

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Summer 2025 Rural Non-Congregate Feeding Option

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### OVERVIEW

#### 1. What is the 2025 Rural Non-Congregate Feeding Program?

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 authorized a permanent, non-congregate meal service through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) for rural areas with no congregate meal service. After implementing a Pilot Program in Summer 2023, Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) implemented a permanent rural non-congregate program in Summer 2024 based on the Interim Final Rule published in the December 29, 2023 Federal Register:

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/29/2023-28488/establishing-the-summer-ebt-program-and-rural-non-congregate-option-in-the-summer-meal-programs>.

Contracting Entities (CEs) with sites in rural areas are encouraged to apply to provide non-congregate feeding services should they recognize an appropriate need and feel they can meet the requirements described within these FAQs. CEs approved to operate non-congregate service in Summer 2025 must abide by the instructions provided in these FAQs and all other standard program regulations.

#### 2. Who is eligible to participate in the Non-Congregate Feeding Program?

Participation in the Summer 2025 Non-Congregate Program is available to both Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) operators based on the following criteria:

- CEs must be in good standing, meaning they are not seriously deficient in any Child Nutrition Program, have no outstanding corrective action, and have no outstanding debts to TDA.
- All sites must be in a rural area to be approved for non-congregate service ([refer below for more information on how rurality is established](#)). CEs should use the [Non-Congregate Eligibility Map](#)<sup>i</sup> to determine if a proposed site is in an area that is eligible for participation **prior** to submitting a request to provide non-congregate service.



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- Any non-congregate site must be over 2.0 miles away from another congregate or non-congregate site. TDA will validate that requesting sites meet this proximity requirement prior to approving non-congregate service. In rare circumstances, TDA will approve exceptions to the proximity requirement. Sites denied for proximity can request an exception by submitting a justification, which may include:
  - Driving distances of over 2.0 miles to the next nearest site
  - Barriers between sites that would present a challenge for parents in automobiles to visit both easily.
  - Meals served at all nearby open congregate or non-congregate sites do not overlap by type or day of intended consumption.
  - Site within 2.0 miles is closed enrolled, and the requesting site has provided adequate documentation verifying the two sites are serving different populations.

**NOTE:** Requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

- All newly applying area-eligible sites must be approved for **congregate** service via the standard application process **before** CEs can request to operate non-congregate service at that location. After successfully operating a year of non-congregate service, a site will have priority in operating non-congregate service in that area in subsequent summers.
- For conditional non-congregate sites operating in non-eligible areas, CEs must submit a standard site application and be conditionally approved prior to submitting the request to serve non-congregate meals ([see below for more information on conditional non-congregate sites](#)).
- All sites requesting to serve non-congregate meals must fully complete the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#),<sup>ii</sup> including providing all procedures required per the requested flexibilities described in these FAQs.



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### RURAL DESIGNATION & AREA ELIGIBILITY

#### 3. How does TDA determine if a site is rural?

TDA uses the following regulatory criteria (listed in 7 CFR 225.2 "Rural") to determine the rurality of an area:

- Any area in a county that is not a part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area based on the Office of Management and Budget's Delineations of Metropolitan Statistical Areas.
- Any area in a county classified as non-metropolitan based on USDA Economic Research Service's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes and Urban Influence Codes.
- Any census tract classified as a non-metropolitan area based on USDA Economic Research Service's Rural-Urban Commuting Area codes.
- Any area of a Metropolitan Statistical Area that is not part of a Census Bureau-defined urban area.
- Any area of a State which is not part of an urban area as determined by the Secretary.
- Any subsequent substitution or update of the aforementioned classification schemes that Federal governing bodies create.

TDA will apply all the criteria above to identify rural areas on [the mapping tool](#).<sup>iii</sup> Sites falling into those areas will potentially be eligible to serve non-congregate meals. Similar to area eligibility, a rural designation for a site is valid for five years and will be re-evaluated at that time.

Note that USDA will examine additional criteria and continue to add to this list in subsequent years if additional sources of information are identified.



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4. Can non-congregate meals be provided in non-rural areas if Program access is limited because of lack of transportation, safety concerns, lack of a location to serve meals, or other similar reasons?

No. Per regulation, non-congregate meal service is only allowed in rural areas.

5. Can I serve non-congregate meals in rural areas that are not area eligible as determined by the percent of children in the area receiving free or reduced-price meals?

Most non-congregate sites must adhere to the same area eligibility requirements as congregate sites. However, regulations allow for a conditional non-congregate site type that can serve non-congregate meals in areas not considered low-income. Only School Food Authorities (SFAs) in rural areas can apply to operate conditional non-congregate sites. This site type must adhere to the following requirements:

- Only meals served to children with free or reduced-price eligibility can be claimed for reimbursement. Non-congregate meals may be served to children who are not eligible for free or reduced-price meals in rural areas, but they may not be claimed for reimbursement.
- Sites must be able to obtain eligibility information for each participant. **In the application, SFAs must indicate the number of estimated children expected to receive free meals at each site.**
- Sites may charge for meals served to children categorized with a paid eligibility. If charging, SFAs must submit for each site Form H1506-A, *Additional Assurances for Camps, Conditional Non-Congregate Sites, and Other Enrollment Programs that Charge Separately for Meals*. This form, [located on the Summer Meals Administration/Forms page](#),<sup>iv</sup> allows the CE to enter the following assurances:
  - Eligibility standards conform to the family size and income eligibility guidelines for reduced-price school meals;





