



August 6, 2024

## High Quality Summer Meals Award Program

*Turnip the Beet Award Nominations Opened August 1*

*Nomination Deadline: August 30*



Nutrition Services is excited to announce that the **Turnip the Beet Award** has returned for summer 2024.

This award recognizes outstanding Summer Meal Program sponsors across the nation who work hard to offer high quality meals to children that are appetizing, appealing, and nutritious during the summer months.

For summer 2023, Bread of Life Development (BOLD) Ministries, Boys & Girls Club of Greater Augusta, and Burke County Public Schools received the gold, silver, and bronze awards, respectively. Together, these sponsors have been serving summer meals for over 43 years.

Tell us how your organization went above and beyond this summer to ensure children participating in SFSP received

high-quality meals by completing the nomination form.

To apply, sponsors may self-nominate or be nominated by another party. The **nomination form** for this award includes short-answer questions and menu criteria based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The criteria include serving local foods, a variety of vegetables and fruit, whole grains, and low-fat and fat-free milk. For more detailed information on the Turnip the Beet Award and the evaluation criteria, check out the **Turnip the Beet webpage**.

**NEW!** Include 2-3 pictures from your meal site when submitting your nomination form (i.e. pictures of meals, pictures of children helping with meals, pictures of children doing activities, etc.).

Please complete and submit nomination forms by **Friday, August 30, 2024**, to [morgan.chapman@decalf.gov](mailto:morgan.chapman@decalf.gov).

Questions? Contact Morgan Chapman, Nutrition Education Specialist at [morgan.chapman@decalf.gov](mailto:morgan.chapman@decalf.gov).

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## City of Atlanta Partners with DECAL for Summer Meals Spike Event

The City of Atlanta partnered with the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning to promote the availability of summer meals at a spike event in July. This event reminds families and guardians that summer meals continue to be



offered through the Happy Helpings program until school starts.

During the event, children and teens received free nutritious meals through Happy Helpings, In addition to the nutritious meals, the event included physical activities like hop scotch, egg toss, bean bag toss and jump rope, a hydration station with fruit infused water, and a taste testing station with local fruits and vegetables.

Special guests included Sakeenah Shabazz, MPP, Senior Policy Advisor for the Food and Nutrition Service with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the members of the USDA SERO team.



## Summer Meals Season Ends when School Starts

Sponsors can only operate the Happy Helpings (HH) program during the summer months when school is not in session. Once school reopens in the district where a site is located, HH operations must end.

## Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At Risk Afterschool

## Meals

Many existing Happy Helpings sites are well-positioned to offer afterschool meals during the school year through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Both organizations and communities benefit when meals are offered to children in low-income communities year-round.

Now that we are at the end of the summer season, the opportunity for sponsors to transition to At-Risk Afterschool Meals, a component of CACFP, is upon us. Here are a few things to consider:

- An application for Happy Helpings sponsors transitioning to CACFP is required upon initial entry to the CACFP. General updates and annual renewal will be required thereafter.
- As part of the current ATLAS CACFP application process, Happy Helpings sponsors are required to sign a CACFP agreement in addition to their existing agreement.
- Sponsors are required to adhere to all monitoring requirements.
- Sponsors are required to attend training.
- If you have questions or are interested in registering for training, please contact [Leslie Truman](#) at 404.657.1779

## After School Programs Required to Apply for License or Exemption to Participate in At-Risk

Afterschool programs MUST apply for license or exemption in order to participate in the At Risk Afterschool Meals Program by submitting a complete license or exemption application to DECAL's [Child Care Services](#) (CCS) .

Available Resources:

- [Applicant's Guide to Licensing](#)
- [Child Care Learning Center Information](#)
- [Exemption Overview Presentation](#)

For more information, requirements, License Orientation meeting, and state laws, contact CCS at 404.657.5562.

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## Annual Year-End Reconciliation Due October 31

Institutions operating FY2024 Happy Helpings Summer Food Program (May 2024- Aug 2024) must complete an Annual Reconciliation Form. **The SFSP reconciliation form and final bank statement or general ledger is due October 31, 2024.**

The form should include all FY2024 Happy Helpings operating months. Per SFSP Policy 5, sponsors are required to submit year-end reconciliation documentation as well as the bank statement and/or general ledger **supporting the ending balance on the reconciliation form.**

The Year End Reconciliation is completed after:

- The final claim is submitted to DECAL
- All invoices are paid
- Final reimbursement is received
- Happy Helpings functional activity is closed
- All Happy Helpings activity is accounted for on the last operating bank statement or general ledger.

