

Summer Food Service Program

What is Summer Food Service Program?

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally funded program established in 1975. It is designed to provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during summer months, when many children do not have access to the free-and-reduced meals that are provided to them during the school year. This program is funded by the USDA and in Oklahoma, it is administered by the State Department of Education. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma serves as a sponsor of this program, overseeing multiple sites across central and western Oklahoma.



Why is the SFSP important?

Access to nutritious food is crucial to a child's mental and physical development. During the summer months, many low-income children may not know where their next meal is coming from. These children are at a high risk of falling behind their peers during the summer months, a problem known as the "summer slide." SFSP partners offer enrichment activities including tutoring and literacy programs, physical fitness programs, cultural activities and arts and crafts. Research has shown that when partnered together, food programs and enrichment programs are more successful. The Regional Food Bank has been a SFSP sponsor since 2002 and is the largest sponsor in the state of Oklahoma. During the summer of 2023, the Regional Food Bank provided more than 138,000 meals at nearly 100 SFSP sites across central and western Oklahoma.

Who Can Become a SFSP Partner?

SFSP partner sites may be located in a variety of settings including, but not limited to schools, recreation centers, playgrounds, parks, churches, community centers, day camps, residential summer camps, housing projects, migrant centers and Indian reservations. The only requirement is the site must be located in an area where the assigned school has at least 50% or greater of children who are eligible to participate in the free and reduced-priced meal program. For us to check your eligibility, we simply need the physical address of your site. Questions regarding eligibility can be directed to Aline Bristol, Food for Kids data coordinator, at abristol@rfbo.org or 405-604-7102.

As an SFSP site, your responsibilities include:

- Complete site training with the Regional Food Bank staff.
- Maintain trained staff members or volunteers to supervise and oversee meal and snack services.
- Distribute and track meals, following SFSP guidelines provided in training.
- Utilize Link2Feed, an online platform, to track daily meal count records and menus.
- Maintain proper food safety standards by storing food appropriately and keeping site clean and sanitary.
- Help promote the program in the community.

What are the benefits of becoming an SFSP site?

- You can serve free, nutritious meals and snacks to the children in your community.
- Providing meals for children helps families in your community stretch their monthly food budget.
- If your organization is already operating a summer program that serves food, utilizing the SFSP is a no-cost means to free up your budget to add or expand other programs.
- Offering activities such as physical activities, reading or tutoring programs can help keep children engaged in learning during the summer months, ensuring they return to school in the fall ready to learn.



How much does it cost?

As an SFSP site operating under the sponsorship of the Regional Food Bank, the meals and snacks are free. The Regional Food Bank takes care of the ordering, preparing and delivery of the food. We only ask that you store it according to food safety standards you will learn about in training, serve it according to federal requirements taught during your training and maintain accurate daily meal counts via Link2Feed so that we are able to receive reimbursement that will cover the cost of purchasing and shipping the food.

How will we get the food?

The Regional Food Bank will deliver your food to you! If you are located in the Oklahoma City metro area, you will receive daily or weekly deliveries directly to your site. For sites located outside of the metro area, you will receive routine deliveries via the Regional Food Bank's rural delivery schedule. This schedule depends on the route and schedule of existing community partners of the Regional Food Bank, such as a Food & Resource Center or nearby food pantries. Please keep in mind, you may have to pick up your deliveries from the designated delivery location that will include frozen and dry, shelf-stable items and take them to your site for proper storage. These deliveries typically occur about twice per month depending on your need and location. Orders will be adjusted according to the number of participants.

How will we store the food?

You will need both cold and dry storage available and the amount of space needed will depend on how many children you plan to serve and what types of meals you want to serve. If you do not have storage available at your SFSP site, you may want to consider building partnerships within your community. For example, if there is a church or community center that has a commercial kitchen available, that would be a great partnership. School cafeterias also make great SFSP sites as space is available during the summer. Some SFSP sites have also worked with their local grocer to allot cooler/freezer space for storage. Every community is different and the Regional Food Bank staff can help facilitate these conversations if need be.

What do the meals consist of?