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- There is a method in place to be used in accepting applications from families that ensures that households are permitted to apply on behalf of children who are members of households receiving SNAP, FDPIR, or TANF benefits;
- There is a method in place to be used for collecting payments from children who pay the full price of the meal while preventing the overt identification of children receiving a free meal;
- If a family appeals an eligibility determination, the child will continue to receive free meals until a decision is rendered;
- There will be no overt identification of free meal recipients and no discrimination against any child on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability; and
- The SFA has hearing procedures that provide the following information and assurances:
  - Procedures must allow families to request a timely and convenient hearing easily, either orally or in writing.
  - An attorney or designated representative can assist families during the hearing.
  - Families can review documents supporting the decision being appealed, both before and during the hearing.
  - Families must receive adequate notice of the hearing's time and place.
  - Families can present evidence and arguments during the hearing.
  - Families can question and refute testimony and evidence, as well as cross-examine adverse witnesses.
  - The hearing official must not have participated in the decision being appealed.
  - Decisions must be based on evidence presented at the hearing.



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- Families must receive written notification of the decision.
- A written record of the hearing, including evidence, testimony summary, decision, and reasons, must be maintained for three years.
- The written record must be available for examination by the family or representative upon request.

[Refer below for specific application instructions for conditional non-congregate sites.](#)

### 6. Are there participant notification requirements for a conditional non-congregate site?

Yes. As with camps and closed enrolled sites, conditional non-congregate sites are required to notify participants or enrolled children of the availability of free meals and that a free meal application is needed to determine eligibility.

Income eligibility guidelines must accompany the notification, and all notices to participants and enrollees must include the Civil Rights Nondiscrimination Statement (NDS).

The *Participant Notification of SFSP Meals—Conditional Non-Congregate Site* form can be used to notify participants of these requirements. It is available on the [Summer Meals Administration/Forms<sup>v</sup>](#) and [Summer Non-Congregate Feeding Program<sup>vi</sup>](#) pages.

### 7. Can I use child nutrition funds to procure and prepare non-reimbursable meals at conditional non-congregate sites?

No. Using unused reimbursement funds to cover the cost of ineligible children at conditional non-congregate sites is not an allowable cost. Regulations prohibit federal funds to be used for meals that exceed the number of meals eligible for reimbursement. Program sponsors operating a conditional non-congregate site should plan to allocate child nutrition funds only for meals that they estimate will be served to free or reduced-price students. Any cost of food served to ineligible participants paid for with program funds must be replenished back to the food service account using non-program funds, which could include money received from charging for meals.



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### NON-CONGREGATE FLEXIBILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS

#### 8. What distribution models of non-congregate meal service are allowed?

Grab-and-go (meals distributed at a single location) and home delivery are both allowable distribution models when operating a non-congregate service. However, only one service model is allowed per site. If wanting to serve grab-and-go while also distributing meals via home delivery, two site applications are required.

Both meal distribution methods allow for additional flexibilities, as follows:

- [Meal bundling \(10-day max for grab-and-go, 5-day max for home delivery\).](#)  
**NOTE:** TDA recommends a 5-day maximum due to food quality and expiration dates for milk and juice.
- [Bulk food component distribution](#)
- [Parent/guardian pick-up with no child present](#)
- [Hybrid congregate/non-congregate service](#)

Note that each of the above flexibilities, if requested, has associated regulations and requirements, both at the time of application and implementation. Please familiarize yourself with all requirements described in these FAQs before requesting specific flexibilities.

#### 9. Can I operate a mobile route (for example, along an established school bus route) in which grab-and-go meals are distributed at each stop? If so, does each stop need to be its own site?

Mobile routes are allowable. However, they must adhere to the following criteria:

- Each stop along the route is considered its own site, meaning a separate site application in TX-UNPS and a separate Non-Congregate Request Form will be required for each stop.



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- Each stop must adhere to all site administration and monitoring requirements per current regulations.
- Finally, each site along the route must meet the 2-mile proximity requirement.

CEs are encouraged to identify strategic mobile stops in areas that are currently underserved. This is an effective method of bringing meals closer to families who cannot travel long distances to congregate feeding locations.

**NOTE:** Sites opting into home delivery, where meals are delivered to specific children at an individual home, can submit one site application to represent the entire home delivery route. [Refer below for more information about home delivery.](#)

### 10. What are the requirements for issuing meal bundles?

CEs may distribute a single day's worth of meals or meals for multiple days at a single distribution but must adhere to the daily maximum number of meals allowed (up to two meals, or one meal and one snack, in any combination except lunch and supper). The following parameters apply to multi-day issuance:

- CEs may distribute up to 10 days of **unitized, grab-and-go** meals at a time; however, if wishing to distribute more than 5 days at a time, CEs **must provide with their request form** a sample menu for the entire period that the meals will cover along with procedures for how to ensure food safety. TDA strongly discourages more than 5 days' distribution due to potential deterioration of food quality.
- A menu must be included with each food package, even if unitized meals are distributed. If portioned food components are not packaged together to clearly identify what is required for each reimbursable meal being distributed, instructions must be provided to show how the components will be assembled for each reimbursable meal. For example, if the unitized milk for the week is packaged in a separate bag from the rest of the food components, written instructions must state that only one milk should be consumed per child per meal.



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- CEs delivering meals to individual homes or distributing food components in bulk **may not provide meals for more than 5 days of meals at a time and must provide procedures at the time of application supporting how they will safely distribute those meals under these models.**
- **All CEs providing more than one day of meals at a time must provide procedures for mitigating the risk of serving duplicate meals.**

CEs providing multi-day bundles must adjust the number of days per week it operates accordingly. For example, an open site wishing to serve three days of meals on one day and two meals on another could have the following schedule:

- On Monday, the site would distribute meals for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.
- On Thursday, the site would then distribute meals for Thursday and Friday.