The reconciliation form and supporting financial documentation should be submitted together to [nutritionbudget@decalfga.gov](mailto:nutritionbudget@decalfga.gov). Please submit the requested documents as soon as possible to avoid delay in approvals for Happy Helpings in FY25.

**Include the name of the institution and agreement number in the subject line of**

**the email.**

Please review the [reconciliation form](#) and [instructions](#). Contact the budget team at [nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov) with any questions.

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## Unanticipated School Closure Waivers Available

On August 5, 2024, Nutrition Services received USDA approval for statewide waivers for Happy Helpings sponsors to utilize during unanticipated school closures.

The following waivers are available during unanticipated school closures when meal service operations are limited due to natural disasters, unscheduled major building repairs, court orders relating to school safety or other issues, labor-management disputes, or when approved by the State agency for similar unanticipated causes.

The following approved waivers are available when schools are closed with no virtual learning/classes:

- **Non-Congregate Meal Service**
- **Parent and Guardian Meal Pick-up**
- **Meal Service Times**
- **Service of Meals at School Sites**

The waivers listed above are available through June 30, 2025.

When approved, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sponsors may only serve meals in a non-congregate setting, adjust the time of meal service, allow parent pick up, and allow service of meals at non-school sites.

Waivers cannot be approved for more than 10 consecutive operating days without approval from Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). In situations that may warrant longer approval periods, the FNS Southeast Regional Office (SERO) will work closely with Nutrition Services to determine if an extension is needed.

Happy Helpings sponsors interested in applying for these waivers during unanticipated school closures must submit waiver requests via the Waiver Module within GA ATLAS. For questions, please reach out to Robyn Parham at [robyn.parham@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:robyn.parham@dec.al.ga.gov).

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## Stay Informed: New Happy Helpings Memo on Geographic Preference

On June 26, 2024, USDA's Food Nutrition Services (FNS) issued the policy memorandum [Geographic Preference Option Questions & Answers](#). This memorandum provides updated guidance on the geographic preference option to reflect changes made by the final rule, Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (**89 FR 31962**, April 25, 2024).

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## Waivers for Physical Safety Concerns

Nutrition Services received recent notification that USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will consider non-congregate waiver requests submitted by sponsors for individual sites during exceptional circumstances that cause physical safety concerns.

Exceptional circumstances can include incidents such as a violent crime occurring within close proximity of a site, determination of unsafe or contaminated water at a site, or other extreme and specific conditions or events that would severely jeopardize the safety of Program

participants at a particular site.

It is important to keep in mind that waivers will only be considered for specific meal sites in close proximity to actual incidents. Blanket waiver requests for the entire state, communities, or neighborhoods will not be considered/approved by DECAL or FNS.

To apply for this waiver, sponsors should follow waiver request procedures in DECAL's memorandum [Child Nutrition Program Waiver Request Guidance and Protocol](#). Attached to the memorandum is a template waiver request form that sponsors should use to submit the waiver request to Nutrition Services.

This request should be submitted to Robyn Parham at [Robyn.Parham@decals.ga.gov](mailto:Robyn.Parham@decals.ga.gov). Waivers for physical safety concerns must receive DECAL and FNS approval and non-congregate meal services may not occur until approval has been granted.

Sponsors may request waivers for specific sites for the following:

- Non-Congregate Meal Service [42 U.S.C. 1753(b)(1)(A), 42 U.S.C. 1761(a)(1)(D), and 7 CFR 225.6(i)(15)]
- Parent/Guardian Meal Pickup [42 U.S.C.1761(f)(3), 7 CFR 225.2(Meals), and 7 CFR 225.9(d)(7)]
- Meal Service Times [7 CFR 225.16(c)(1),(2), and (3)]

Please note that sponsors would be required to publish a public notice of their waiver request on the SFSP sponsor's website or through a printed announcement in the local/state newspaper. This notice must include the regulation that is requested to be waived, such as the regulations noted above.

