

FRESH BITES NEWSLETTER

April 2021

Featured: Start Here to Plan Your Summer Meal Program



The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be felt across the country. Hunger-relief organization [Feeding America](#) reports a 55 percent increase in demand at food shelves in the U.S. since March 2020. In 2021, Feeding America estimates that “42 million people, including 13 million children, may be at risk of hunger.”

Schools and nonprofit organizations have been key to fighting food insecurity this past year. Your help will be needed yet this summer. Summer meals are easier than ever to offer because of the USDA's [emergency waivers for COVID-19](#).

There are two federally reimbursed programs for offering summer meals: the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). [This chart](#) outlines the differences between SFSP, SSO, NSLP and School Breakfast Program under normal operations and do not reflect waivers currently in effect.

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Editor's note

The end of this most unusual school year is in sight. While you foodservice heroes may be breathing a sigh of relief, you realize that foodservice, education and our country, in general, will feel the impacts of COVID-19 for some time. Budgets may be cut. More families will depend on assistance programs. Universal meals, [already proposed in the California legislature](#), may become a widespread reality.

NutriStudents K-12 and this issue of Fresh Bites can help prepare you for these issues and others that may lie ahead.

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Summer Food Service Program

Most schools and organizations have been operating under eased SFSP guidelines since the USDA first issued waivers in 2020. This program has historically been limited to organizations providing structured programming, feeding kids in a congregant setting, and in geographic areas where at least 50 percent of children receive free or reduced-price school lunches. These traditional tenets have been waived until September 2021 due to the coronavirus.

Under current waivers, schools and nonprofits operating under the SFSP can provide weekly meal bundles containing breakfasts and lunches for 5 or 7 days for children 18 and under. Parents can pick up these meals for each child under 18 in their homes weekly on the designated pick-up day. Because the SFSP nutritional guidelines are based on daily versus weekly requirements, this program offers greater meal flexibility than the Seamless Summer Option.

For example, SFSP providers can use NutriStudents K-12 grocery menus, which anyone can [download for free](#), to supply families with ingredients for cooking 5 servings of a single recipe. These menus cannot be used by Seamless Summer providers. We also have 2 weeks of cold and 2 weeks of hot menus for SFSP service available for free download. Because SFSP nutritional guidelines are more relaxed than NSLP/SSO menus, NutriStudents K-12 clients following either SFSP or SSO can also use our 45 weeks of National School Lunch Program menu weeks for summer service.

SFSP reimbursement rates, which are higher than the NSLP and SSO reimbursement rates, [are available here](#).

Schools and nonprofit organizations can choose to be “sponsors” or feeding sites operating under supervision of a sponsor. In addition to managing the foodservice program for your own school or organization, sponsors also oversee operations and reimbursement for the feeding sites under their jurisdiction. As a sponsor, you provide meals to all feeding sites and report meal counts to the USDA for reimbursement. Feeding sites must operate under the same USDA rules and guidance for the SFSP as the sponsor and are responsible for raising awareness of the free meals in their respective areas of service.

Summer Resources

- [Free download: Grocery menus](#)
- [CLIENTS: Grocery menus](#)
- [Grocery menus simplify SFSP service](#)
- [Free download: 4 weeks SFSP menus](#)
- [Free download: 2 weeks Seamless Summer menus](#)
- [Free download: 3 menu days with recipes and reports for NSLP/SSO, SFSP](#)
- [Providing Multiple Meals at a Time During the Coronavirus Pandemic from USDA Team Nutrition \(SSO version / SFSP version\)](#)
- [SFSP Fact Sheet \(in English and in Spanish\)](#)
- [SFSP Summer Meals Toolkit](#)
- [CLIENTS: Cafeteria Connection: Summer Meals and Grocery Menus editions](#)
- [Cafeteria Connection: Summer Meals and Grocery Menus editions](#)
- [CLIENTS: Template press release announcing summer meal service](#)

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Get In Touch!
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Nominate a Foodservice Hero!

NutriStudents K-12 clients, who is a hero among heroes on your team? Who has gone above and beyond in this unusual year? Please take 2-3 minutes to nominate that person to be recognized by NutriStudents K-12 as a Foodservice Hero. One winner will receive a “foodservice hero” hat and apron (modeled here by Shelly), and be featured on the Fresh Bites blog and newsletter, and on social media. Please include a photo of your nominee when you submit your nomination.

Winner will be announced on Friday, May 7. Nominations due by midnight, Wednesday, May 5.

NOMINATE NOW

NOTE: This recognition is one of the many benefits available only to NutriStudents K-12 clients/subscribers. [Schedule a demo to learn more.](#)

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Seamless Summer Option

Schools that have continued to serve meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in school year 20/21 may prefer to provide summer meals through the SSO. It allows you to follow the same school-year operational and nutritional guidelines during the summer. The [SSO reimbursement rate](#) is at NSLP rates, which are less than the SFSP reimbursement rate.

NutriStudents K-12 offers two weeks of free SSO menu weeks, complete with recipes and reports, for downloading. Our clients can also use our 45-week rotation of student-approved lunch menus. You can rest assured of compliance as our menus and recipes are certified by a registered dietitian to comply with all USDA nutritional guidelines.

You can use our menu weeks exclusively or in combination with your own and in any order you choose. Whether you operate a 4-day, 5-day or 7-day a week program, NutriStudents K-12 can help. Every entree, whether it's a perennial student favorite or a newer food trend, has been tested and approved by kids of varying ages and diverse backgrounds.

Please help fill a critical need for kids this summer by providing nutritious meals. The USDA and state agencies are currently seeking organizations like yours to offer these summer programs for breakfasts, lunches and snacks.