All schedules must be documented in the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#).<sup>vii</sup>

### 11. What are some safeguards for mitigating the risk of serving duplicate meals?

Examples of methods to ensure that duplicate meals are not served include:

- Registration of site participants (note registration must be available to any child if operating an open site). [See the question below for more information on registering participants.](#)
- Monitoring at the point of service.
- Sign-in sheets.
- Cross-referencing sign-in sheets or pre-registration rosters, such as for a sponsor with multiple sites in close proximity.
- Using technology-based solutions, such as QR codes for sign-in sheets.



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- Signage at the site warning participants not to take more than the allowable number of meals.
- Restricting meal service times to reasonable or shorter periods instead of extended or nearly all-day distribution times.
- Coordination with other nearby sites to strategize days and times of service.

### 12. Can I use a registration process to estimate the number of meals needed at open sites operating non-congregate meal service?

Yes. CEs may use a registration process to estimate the number of meals needed for non-congregate meal service at open sites. This method can help CEs plan and prepare enough meals for families in the community to pick up. A registration process also helps strengthen program integrity by ensuring meals are served to eligible children.

However, CEs should plan to serve families who arrive without registering to ensure all children in the community have access to meals. CEs should also be transparent with the community that meals are served on a first-come, first-served basis and are not limited to families who register. If utilizing a registration system, the CE must submit registration procedures with their [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)<sup>viii</sup> that document the system used, the complete registration process, and associated communication methodology.

### 13. How does bulk food component distribution differ from unitized meal bundling?

While both methods allow for the issuance of multiple meals at a single distribution, unitized meal bundling provides complete, prepared meals. Bulk food component distribution means one or more food components are distributed in larger amounts (for example, a gallon of milk or loaf of bread) with the intent that they can be assembled into individual reimbursable meals over a given period of time.

Bulk distribution of food components is only allowed in Summer 2025 under the following parameters:

- Sites are not permitted to distribute more than five days of food.



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- At the time of application, CEs must provide procedures that demonstrate the following:
  - Meal packages must include a menu describing the food items and portion sizes for each reimbursable meal to be served with simple assembly directions for the meal. **A sample menu is required at the time of application.**
  - Participants must be provided with information that identifies the items that, when bundled together, meet the requirements of a reimbursable meal. **Sample instructions are required at the time of application.**
  - Packages include labeled food items requiring only adding water and warming to be served. While microwaving prepared food with room temperature water is acceptable, foods provided as ingredients for recipes that require chopping, mixing, or baking must not be provided as part of the meal service.
  - Extra food items are separated and labeled “not part of the reimbursable meal (if included).”
  - The packaging and distribution method meets applicable food safety regulations.

### 14. If I am only distributing one component in bulk (for example, milk), must I meet all the requirements [listed in the previous question](#) for bulk food component distribution?

Yes, even if most of the meal components are unitized, distributing any single component in bulk will limit meal distribution to five days, and sample instructions and food safety procedures must be submitted with your [Non-Congregate Request Form](#).<sup>ix</sup>

### 15. Can meals be distributed to parents/guardians at non-congregate pickup locations?

Yes. Non-congregate meal service allows meals to be distributed to parents or guardians to take home to their children. CEs opting to distribute meals to parents or guardians must indicate in their non-congregate request form the methodology used to



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validate a child's guardianship and upload procedures documenting the safeguards put in place to ensure duplicate meals are not distributed.

### 16. Who can act as an authorized guardian of a child for the purposes of meal pick-up?

The following adults may be considered guardians who can pick up meals for a child:

- Legal guardian - a person appointed by a court or otherwise has the legal authority to make decisions relevant to the child's personal well-being.
- With written permission from a parent, an adult that is providing scheduled, informal care of the child on the day of meal service.

**NOTE:** Adults representing a licensed child care center or day care home provider or adults supervising children as part of a formal, organized activity are not eligible to pick up meals for the children in their care. For example, a football coach cannot pick up meals for his players to eat at practice.

Allowable examples include:

- Adult or non-parental relative who is providing residency for a child during the summer.
- A neighbor or other adult who is babysitting the primary child. In this case, the site must have written consent from the primary child's parent that attests to the following:
  - The supervising adult is not a licensed child care professional.
  - Care is being provided outside of a formal, organized activity.
  - The adult is supervising the child on the day of meal distribution.

TDA recommends that the supervising household where the child stays obtains a copy of qualifying identifying information for the child under their supervision.





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### 17. What are the guidelines for proper implementation of parent pickup?

Per TDA-established guidelines, when a parent or legal guardian arrives to pick up a meal without a child at a site, the parent or guardian must show proof of guardianship. Preferred methods of proof of guardianship include:

- Official Letter/email from a school listing the children enrolled at a school campus
- Student ID cards
- Individual student report cards
- Attendance record from the parent portal of the school website
- Birth certificate
- Official letter/email from facility or school listing children enrolled
- Other official ID cards (for example, IDs issued by a child care facility)

Operators must establish procedures to facilitate this process **and submit those procedures when submitting the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)**.<sup>x</sup>

### 18. Does a parent or guardian have to provide proof of guardianship at every meal distribution?

While a parent or guardian does not necessarily have to provide official documentation each time meals are picked up, procedures must be in place to validate the parent or guardian at each service. This could be a streamlined process in which a site issues the parent/guardian an ID card or car placard after initial validation; the guardian must then present this card every time they pick up non-congregate meals without a child present. While TDA acknowledges that operators will likely begin to recognize adults and guardians over time, these procedures must be in place so that TDA can verify in an Administrative Review that the site has validated every adult picking up a meal.



