



Expanding Summer Meal Access in Rural Illinois

What is Sun Meals To-Go?

Sun Meals To-Go is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that helps rural communities reach more children with nutritious meals during summer. The program allows approved school and community program sponsors to provide children 18 and younger with up to two meals per day for up to 10 days per distribution. Meals can be distributed through pick-up or delivery to homes.

Who Can Offer Sun Meals To-Go?

The Sun Meals To-Go Program can be implemented by approved program sponsors under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in designated rural areas. Eligible program sponsors include public and private school food authorities; local, municipal, and state governmental units; tribal governments; and private nonprofit organizations.

Why is Sun Meals To-Go Important?

This program helps low-income children in rural communities maintain access to nutritious meals throughout the summer when they don't have access to school breakfast and lunch. Traditional SFSP/SSO congregate summer meal programs are often less accessible to children in rural communities due to transportation barriers that make it difficult for children to reach the congregate meal sites at mealtimes.



What are Congregate Meals?

Congregate meals refer to children coming to an SFSP/SSO meal site and eating the provided meal on-site. Until recent years, only congregate meal service was allowed. Participating in summer meals at congregate locations offers children added benefits through on-site activities and socialization opportunities. Functioning congregate meal sites should not be replaced with non-congregate meal service. However, a hybrid model can be offered to increase program availability in eligible rural areas.



How Can I Find Out if a Location is Eligible to Offer Sun Meals To-Go?

The USDA has created the [Rural Designation Map](#) to determine Sun Meals To-Go eligibility by address. Type an address into the search box in the upper left corner of the map. Addresses located within green areas on the map are considered rural and can serve as a Sun Meals To-Go site.

How Can I Assess if an Address Meets Area Eligibility Criteria?

There's a map for that, too! The [USDA's Area Eligibility Mapper for CACFP and Summer Meals](#) can be used to determine if an address qualifies for area eligibility and can be operated as an open Sun Meals To-Go site. Type your site address into the search bar in the top right corner of the map. Like the USDA Rural Designation Map, green areas of the map qualify as area eligible.

Who Can Receive Sun Meals To-Go?

If your Sun Meals To-Go site address meets the area eligibility criteria, it is an **open** site. It can serve all children 18 and under without confirming income eligibility. The program sponsor may ask parents and guardians to pre-register their children for an open site to assist with anticipating meal counts or managing site caps. However, preregistration for an open site should not include income eligibility documentation.

If your site address does not meet the area eligibility criteria, it is a **conditional** site. The program sponsor for a conditional site must collect applications from participating children before the start of the program to confirm income eligibility. To be eligible, children must reside in households that make no more than 185% of the [federal poverty level](#), the same benchmark for determining free and reduced-price school meal eligibility.

Who Can I Contact for More Information About Sun Meals To-Go?

If you have specific questions or need additional resources to explore whether Sun Meals To-Go is a good fit for your community, you can contact Trina Ragain with the ISBE Nutrition Department at tragain@isbe.net or (217) 782-2491.

Additional resources can be found on the [USDA Sun Meals To-Go webpage](#) and the [ISBE Nutrition Department's Summer Food Service Program webpage](#).