In addition to the request form, sponsors must submit documentation of the incident that threatens physical safety of Program participants at the site. Examples of documentation that should be submitted are as follows:

- Written and signed statements from site staff who directly witnessed and documented the event;
- Documentation of an event by a law enforcement agency of the jurisdiction in which the site exists (e.g., a police report);
- Published news reports or articles reporting of the incident in close proximity of the site; or
- In the case of contaminated water at a site, a notice from a local health authority advising of the unsafe water conditions.

Waivers will be approved for no more than 7 days. If the safety issue persists past that period, FNS may consider granting extensions on a case-by-case basis.

For questions, please contact Robyn Parham at [Robyn.Parham@decals.ga.gov](mailto:Robyn.Parham@decals.ga.gov)

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## New Waivers Available during Excessive Heat and Air Quality Advisories

On March 26, 2024, USDA granted a Nutrition Services request to waive certain requirements in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) for summer 2024 operations. Specifically, Nutrition Services was approved to waive the requirement to serve congregate meals during times of excessive heat and air quality advisories.

### Non-Congregate Meals during Excessive Heat Waiver

This waiver allows SFSP sponsors, in good standing, to operate approved outdoor meal sites without temperature-controlled alternative sites as non-congregate sites on days when the area is experiencing excessive heat. These waivers may only be used on days when the National Weather Service (NWS) has issued a Heat Advisory, an Excessive Heat Warning, or an Excessive Heat Watch for the area in which an approved outdoor

meal site is located, as indicated at <https://www.weather.gov/>. These waivers are effective *May 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024*.

## **Non-Congregate Meals during Air Quality Advisories Waiver**

This waiver allows SFSP sponsors, in good standing, to operate approved outdoor meal sites without alternative indoor sites as non-congregate sites on days when the area is experiencing certain air quality advisories. Sites may be approved for non-congregate meal service on days when the site's zip code has an Air Quality Index (AQI) "purple" flag or higher, as indicated at <https://www.airnow.gov/>. These waivers are effective *May 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024*.

## **Additional Flexibilities Available**

The following flexibilities are also available during times of excessive heat and air quality advisories. These flexibilities are effective *May 1, 2024, through September 30, 2024*

- **Parent and Guardian Meal Pick-Up**
- **Meal Service Time Flexibilities**

## **Guidance Available on Waivers and Approval Process**

Nutrition Services has developed instructions and further guidance on applying for these waivers and flexibilities entitled Happy Helpings Excessive Heat and Air Quality Advisories Application and Instruction Guide. The guidance can be found [here](#).

**All sponsors who desire to apply for these waivers are strongly encouraged to review this guidance as it offers information on required documentation to be maintained and submitted. In addition, the guidance contains instructions on how to report meals served during the utilization of these waivers.**

Sponsors interested in utilizing these waivers and flexibilities must request approval via the Waiver Module in GA ATLAS. Sponsors must have approval to utilize these waivers and flexibilities prior to serving meals in non-congregate settings during excessive heat and/or air quality advisories.

For general questions on requesting a USDA approved waiver, please contact [Tammie.Baldwin@dec.al.gov](mailto:Tammie.Baldwin@dec.al.gov).

For specific policy questions pertaining to waivers, please contact [Robyn.Parham@dec.al.gov](mailto:Robyn.Parham@dec.al.gov).

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## **Training Resources**

### **In Case You Missed It: Webinar Recordings Now Available!**

If you missed a webinar, please visit the [Training and Technical Assistance](#) webpage for previously recorded webinars.

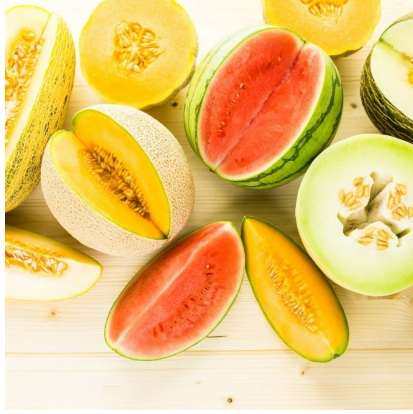
This month's training highlight is the [Happy Helpings Reconciliation Training](#) webinar. It discussed detailed information on the annual Year-End Reconciliation process, how to complete the Reconciliation Form, and documents required for submission and potential next steps.

