



Food That's In . . . When School Is Out! Summer Food Service Program for Children

Improving Nutrition Education and the Quality of SFSP Meals

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is intended to promote and continue the nutritional care and education of children during the summer months when the in-school Child Nutrition Programs, School Breakfast and School Lunch, are not available. The nutritional well-being of children can be influenced by both the amount and the quality of the food they eat. Children are more likely to eat foods that appeal to all their senses. They are also more likely to eat foods that they know will help give them energy to grow and be healthy.

Serving Quality SFSP Meals

Quality meals that attract children to the SFSP site can be served within the reimbursement rate. In fact, serving high quality meals may improve a sponsor's financial condition by increasing and stabilizing attendance. Higher attendance leads to lower unit costs.

Sponsors can improve the quality of meals in several ways:

- Serve as many creditable food items as possible;
- Balance meals in terms of color, flavor, shape, and texture of foods selected for each component;
- Create meals that appeal to the senses (sight, taste, touch, smell);
- Consider the ethnic, cultural and religious background of the children being served and plan meals that are acceptable and appropriate for them;
- Serve foods that are in vogue with children, such as "wraps";
- Team up with farmers to serve fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Use commodities to increase variety of foods served at low cost;
- Moderate levels of fat, sugar, and salt; and
- Choose foods that are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber.

Providing Nutrition Education

SFSP can offer children more than a nutritious meal. It can provide opportunities to teach children about healthy eating through activities that are creative and fun. It can also introduce new foods to children and lead to better acceptance of a variety of foods.

By adding nutrition education activities, healthy food choices can be reinforced and become choices children make as part of their lifestyle. Activities should provide nutrition concepts, be age appropriate, and provide a way for children to practice what they learn.

Quality meals and meaningful nutrition education activities attract children and keep them coming back to SFSP sites which helps ensure that their nutritional well-being is protected during the summer.

Nutrition Education Activities

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| Puppet shows | Skits or plays |
| Reading or story telling | Contests |
| Crafts | Games |
| Music | Food preparation |
| Tasting parties | Gardening |
| Nutrition fairs | Parades |
| Guest speakers | Videos |
| Puzzles | Placemat designs |
| Recipes | Take-home newsletters |





Nutrition Education Challenges and Solutions

There are several challenges that face sponsors when offering nutrition education activities at their sites; but for each challenge, there are solutions.

- **Time** - At many sites, children come and go quickly. Sponsors need to:
 - Promote the activity in advance so children can plan to be on site at the time of the activity;
 - Select the time when more children are together, such as shortly before the meal service begins; and
 - Use nutrition displays to generate interest.
- **Age differences** - Children of all ages participate in SFSP. Planning an activity to interest all ages of children may not be possible. Sponsors should:
 - Focus on the dominant age group;
 - Have a variety of activities appropriate for several age groups; and/or
 - Have different activities for each age group.
- **Limited time and staff** - SFSP site operators may not feel they have the expertise or the time to do nutrition education activities along with their other duties. Sponsors can:
 - Contact a nutrition resources person to conduct activities such as home economists with county extension service, nutrition college students, and WIC or Head Start nutritionists; and/or
 - Seek training on conducting nutrition education activities and/or research materials designed to enable a sponsor to conduct the activities.
- **Materials and resources** - Sponsors and sites may not have nutrition education materials and lesson plans to provide nutrition related activities. In securing these materials sponsors can:
 - Identify local resources (materials and personnel) which may help with activities at no cost to the sponsors, and/or
 - Count nutrition education materials purchased as an allowable expense.



Nutrition Resources

SFSP sponsors have a variety of other resources that can help with nutrition education activities.

- **The State Cooperative Extension Service** can be an excellent resource of both ideas and assistance in providing activities. They have specialists and program assistants who have been trained to provide nutrition education to youth.
- **Colleges and universities** may have nutrition or home economics students who can assist with nutrition education in the summer as part of an internship or field experience.
- Many of the **trade organizations** such as Florida Citrus, Washington Apples, and National Dairy Council offer nutrition education materials at no or low cost.
- **Many State and other nutrition organizations** have developed valuable nutrition resources that can be ordered. Examples include:
 - Pyramid Twister and Fun Ways to Teach Children About Food and New Mexico Simplified Food Buying Guide - available from New Mexico Family Nutrition Bureau at (505) 841-9410;
 - The Nutrition Idea Book - developed by the Society for Nutrition Education and available by calling (304) 293-2694; and
 - 50 Ways to Run the Summer Food Program on a Low Budget - available from Tufts University School of Nutrition Science and Policy at (617) 627-3956.
- **USDA** also has a variety of resource material to assist SFSP sponsors with nutrition education, including:
 - Community Nutrition Action Kit - activities for kids and guidelines for implementation, reproducible handouts, resource information and references through USDA Team Nutrition at (703) 305-1624; and
 - USDA's Food and Nutrition Information Center (FNIC) - USDA program participants may borrow nutrition education materials, videos, and training materials free of charge at (301) 504-5719.

January 1998