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### 19. Do the meal service time requirements apply to non-congregate meal service?

SFSP CEs offering bundled meals via a non-congregate meal service are exempt from serving breakfast in the morning and requiring one hour between the end of one meal service and the start of the next.

SSO CEs are exempt from the NSLP/SBP meal service time requirements, which state that breakfast must be served in the morning and lunch between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

CEs are encouraged to serve during times that suit their communities' needs. For example, if CEs are issuing multi-day bundles once a week and relying largely on a parent pick-up distribution model, it would be beneficial to schedule distribution times for days and times when parents are available to pick up those meals (for example, on weekends or outside of standard work hours).

Note that meal service times still need to be established for each site **in both the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)<sup>xi</sup> and the CE's site application**. They should reflect the entire timeframe per meal type that those meals will be distributed on a given day. [Refer below for more information on how to document meal distribution times in the site application when bundling meals.](#)

If operating a hybrid congregate/non-congregate site, the sponsor must provide schedules of each service to ensure there is no overlap between the distribution or intended consumption days of congregate and non-congregate meal service. [See below for more information on allowable and unallowable hybrid service models.](#)

### 20. Can CEs claim non-congregate meals for everyone in line to pick up meals if it is after the approved meal service time?

Generally, sites must operate within approved meal service times regardless of whether they offer non-congregate or congregate meal service. **However, non-congregate sites should serve all the participants who are in line before the end of the approved meal service time. Additional participants should not be allowed to enter the line past the end of the meal service time.**



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In rare circumstances, such as inclement weather, late deliveries, or traffic delays, and with supporting documentation provided, TDA can approve meals served outside of the approved meal service time to be claimed for reimbursement. TDA is developing a form for CEs to submit notifications of meal service time deviations that will be available before Summer 2025 operations begin.

If meal service repeatedly runs longer than the approved meal service time, CEs should adjust operations to ensure meal services are completed within the approved meal service times or consider adjusting the meal service times. To adjust meal service times or the intended days of meal consumption, submit a site application amendment within TX-UNPS.

**NOTE:** If distributing multiple days of meals and once, and you need to adjust days of distribution or any other aspects of your non-congregate operation that are not captured in the TX-UNPS site application, you must submit a new [Non-Congregate Request Form](#).<sup>xii</sup>

### 21. Are CEs required to follow established meal patterns when serving non-congregate meals?

Yes. As with congregate meals, non-congregate meals must comply with the current meal pattern requirements for SFSP and SSO.

### 22. Can I operate a hybrid site offering congregate and non-congregate meals?

Yes, but only under very specific parameters. While sites can operate a hybrid model in which both congregate and non-congregate services occur, **those separate services (including intended days of consumption) cannot overlap. All children must receive the same number and types of meals at each distribution.**

Allowable hybrid scenarios include:

- Congregate meals served Monday through Friday with an additional non-congregate bundle of weekend meals sent home with the child at Friday distribution.



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- Congregate daily breakfast with non-congregate lunches sent home daily with the child.

An unallowable scenario would be feeding congregate meals to summer school students daily while other children receive a multi-day bundle. This would be considered an overlap of congregate/non-congregate days of consumption.

Another unallowable scenario is feeding summer school students plated meals on trays daily at one time and distributing the exact same meal in a to-go format to the community at a later time. While the congregate and non-congregate meal service times do not overlap, the type of meal being distributed at both services on that day overlaps.

However, if a non-congregate site with summer school students offers daily grab-and-go meals, the summer school children can pick up the meals offered and eat onsite as long as the student receives the same to-go packaged meals being distributed to the community.

Similarly, if a site wishes to distribute multiple days' worth of meals where summer school is occurring, the summer school children would be permitted to pick up those same bundles to take home with the idea that they could bring meals from that bundle back to school each day to eat onsite. In both of the above scenarios, these sites would be considered non-congregate sites, not hybrid sites, as the children are all receiving to-go meals and are not required to eat those meals onsite.

### **23. If I offer a congregate breakfast and lunch at the end of the week but then send a non-congregate bundle of weekend meals with the children on the same day of congregate service, how do I document this in my Non-Congregate Request Form?**

On days when congregate service is occurring but non-congregate meals intended for the next day and beyond are also distributed, you would enter information into the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)<sup>xiii</sup> as follows:

1. For the day in question, select both congregate and non-congregate meals in the Non-Congregate Request form:



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Thursday - NON-CONGREGATE meal service will occur.

Thursday - CONGREGATE meal service will occur.

2. Select the meal types that will be distributed for offsite consumption and the number of days for which the meals are provided. For example, on Thursday afternoon, if you are sending a bundle of meals intended for Friday through Sunday, you would enter the information into the form as follows:

**Thursday - Select NON-CONGREGATE meal types distributed: \***

Which meal(s) will be distributed on Thursday for **non-congregate** service?

Breakfast;  Lunch;  Snack;  Supper

**Thursday - Enter number of days of NON-CONGREGATE meals distributed: \***

How many days' worth of meals will be distributed on Thursday for **non-congregate** service?

3

3. Then select the type of meals distributed at **congregate** service on that day:

**Thursday - Select CONGREGATE meal types distributed: \***

Which meal(s) will be served during Thursday **congregate** service?

Breakfast;  Lunch;  Snack;  Supper

4. **IMPORTANT:** The information entered thus far shows an overlap in service since it shows both non-congregate and congregate breakfasts and lunches being served on the same day. You must provide clarifying information in the Meal Service Comment text box to indicate that the non-congregate meals are intended for subsequent days. See below for an example:



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### Meal Service Comment

If required, please enter any additional or clarifying information about the days and number of meals distributed as listed above.