### **Cartwheel Meal Counter *Update!***

Meal Counter may not be available next year. However, sponsors that utilized Meal Counter this summer will still be required to maintain, provide and/or produce required records upon request. Sponsors that maintain (or plan to maintain) electronic records via Meal Counter must submit those records to your assigned TA Coordinator for alternate approval.

### **Encouraging Excellent Eating Early**

Interested in giving young children a taste for healthy eating right from the start? Kids can react strongly to the foods— healthy or not! Check out these child-feeding tips and advice on how to set a positive tone for balanced, healthy eating!



## Nutrition Ed Nook

### *Juicy, Sweet Melons*

Melons are August's Harvest of the Month ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) spotlight! Melons are a summertime delight - sweet and juicy fruits - whether freshly picked or cooled in the refrigerator.

There are different varieties of melons that grow around the world, including the gourd-like bitter melon from India and the sweet canary melon grown in Asia and Africa.

Watermelon, cantaloupe, and honeydew are the most eaten melon varieties in the U.S. Examples of other melons include Canary, Charentais, Crenshaw and Galia.

Melons are among the most hydrating fruits around, with varieties like cantaloupe and watermelon containing 90% water. Melons are also a great source of antioxidants, such as beta-carotene in cantaloupe and lycopene in watermelon. In addition, melons support immune and skin health with high vitamin C and water content. Melons are versatile as an ingredient in salads, salsas, side dishes, entrees, and drinks.

Melon season in Georgia is between May and October. The peak harvest season, when these fruits have the best flavor and are usually more affordable, is from late May through mid-July.

**Fun Fact:** The University of Georgia's 2024 Ag Snapshot lists Georgia as second in the nation for both cantaloupe production and watermelon production.

### Integration:

- [Melon and Mint](#)
- [Melon Salsa](#)
- [Cantaloupe Cooler](#)
- [Fruit Slush](#)
- [Cantaloupe Melon Kabobs](#)
- [Watermelon Cooler](#)

### Education:

- **Watch** the [Harvest with Holly](#) video that explores the Harvest of the Month spotlight, how these items grow, where they grow in Georgia, and how they get from the farms to school meals all across the state of Georgia.
- **Compare & Contrast** Make a list of similarities and a list of differences between two different melons. Are there more similarities or differences?
- **Read** ['The Watermelon Seed' by Greg Pizzoli Koller](#). In this award-winning book for kids, the crocodile has a problem: he loves watermelon, but he's afraid of what will happen if he eats one of the seeds—there's only one way to find out!
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such as using a plastic knife or cookie cutter to cut melons into cubes or fun shapes. **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate melons into their meals!

### Conversation:

- What varieties of melons have your program participants eaten before?
- What is their favorite type of melon to eat?
- What new melon would your program participants like to try?

Share your Harvest of the Month stories and menu integration of melons with Nutrition Education Specialist, Morgan Chapman, MPH, MChE at

## Physical Activity Corner

### *Family Engagement Through Physical Activity*

Family engagement during the earliest years of a child's life is one of the most powerful factors of a child's growth development.

The positive outcomes of engaging parents, staff, and caregivers increases the support for children's learning at home, empowers parents, and improves family well-being. According to the CDC, family engagement in relation to physical activity in childcare settings and schools work together to increase physical activity opportunities outside of a child's learning environment.

Family engagement improves cognitive development and academic performance, better social-emotional development, and improved health. Their families are children's first teachers, and it is the quality of parent-child relationship and interactions that create the foundational skills that children need at home, in school and their community.



### **Family Engagement & Physical Activity Ideas & Tips for Families:**

- Have a Family Picnic. Social interactions boost children's cognitive and communication abilities. Have a family picnic in the backyard of your home, outside on the lawn, or at a nearby park. Consider bringing a blanket, basket, toss and catch, kickball, running, etc. to get active!
- Plan a day outdoors. As a family, schedule a time each day for an outdoor activity with your children. Hike a local nature trail/park or ride a bicycle path.
- Choose toys appropriately and wisely. Give children toys that encourage physical activity, such as balls, hopscotch, hula hoops, and jump ropes. Choose the Do it Yourself (DIY) materials on active play indoors and outdoors.
- Limit Screen Time. As per the CDC, one to two hours of screen time a day should be the limit for children. As a family, set boundaries, keep the television and electronics out of the child's bedroom and limit computer usage to school projects.
- Gardening. Caring for the plants gives the children a reason to get outside each day. Learning how to grow a garden teaches us about the origins of our food and encourages healthy eating and active living habits.

