



SFSP Policy 2024-02

Non-congregate Meal Service Policy for Approved SFSP/SSO Sponsors

Purpose

To outline requirements and implementation guidelines for Non-Congregate (NC) Meal Service in eligible rural areas for approved sponsors of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) during 2024.

Scope

Approved sponsoring agencies and organizations with sites meeting the USDA designation for “rural” in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or Summer Seamless Option (SSO) in Indiana. The definition of ‘rural’ in the SFSP regulations (7 CFR 225.2) is:

- (1) Any area in a county which is not a part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area based on the Office of Management and Budget's Delineations of Metropolitan Statistical Areas;
- (2) Any area in a county classified as a non-metropolitan area based on USDA Economic Research Service's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes and Urban Influence Codes;
- (3) Any census tract classified as a non-metropolitan area based on USDA Economic Research Service's Rural-Urban Commuting Area codes;
- (4) Any area of a Metropolitan Statistical Area which is not part of a Census Bureau-defined urban area;
- (5) Any area of a State which is not part of an urban area as determined by the Secretary;
- (6) Any subsequent substitution or update of the aforementioned classification schemes that Federal governing bodies create; or
- (7) Any “pocket” within a Metropolitan Statistical Area which, at the option of the State agency and with FNSRO approval, is determined to be rural in character based on other data sources.

In most instances, the USDA Rural Designation Map will be used to determine if a proposed site is within a rural area: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/rural-designation>

Description

A lack of transportation, long distances and higher costs in rural areas have presented participation barriers for eligible children to receive free SFSP or SSO meals in a congregate setting. On December 29, 2022, President Biden signed the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 establishing a permanent non-congregate meal service option for SFSP and SSO sponsors operating in rural areas.

The following policy is effective for program year 2024.

Policy

SFSP and SSO sponsors meeting the following criteria may request to operate non-congregate meal service and are required to submit a Program Addendum/Service Agreement which includes the Integrity Plan for Non-Congregate Meals. The Integrity Plan must be submitted to the state agency for approval and describe how regulatory compliance is ensured in all aspects of meal service. The plan, along with non-congregate menus showing meal pattern compliance, must be approved by a state agency field specialist prior to the start of non-congregate site operations. No meals may be claimed until the plan and site application(s) in the CNPweb are approved.

➤ **Sponsor Eligibility**

Experienced SFSP and SSO Sponsors determined to be in good standing and new SFSP and SSO sponsors who have successfully completed all steps for program sponsorship may be determined eligible for non-congregate meal service. For existing sponsors, good standing means the status of a program operator that meets its Program responsibilities, is current

with its financial obligations, and, if applicable, has fully implemented all corrective actions within the required period.

➤ **Site Eligibility**

As defined by regulations, rural non-congregate feeding sites must meet the definition of “rural” as described above and meet the eligibility requirements of serving an area in which poor economic conditions exist.

Meal Service Options

For all non-congregate meal service options, sponsor sites must be following the Integrity Plan approved by state agency staff. Rural non-congregate meal service may be provided for up to a maximum of 10 consecutive days. However, the state agency may limit the maximum days on a case-by-case basis. Food items must be unitized or provided in individual servings. A daily dated menu must be included with each non-congregate meal package along with food safety storage instructions if the service includes more than one meal.

➤ **Meal Distribution to Children**

Meals are distributed specifically to children ages 18 and under, however, there is no expectation for participants to remain on site to consume the meal.

➤ **Parent/Guardian Meal Pick-up Option**

Parents and guardians are permitted to pick up meals for all children ages 18 and under in their household without children being present if the approved sponsor integrity plan ensures no duplication of meals and uses the following criteria for defining parent/guardian. Keep in mind that if children are present during the meal pick up there is no need to verify if the accompanying adult is a parent or a guard

For purposes of the pick-up of meals (7 CFR 225.16(i)(2)), a parent or guardian means:

- a. Any biological or adoptive parent;
- b. A guardian generally authorized to act as the child’s parent;
- c. A foster parent;
- d. An individual with legal custody or an individual acting in the place of a biological or adoptive parent, including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative, or other adult who accepts full legal responsibility for the child; or
- e. Adults or minors who are principally responsible for the care of the child on the day of meal pick-up (this does not include a day-care operator or childcare center operator).

➤ **Home Delivery Option to Pre-approved Households**

Sponsors must obtain written consent from all the households participating in a home delivery option. If a different organization is delivering the meals to households, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) must be obtained between the sponsoring agency and the delivery agency. Sponsors must work with their local health department to ensure food safety and plan the menus in a manner that allows food to be left behind in case no one is at home.

➤ **Mail Delivery**

Prepackaged meals meeting all component requirements are delivered via delivery directly to pre-approved households who have given consent.

Bulk Meal Service – Non-vented sponsors may provide bulk meal items only after detailed distribution plans are fully discussed with the field specialist and outlined and approved within the site Integrity Plan.

Offer Versus Serve – School Food Authorities may utilize offer versus serve with prior discussion with the field specialist, if indicated on the site information sheets, and staff training has taken place.

Resources: Indiana Department of Education, School and Community Nutrition Programs Summer Food Service Program and Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (the Act) ([PL 117-328](#))