For example, if days of distribution vary week to week, please provide a complete schedule of meal distribution days in the comment box below.

Congregate breakfast and lunch service will occur as normal on Thursday, but each child will receive on Thursday afternoon a bundle of three breakfasts and three lunches intended for Friday through Sunday.

### 24. How do I document non-congregate meal counts when distributing multiple days of meals at one time?

TDA provides the *SFSP/SSO Meal Count Form - Non-Congregate Meal Bundling* that will allow both SFSP and SSO operators to document the following:

- Day of distribution
- Number and type of meals in each bundle
- Number of complete bundles distributed
- Number of non-program meals and leftover meals by type
- Number of meals to be claimed per day of intended consumption by type.

This form is located on the [Summer Meals Administration/Forms page](#)<sup>xiv</sup> on SquareMeals.

**NOTE:** Sites must distribute the same number and type of meals to each participant. Sites may not proactively modify or customize meal bundles. For example, it would be unallowable to distribute daily non-congregate meals to one sub-set of children while distributing a week of meals to a different sub-set of children.



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### 25. If I operate a hybrid congregate/non-congregate site, what are the documentation and reporting requirements for counting meals?

Sites operating a hybrid site must keep separate counts for congregate and non-congregate meals. Distributing non-congregate meals intended for a later day or time after a standard congregate service is considered two separate services, and you must document those meals on separate meal count forms. TDA provides a *SFSP/SSO Daily Meal Count Form - Standard Congregate Service* and *SFSP/SSO Meal Count Form - Non-Congregate Meal Bundling* on the [Summer Meals Administration/Forms page of SquareMeals](#).<sup>xv</sup>

CEs sponsoring hybrid sites are required to provide these separate meal counts to TDA monthly in Summer 2025. TDA is developing the 2025 version of the online form for hybrid sites to submit their separate meal counts; the form and completion instructions will be released before Summer 2025 operations begin. Please monitor SquareMeals and an updated release of these FAQs for a link to the form.

## HOME DELIVERY GUIDANCE

### 26. What are the requirements for initiating home meal delivery for a household?

CEs that are approved to provide a non-congregate meal service using the home delivery model must be able to identify and invite households of eligible children to participate in the meal delivery service and obtain written consent from the eligible child's parent or guardian that the household wants to receive delivered meals. Written consent could include hard copy, email, or other electronic means of communication.

CEs must protect the confidentiality of participants and their households throughout the process. Private Non-Profits (PNPs) using SFA data to identify potential households must have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the SFA that explicitly allows the PNPs access to school data and demonstrates proper handling and safe storage of confidential student data.





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When requesting to operate a home delivery service, CEs must provide the following documents and procedures to TDA:

- The site's means of obtaining household consent.
- How the site will protect the privacy of household participants.
- The means for determining home eligibility.
  - Homes served must either be in the attendance zone of an area-eligible school, or the child in the home qualifies for free or reduced-priced meals.
- The means for ensuring food safety requirements are met.
- If using school data, a copy of the MOU between the site and the SFA.

### 27. What should be included in the written household consent required for home delivery?

Sponsors must confirm the household's current contact information and the number of eligible children in the household to ensure the correct number of meals are delivered to the correct location when obtaining written parental consent for home delivery.

Household consent information may include but is not limited to the following: home address, phone number, child(ren)'s name(s), child(ren)'s age(s), and language establishing both the presence of children in each household as well as the household's consent to receive meals.

Written parental consent forms must also contain the Nondiscrimination Statement (NDS).

### 28. Is it permissible for CEs to obtain parental consent for home delivery on the day of delivery?

Yes, it is permissible for CEs to obtain parental consent for home deliveries on the day of delivery, as long as the CE obtains parental consent before or at the time that the meals are delivered to the home. **However, this should be reserved for specific,**





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**limited situations.** For instance, if meals are being delivered to a multi-housing unit and families see the delivery and express interest in receiving meals for their children, the CE can ask for parental consent on the spot and provide a meal that day. However, CEs must not prepare extra meals and rely on same-day or on-the-spot parental consent for home deliveries in most cases, as it could lead to food waste.

### 29. How many days of meals can be delivered to a household at one time?

TDA only allows for a maximum of five days' worth of meals to be delivered at one time. If delivering five days of meals on Monday, the next eligible day of service would be Saturday if weekend service has been approved. If weekend service is not approved, the next eligible day of service is the following Monday.

### 30. Must all non-congregate home deliveries be located in a rural area?

Yes. Non-congregate meal service may be operated only at sites designated as rural. A non-congregate home delivery "site" is the entire route for non-congregate home-delivered meal service. Therefore, the entire route for non-congregate home deliveries must be within an area defined as rural.

### 31. Do home-delivered meals need to be shelf-stable?

Not necessarily. The type of meal offered will depend on the resources and capacity of the site. CEs must have adequate food preparation and holding facilities and the capacity to meet State and local health, safety, and sanitation requirements per 7 CFR 225.16(b)(5). CEs that can prepare ready-to-eat meals and deliver meals daily in a way that meets state or local food safety requirements may do so if participating households can also accept and safely store the meals.

CEs must consider whether households have access to refrigeration, stoves, microwaves, etc., when providing food that requires cold storage or further preparation, such as reheating. CEs may be able to collect information from households about their capabilities for storing food while obtaining parental consent to deliver meals to the home.



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Before being approved to operate a home delivery model, CEs must upload procedures with their [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)<sup>xvi</sup> that demonstrate the method that CEs and their sites will use to ensure food is held at the required temperatures for the duration of the home delivery route. These methods can include but are not limited to refrigerated trucks, coolers with ice, or other methods to ensure food is held at safe temperatures for service.