Engaging families as partners early in the physical activity space allows parents to establish strong home-school and community connections that support their children's growth and development in the long-term. It is an essential component of high-quality early care and education. Let Us Keep Family Engagement Moving!

### **Integration:**

- [Bright From the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning – Family Engagement and Resources](#)
- [CDC – Involve Families in Physical Activities in Schools](#)
- [Strengthening Families Georgia](#)
- [CDC – Parent Engagement \(Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health\)](#)
- [Strong4Life – Outdoor Activities for Children](#)

### **Education:**



- **Read aloud, “We Move Together”** by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire and Eduardo Trejos.
- **Watch** the video on Family Engagement: “**Molly Wright: How Every Child Can Thrive By Five.**” | by TED Talk.
- **Talk** with families about ways to bring family together and to promote physical activity on family engagement all year round, whether at home, outside, in their local community, at your childcare site, or at their local community recreational areas.  
**Bonus:** Share #FamilyEngagement, #InstaFitness, #MoveYourWay #OutdoorFamilyActivities, #ActiveIndoors pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

### Conversation:

- What physical activities are good for family engagement?
- How do you encourage families to engage in physical activity (indoor/outdoor)?
- Why is family engagement important in children?
- How does family impact physical activity?

Share your #FamilyEngagement, #InstaFitness, #OutdoorFamilyActivities, #MoveYourWay #ActiveIndoor, stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at [tina.mclaren@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:tina.mclaren@dec.al.ga.gov).



## Eat Healthy and Live Active Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 2024-2025 Calendar

Harvest of the Month (HOTM) is the Georgia Department of Education School Nutrition Program’s farm to school initiative that highlights an item each month that can be sourced locally and served in Georgia’s school meals.

DECAL’s Harvest of the Month calendar aligns with the Georgia Department of Education’s Harvest of the Month initiative and was created in partnership with Quality Care for Children, Georgia Organics, Georgia SNAP-Ed[MC1], and the Farm to Early Care & Education (ECE) Coalition for ECE settings.

Visit the Georgia Department of Education's HOTM [webpage](#) and Quality Care for Children [webpage](#). Upon viewing, you can find tips and tricks for preparing produce items, curriculum connections, activity lists and book alignment for your early care classrooms.

## Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
August	Harvest of the Month: Melons
August 1	Turnip the Beet Award Nominations Open
August 30	Turnip the Beet Award Deadline
October 31	Year-end Reconciliation Due

## Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [And Justice for All Posters](#)
- [Notify DECAL When Updating Your Banking Information](#)
- [Stay Informed: SFSP Policy Revised](#)
- [Updated Guidance for Rural Non-Congregate Meal Services](#)
- [Updated Guidance: Rural Non-Congregate Parent/Guardian Pick up and Delivered Meals](#)
- [Procurement Methods At-A-Glance](#)
- [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)
- [Budget Representatives Updated April 2024](#)
- [Identifying the Difference between Pre-Award Cost Request vs. Excess Funds](#)
- [Make your Local Farmers Market a Meal Site Option](#)
- [FY24 Reimbursement Rates Released](#)
- [Increasing Access to Food Through Mobile Feeding](#)
- [Check your Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)

## How was my Customer Service?

*Provide feedback on your experience with the Nutrition Team*



Click on the icon on the right to participate in the customer service survey. Responses are anonymous.

## NEW DECAL Download

*Hot Boiled Peanuts: A Georgia Food Tour*



Richard Woods has served as State School Superintendent here in Georgia for nearly a decade.

He has over 30 years of experience in public education, from Pre-K through 12th-grade. He was also a high school teacher for 14 years, serving as department chair and teacher mentor.

Woods also served in administrative roles like principal, assistant principal, Pre-K director, and alternative school director. He is also a member of the Georgia Children's Cabinet which is Co-chaired by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. On this episode of the DECAL Download we have a chat with the State School Superintendent Richard Woods.

Listen to the episode [here](#).



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