with bean and vegetable chili and cornbread.
	Limit serving processed meats and poultry, such as hot dogs, bologna, pepperoni, and sausages, to no more than once per week.
	Choose low-fat or reduced-fat cheeses and yogurts. Get children excited about yogurt by letting them build their own yogurt parfait. Just like a salad bar, set up toppings for children to add to their yogurt. Some toppings may include sliced or cubed fruit (apples, bananas, mango, kiwis, and melon) or whole grain-rich granola.

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Grains	Provide at least two servings of wholegrains per day: • Check the ingredients list on the food package to see if the food is made with whole grains. Look for the word "whole" in the ingredient that is first on the list, or second after water—that means there is more of it than other ingredients. Some examples of whole grain ingredients are whole wheat, whole durum, or whole corn. Other whole grains that don't require the word whole include brown rice, wild rice, oatmeal, bulgur, and quinoa. • Make simple switches by introducing some whole wheat versions of grains already used in meals, such as brown rice, whole wheat pasta, or 100% wholewheat bread.
	Use the Nutrition Facts Label to choose and serve cereals with the lowest amount of sugar per serving.
	Offer fruit instead of grain-based desserts (e.g., cakes, cookies, brownies, fruit turnovers, doughnuts, granola bars, toaster pastries, or sweet rolls).
Milk	Move towards serving low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk.
	Keep milk extra cold (35°F for the best taste). Cold milk can be a refreshing beverage in summer months.
Additional Best Practices	Prepare and serve hot meals when the appropriate foodservice equipment is available. Have a popular cold sandwich as a backup option in case the hot items run out.
	Incorporate seasonal and locally produced foods into meals for the freshest and highest-quality foods. Find out how by checking out the Farm to Summer resources [http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-summer].
	Make water available. Try adding sliced fruit (ex. lemons, limes, or berries) or cucumbers to water for a tasty twist.
	Offer children who participate in the summer meal program the opportunity to sample menu items and give their feedback. Taste tests introduce children to new foods in a fun and positive way.
	Consider offering meals for parents so that they feel welcome as well. Program policy permits meals to be sold to parents and caregivers (also known as "Non-Program Adults) at cost. Parents and caregivers can sit with their children and enjoy lunch, which can enhance the appeal of sites as a family gathering spot.