### 32. Should each home be considered a site for CEs serving non-congregate meals via home delivery?

No. Standard SFSP/SSO site requirements do not apply for individual homes where non-congregate meals are distributed. CEs should consider the 'site' the non-congregate meal service operation overall and document the route's origin as the address on the site application.

Note that this guidance does not apply to grab-and-go mobile routes. [See above for information about how to document sites along a mobile route.](#)

### 33. Does the child need to be present for home meal delivery?

No. The child does not need to be present at the delivery time if the CE has obtained the household's written consent to deliver meals and has verified the current address. If the meals are shelf-stable, no one needs to be present if the address has been verified. CEs must consider state and local food safety requirements and best practices when designing their meal service and include these considerations in the procedures they submit to TDA.

### 34. Is additional funding available for meal delivery?

No. There is no additional federal reimbursement for home delivery or mobile meal delivery. However, expenses related to meal delivery, such as postage or delivery service fees, would be considered an allowable cost under the SFSP or SSO. Note that if planning to use a third-party vendor to deliver meals, that vendor must be procured in accordance with federal procurement requirements. Delivery costs could also be paid with non-program funds, such as State or local funds, or private donations.



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### 35. What is the guidance regarding displaying the “And Justice For All” (AJFA) posters when providing meals via home delivery?

Sponsors can either post the AJFA on the delivery vehicle, or they may include a printed copy of the Nondiscrimination Statement (NDS), in a language the participant can understand, in the box, bag, or other container, along with the meals **at each delivery.**

If including the NDS with each delivery package, it may be printed as a standalone document or may be included as part of other printed documents that sponsors choose to include in the meal delivery, such as menus, newsletters, etc. If the sponsor requires that the parent sign a consent or opt-in form with each meal delivery, then this parental consent form containing the NDS is sufficient to satisfy this requirement. If the sponsor does not require a parental consent form to be signed with each delivery (e.g., only once at the beginning of the summer), the NDS must be included with each meal delivery.

Please note that only the current NDS may be used when included with home-delivered meals, meaning AJFA signage may not be used for this purpose.

## APPLICATION AND REQUEST FORM REQUIREMENTS

### 36. How is a new site approved to operate an open or closed enrolled non-congregate site? ([See this question for conditional non-congregate site application steps](#))

CEs wishing to establish **new** open or closed enrolled non-congregate sites should first check the location of the proposed site on the [Non-Congregate Eligibility Map](#)<sup>xvii</sup> to ensure that the site is located in a rural area and that it meets the 2-mile proximity requirements.

Next, the sites must be approved via TDA's standard application process. Once approved, the CE must submit the [Non-Congregate Request Form](#)<sup>xviii</sup> **for each site**, in which the following information is required:



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- Specific details about the service, including method of distribution and requested flexibilities (ex., grab-and-go, home delivery, bulk food component distribution, parent pick-up), actual days of distribution, meal service times, and number of days' worth of meals being bundled, as applicable.
- Supporting procedures for ensuring duplicate meals are not served and other procedures, depending on flexibilities requested, documenting how program integrity and food safety will be ensured under the requested flexibilities. See various questions above for more information on specific flexibilities and the documentation that must be submitted for each site at the time of application.

Note that requests to switch existing congregate sites to non-congregate sites must follow this process, as sites switching service models are considered new. [See below for more information on requirements for sites switching from congregate to non-congregate service.](#)

Once TDA has reviewed the information submitted and approved the request via email notification to the CE, the CE is free to begin non-congregate service. If denied, the site can still provide congregate service should they meet congregate service requirements. **NOTE:** If the request is denied because it was incomplete or contained insufficient supporting documentation, the requestor may submit a new request with revised information.

TDA will update the site name in the TX-UNPS application with an "NC" designation for the sites approved to serve non-congregate meals.

### **37. How does a renewing site that was approved to operate a non-congregate service in Summer 2024 get approved to continue operating an open or closed enrolled non-congregate site in Summer 2025?**

CEs that operated non-congregate sites in Summer 2024 and intend to operate a non-congregate service in 2025 at those sites must also complete the Non-Congregate Request Form **before** the site application will be approved. All approved sites from 2024 will be available to select in the Non-Congregate Request Form and are noted by the "NC," "NC\_H," or "NC-CON" designation, as applicable. To streamline the process for renewing sites, the following procedures and documents uploaded in 2024 are not



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required to be uploaded again **if those procedures and documents are still valid for Summer 2025:**

- MOU with school district for non-profit sites using school data for home delivery
- Procedures for protecting the confidentiality of households (for sites obtaining parental consent for home delivery)
- Procedures for mitigating the risk of duplicate meals
- Procedures for validating the identity of a child during parent/guardian pick-up
- Form H1506-A, Additional Assurances for Camps, Conditional Non-Congregate Sites, and Other Enrollment Programs that Charge Separately for Meals (applicable to conditional non-congregate sites).

Food safety procedures and sample menus are still required for CEs distributing more than five days of meals or distributing food components in bulk. Additionally, food safety procedures will be required for every site delivering meals to homes.

### 38. What are the application requirements if wishing to operate a conditional non-congregate site in a non-eligible area?

The process is similar to the process for new sites [as described above](#). However, when submitting a CE/site application in TX-UNPS, the CE must enter the site name as follows: NC\_CON\_[SiteName]. Because TX-UNPS is not currently configured to document this new site type. This naming designation is required to notify the TDA application processors that this is a request to operate a conditional non-congregate site. If that designation is not there, TDA will assume the site is requesting to operate a congregate service in a non-eligible area, and the application will be returned.