Cafeteria Connection: Summer Meals Edition

Use our summer meals edition of Cafeteria Connection to get the word out about your program. Download it today from the [client portal](#) or via [our Cafeteria Connection subscription page](#).



Are Universal Meals the Future?



When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, millions of families were suddenly struggling to put food on the table. Providing consistent meals to their children was no longer as easy as putting them on the school bus each day. To help curb the effects of the pandemic and ensure kids didn't go hungry, USDA waivers allowed for free meals to all children in the U.S., regardless of income and without verification.

New USDA data reveals that even with these provisions, during the first nine months of the pandemic, schools served 30 percent fewer meals and lost significant federal reimbursement revenue compared to the same period in 2019. Schools served 1.7 billion fewer meals, equating to \$2.1 billion in lost federal revenue for school meal programs.

Meanwhile, free meals for all students - universal school meals - are set to end in September 2021.

But they could become permanent, if a current lobbying effort by hunger advocacy organizations, the School Nutrition Association (SNA) and others is successful.

"Now more than ever, as schools strive to overcome pandemic learning losses, we need to ensure all students are nourished and ready to learn," said SNA President Reggie Ross. "With research demonstrating the link between school meals and academic achievement, providing equal access to healthy school meals is an investment in America's future."

History of Providing Free School Meals

The government has long provided free and reduced-price school meals to students whose families meet income eligibility guidelines. [According to the SNA](#), in 2019, 29.6 million students received school lunch daily at nearly 100,000 schools/institutions. Of those meals, only 7.7 million were served to students paying full price. Each year, schools promote the availability of free and reduced-price meals and collect and process applications from families. This can be a difficult task, especially if families are reluctant to share personal income information.

Prior to the pandemic, U.S. schools in areas of high need provided free meals to all students, with no eligibility application needed, through the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). In addition to benefiting families financially, attendance rates at CEP schools have increased and more students are advancing beyond the 10th grade, according to [No Kid Hungry](#). The [Food Research & Action Center](#) found the CEP resulted in more kids participating in meals, higher federal reimbursement revenues for schools, and reduced paperwork for families and schools. Under universal school meals, the outcomes experienced by CEP schools will extend to all schools.

Alleviating School-Meal Debt

Universal school meals also will alleviate unpaid school-meal debt and minimize the potential for school-meal shaming that

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has made news headlines. It's what happens when kids show up at school hungry, with no money left in their student account to buy school breakfast or lunch. Schools concerned about sizable debt in students' accounts have been called out for serving those students alternative, less expensive lunches or even turning students away. Unpaid meal debt at schools can reach into the tens of thousands of dollars.

You are likely to hear more about universal school meals in the coming months. Whether free for all or not, school meals are essential for student health and learning and will always be a critical component of the U.S. safety net. If this issue is important to you, please share your opinion with your members of Congress. For contact information for your elected officials, go to: <https://www.house.gov/> and <https://www.senate.gov/>.

Cafeteria Connection: Universal Meals Edition

Educate your parents on universal meals, a topic that is garnering headlines across the country, with the latest issue of Cafeteria Connection.

Download it today from the [client portal](#) or via our [Cafeteria Connection subscription page](#).

5 New NSLP Menu Weeks Shuffle the Deck



There are lots of sources for individual school lunch recipes. The hard part of building out a menu rotation is putting those individual recipes into days and then into weeks that comply with USDA nutritional guidelines. It can be like a shell game, moving one day here and another there until everything adds up just right.

That's the beauty of NutriStudents K-12 – we offer complete, plug-and-

play, USDA-compliant lunch menu weeks tested and approved by students. We've done all the analysis and the shuffling to create menu weeks that are varied and delicious.

And now we're upping the ante! We just added 5 new menu weeks to our rotation for National School Lunch Program (NSLP) operators. You now have a full 45 weeks from which to choose. The new menu weeks are full of many of our student-favorite lunches in new combinations. By special request, we've also added three new menu days: pork taco, chicken and waffles, and chili and cinnamon roll!

Check out these new menu weeks in the [client portal](#) now. Please note, the CookBook and USDA Commodity Calculator have been updated to include these new weeks.



We support and recognize the hard work of child nutrition professionals day in and day out. On Friday, May 7, School Lunch Hero Day, others will join us in celebrating your efforts to keep our country's kids well nourished.

This has been an exceptional year – one like no other in our lifetime. You who work in the schools, daycares and juvenile facilities have gracefully adapted to frequent changes in USDA requirements, CDC safety protocols and district/organizational procedures. You learned on the fly, brainstormed with peers, likely took criticism from administrators and parents, and yet you persevered. On behalf of your kids, their parents and our country, we say “THANK YOU!”.

The COVID-19 pandemic put you in the spotlight and helped people realize how critical your work is to the fabric of our society. Foodservice is often taken for granted and seen as secondary to academics but now has gained greater appreciation...we hope for the long term.

On School Lunch Hero Day, Friday, May 7, enjoy the recognition that comes your way. And, share on social media the stories of how you and your team have addressed the challenges of this past year. (Use #SLHD and tag us – MenuFreedom on Instagram and NutriStudentsK12 on Facebook – on your posts.)



Congratulations! to all the foodservice pros from southern Minnesota who recently completed their ServSafe training course. The Mankato School District had 9 staff members who attended the 4-hour refresher course to maintain their certifications. Another eight attended the 8-hour class and took the exam to earn their Food Safety Manager Certification.

One week later, Client Relations Director Shelly Miller taught a 4-hour refresher course for multiple districts at St. Clair Public Schools. In all, 18 people were re-certified, many of whom work for districts that belong to the South Central Service Cooperative.

If you're interested in hosting a ServSafe Training, contact Shelly@NutriStudentsK-12.com.