All of our menus meet the USDA meal standards for children 18 and under, meaning they get the appropriate amounts of protein, whole grains, milk and fruit/vegetables. The fresh and frozen meals are prepared in Hope's Kitchen, the Regional Food Bank's production kitchen. Breakfasts and snacks will consist of various fruits, grains, proteins and milk while lunches and dinners will consist of kid-friendly items, including sandwiches, wraps and sometimes compartmentalized meals served in oven/microwave safe trays, such as



chicken nuggets or mini corn dogs. Menus are determined by Hope's Kitchen staff and also what storage capabilities you have on-site. SFSP sites can choose either lunch/dinner only OR a combination that includes lunch/dinner with breakfast or snack. It each's SFSP sites decision based upon what works best for that site.

Grab and Go sites are supplied with shelf stable food boxes that do not require cold storage (refrigeration).

Can we make deliveries or send food home with kids?

Yes! In 2024 the USDA made changes to its guidelines so both of these are an option for SFSP sites.

Who can we serve?

This program is available to all children 18 and under. No identification is required nor do we ask for names or income verification. SFSP site eligibility is based on census data, so if the assigned school to the location qualifies at 50% or greater low income eligibility, that area qualifies to serve all children. One of the requirements of the program is that sites do not discriminate against any child and serve all children who come to that site equally. This can be a great opportunity to be all-inclusive to fight the stigma that this program is only for children who "need" it. It can be fun and healthy for any child who wants to be a part of it.

How many kids can we serve?

This program can be as big or as modest as you want it to be. Refer to your county's "Low Income Report" at the Oklahoma State Department of Education's website to find your school and refer to the number (not the percentage) of children who are receiving free and reduced meals. This will give you an idea of the number of children who could really benefit from this program. This doesn't mean you will serve 100% of these children, it will just give you some context for the need in your area. We don't want to target only these children and create a stigma, we want to build a sustainable, inclusive program that will benefit all children. We do not have a minimum or maximum serving requirement for SFSP.

Best Practices

- Local coalition building (can be formal or informal) - the more people who pitch in, the easier and more fun it is for everyone!
- Work with parents, teachers and schools to raise awareness and support before summer starts!
- Remember WHY you are helping not only the children but also their families and the entire community!

- Tap into local groups and organizations for support:
 - Social service clubs (Kiwanis and Rotary clubs)
 - College extension services
 - City, county and state health departments
 - Tribal nations
 - Youth-serving groups like 4H, FFA, FCCLA, FCA
 - Churches
 - Local businesses
 - Law enforcement
 - Chamber of commerce
- Work with local media and businesses to promote the program. The Regional Food Bank may be able to help promote your program if you need it.
- Transportation can be donated by a local school, church or other organization if they have the capabilities. Know where your kids are already gathering and make it accessible for them.
- Do not hesitate to call and ask questions! The Regional Food Bank staff is always more than happy to help, whether it is technical support, tips on recruiting volunteers, ideas for activities or anything else. We are here to help you serve your community!



How do I get started?

If you are interested in starting one a SFSP site, here are several crucial steps to get started:

1. **Build partnerships in the community.** You don't have to form a whole coalition, just find a few stakeholders (concerned parents, teachers, church leaders, health department staff) who also care about feeding children. Remember it is not just one person's responsibility to make sure a community's children have access to nutritious food during the summer.
2. **Get the word out.** Let people know what you want to do and why you want to do it. Send out informational materials about the program through local schools (check with school administration first!) to both let parents and school staff know the program will be available. This is also a great way to make it more inclusive in the community.
3. **Location, location, location.** You know your community better than we do, so you will probably know possible locations where children live nearby. Are they walking distance from a church or other community center? Is there a community pool/splash pad or park where a lot of children hang out during the summer? If the children are not within walking distance, is there a group or organization who would be willing or able to help with transportation?
4. **Food storage and preparation.** Once you determine where you will be serving, you can determine what you will be serving: breakfast, lunch/dinner and snack. You will need a place to store these meals, such as a church with a large kitchen or a school cafeteria if you do not have them on site (this is where those community partnerships come in handy!)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact **Patrick Tadlock, Food for Kids support coordinator, at ptadlock@rfbo.org at 405-600-3151.**

Applications for Summer Programs are due by April 15. If you are interested in being an SFSP site, please let Patrick know so he can send you the link to the online application.