Once TDA has conducted the standard application review, if the application is approvable, TDA will note that in the application and inform the applicant to submit the Non-Congregate Request Form. If the Non-Congregate Request Form is approved, TDA will approve the entire application.



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If the Non-Congregate Request Form is not approved, the applicant will be notified that the site is not currently approvable, and the TX-UNPS application will be returned but not denied so that the applicant can address the issues that led to the denial of the non-congregate request.

### 39. How do I document the days of service in the TX-UNPS site application if I am distributing multiple days of meals at a single distribution?

The TX-UNPS site application should reflect **the days on which meals are intended to be consumed. Additionally, all meals should be counted and claimed based on these consumption days.** In the Non-Congregate Request Form, CEs can identify the specific days of distribution and the intended days of consumption.

### 40. How do I document meal service times in the TX-UNPS site application if I am bundling meals?

**For sites new to non-congregate service**, in the TX-UNPS site application:

1. Enter temporary, separate times for different meals (if serving breakfast and lunch, ensure the beginning of lunch is an hour after the end of breakfast).

**NOTE:** These times may not initially align with actual distribution times.

2. Once the site application has been approved or conditionally approved, submit your Non-Congregate Request Form, providing more details about days **and times of distribution**.
3. If the request form is approved, the application team will contact you to update the meal service times in TX-UNPS **to match what was entered in the Non-Congregate Request Form**. If breakfast and lunch are distributed simultaneously, the site application should reflect the time that meals are being distributed (meaning the times will be the same for breakfast and lunch).
4. Once the meal service times reflect the distribution times, TDA will add the appropriate "NC" designation to the site name, and the site is now approved to serve non-congregate meals.



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For previously approved non-congregate sites, you will first submit your Non-Congregate Request Form and submit the distribution times and days. Once approved, update the meal service times in the TX-UNPS site application to match what was entered in the Non-Congregate Request Form.

### 41. Do I have to submit a new Non-Congregate Request Form for sites approved to operate non-congregate service in Summer 2024?

Yes. While TDA expects to incorporate the non-congregate request process into the new application system, that system is not yet available in 2025. CEs must complete a Non-Congregate Request Form so that TDA is aware of all aspects of your non-congregate operation.

### 42. Will my site application be denied based solely on wanting to serve non-congregate meals?

No. TDA will not deny a CE application based solely on the sponsor's intent to provide a non-congregate meal service. In fact, all open, closed enrolled, and camp site applications must be approved for congregate service before requesting to operate a non-congregate service. If the non-congregate service is denied due to a site's proximity to another congregate site, the CE is encouraged to offer congregate service at all open, closed enrolled, and camp sites.

For SFAs submitting a request to operate a conditional non-congregate site, while TDA will not approve the site until it can meet all standards required by this site type, TDA will not outright deny an application; SFAs can revise procedures and adjust site specifications and location, if necessary, to meet the requirements.

### 43. Can my congregate site switch to non-congregate service in Summer 2025?

Possibly. An existing congregate site may switch to a non-congregate service under the following conditions:

- The site must meet all proximity and good standing requirements [as described above](#).



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- The CE must submit all documentation required in the Non-Congregate Request Form.
- The CE acknowledges that once the site switches to a non-congregate model, it is considered "new" per regulation, meaning that any SFSP site that switches must receive the pre-operational visit and first two-week site visit required of all new sites.

### 44. Are existing rural sites required to switch from congregate to non-congregate meal service?

No. While the option is available, TDA and USDA understand the benefits of congregate meal service and accompanying activities and encourage CEs to continue to provide these opportunities when feasible.

## MONITORING

### 45. Are monitoring requirements of non-congregate CEs and sites the same as those for congregate sites?

Yes. All existing monitoring requirements for TDA and CEs apply to non-congregate CEs and sites. Required reviews include but are not limited to TDA pre-approval visits, CE-conducted pre-operational site visits (SFSP only), first two-week site visits (SFSP only), site reviews, follow-up reviews, and meal preparation facility reviews.

TDA provides meal counting and review form prototypes on the [Summer Non-Congregate Feeding Program page](#)<sup>xix</sup> on SquareMeals.org.

### 46. How should CEs include non-congregate rural sites in the SFSP monitoring process?

SFSP sponsors must conduct pre-operational visits of new non-congregate sites, non-congregate sites that experienced operational problems the previous year, and existing





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sites that are new to non-congregate meal service. The intent of these site visits is to determine the sites' capacity to provide non-congregate meal service for the anticipated number of children. To decrease administrative burden, a sponsor may train site supervisors during the pre-operational visit.

Just as they would for congregate SFSP meal sites, CEs must conduct a full review of food service operations at each non-congregate meal site at least once during the first four weeks of program operations. Considering the distance and time required to monitor on-site operations, particularly in rural areas, the CE may conduct an initial first two-week site visit (required for all new SFSP sites and all existing sites new to non-congregate service) and a full meal service review simultaneously.

A full site review of meal service for non-congregate sites may look different from a full review of a congregate meal service, depending on the meal service model used. A full site review of a non-congregate site includes reviewing the entire meal service time, which is the time established by the sponsor for a site to distribute meals. For example, with a home delivery meal service model, a full meal service review may include observing the meals being loaded into delivery vehicles and checking meal logs and delivery routes. The CE must also ride along with or follow the delivery driver along the distribution route to observe the meal delivery.

In a meal pickup model, such as grab-and-go, meal service review may also include observing meal self-preparation. In all non-congregate service models, the CE must ensure eligible children are receiving the proper number of meals that meet nutritional standards and are consistent with all applicable State and local health, safety, and sanitation standards.

### 47. How will TDA monitor grab-and-go sites?

TDA will verify onsite that the CE provides packaged meals that can be carried from the non-congregate site to the homes and that CEs distributing meals to parents or guardians are maintaining accountability and Program integrity via the methods described in the Non-Congregate Site Request Form.

As part of the meal service observation during the review, TDA will:



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- Observe meal packaging;
- Observe meal pickup;
- Ensure meal pattern requirements are met;
- Proper implementation of bulk food component distribution, if applicable;
- Ensure meal pickup times are followed as stated on the site application;
- Ensure appropriate number of meals are distributed and counted;
- Ensure local health, food safety, and sanitation standards are followed; and
- Ensure that all civil rights requirements are met.

### 48. How will TDA monitor home delivery sites?

For sites operating home delivery or mobile routes, a TDA Administrative Review Specialist will accompany or follow the delivery route to ensure that meals are delivered to eligible participants.

During reviews of home delivery sites, CEs are expected to provide the following documentation:

- Evidence of written consent from the eligible child's parent or guardian that the household wants to receive delivered meals;
- A record of how many children are eligible to receive meals in the home and how many meals were provided in each meal delivery; and
- If using school data, a copy of the MOU between the sponsor and the SFA for use of household eligibility information.

TDA may use records such as consent forms to verify meals are going to homes with children residing there and to ensure the program's overall integrity.



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As part of the meal service observation during the review, TDA will:

- Observe meal packaging, including the assembly of meals (if applicable);
- Observe meal delivery;
- Ensure meal pattern requirements are met;
- Proper implementation of bulk food component distribution, if applicable;
- Ensure the appropriate number of meals are delivered and counted properly;
- Ensure local health, food safety, and sanitation standards are followed;
- Ensure that either the "And Justice for All" poster is properly displayed on delivery vehicles or that the Non-Discrimination statement is provided with each delivery; and
- Ensure household data is properly protected in accordance with the procedures submitted at the time of application.

### 49. What TDA monitoring requirements apply to SFAs that operate non-congregate rural sites under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO)?

As with SFAs that operate congregate sites in SSO, TDA will use the School Meal Program's Administrative Review process, outlined in 7 CFR 210.18, to monitor SFAs that operate non-congregate rural sites. Reviewers are expected to ensure that sites conducting non-congregate meal services comply with all other Program requirements and properly operate the non-congregate service (e.g., the site is complying with food safety requirements, ensures that only one meal is provided per child, per meal service type, and meals are properly counted and claimed).

**Note:** TDA will prioritize non-congregate sites when selecting sites for review.



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### MISCELLANEOUS

#### 50. What are the requirements related to site caps for non-congregate meal services in rural areas?

The site cap requirement remains for both congregate and non-congregate meal service. A site cap is established for all sites during the application and approval process. When evaluating a proposed food service site, TDA will ensure the site is complying with the following requirements:

- The site has adequate facilities and capacity to prepare and/or distribute meals for the number of children they are approved to serve.
- The site cap reflects eligible children residing in the targeted rural community.

On-site monitoring can uncover concerns with compliance regarding site caps not captured in the application. If inconsistencies are found related to site caps that were previously approved, TDA will provide technical assistance to the CE to ensure the site cap is corrected to reflect the accurate number of meals served to eligible children.

TDA will then verify that the corrective action has been taken through a follow-up visit or other manner. If TDA determines that a CE does not have the capability to operate or oversee non-congregate meal services at their sites, TDA may limit or restrict that CE's use of non-congregate meal service options.

#### 51. Can offer versus serve (OVS) be used in non-congregate settings?

Yes. Only SFAs may use OVS and will indicate their intent within the site application. Non-SFA sponsoring organizations may not use OVS. When using OVS in a non-congregate setting, SFAs should consider the unique service situations of each site, as well as each site's ability to follow appropriate safety measures. All required meal components or food items must be offered, and all participants must have the opportunity to select a reimbursable meal. TDA encourages SFAs that wish to use OVS to think creatively about how to implement this flexibility while ensuring that all meal service requirements are met.



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### **52. What are the requirements for serving non-congregate meals related to meal modifications for participants with disabilities or other medical or special dietary needs?**

CEs must still provide meal modifications for participants with disabilities when serving non-congregate meals. When planning a non-congregate meal service, CEs should consider how individuals who require meal modifications will be identified and served appropriately. Individual substitutions may also be made at a CE's discretion for a child with a non-medical or other special dietary need. Households should have a way of notifying the sponsor of the need for individual substitutions due to medical or other special dietary needs.

### **53. Are CEs required to collect racial/ethnic data at non-congregate sites?**

Yes. All requirements pertaining to collecting racial/ethnic data are in effect for this program. Please refer to TDA's SFSP Supplemental Handbook for the most recent guidance on this data collection.



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In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
- (2) fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



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- ii <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/bcd93c1e55194e6091b108930afc4a9b/>
- ii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- iii <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/bcd93c1e55194e6091b108930afc4a9b/>
- iv <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Administration-Forms>
- v <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Administration-Forms>
- vi <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Summer-Non-Congregate-Feeding-Program>
- vii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- viii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- ix <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- x <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xi <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xiii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xiv <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Administration-Forms>
- xv <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Administration-Forms>
- xvi <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xvixvii <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/bcd93c1e55194e6091b108930afc4a9b/>
- xviii <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/publish?EQBCT=88858da0bd5d474d82fb6b70e8b391d0>
- xix <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs/Summer-Non-Congregate-Feeding-Program>

