Frequently Asked Questions
Navigating SquareMeals for Program Operators

Document Purpose

TDA's SquareMeals.org contains a great deal of information and resources for operators of the 12 federal child and special nutrition programs administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture Food & Nutrition division (F&N). This FAQ resource will act as a quick start guide for new and aspiring Program Operators who are unfamiliar with the website. While this document does not cover every page and resource available on SquareMeals.org, it does provide an overview of the most important pages that you will need while administering your respective Program. Note that pages are subject to change based on new policy guidance from USDA. TDA will update this resource with any permanent changes implemented within SquareMeals.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

Fraud Hotline: 1-866-5-FRAUD-4 or 1-866-537-2834 | P.O. Box 12847 | Austin, TX 78711
Toll Free: (877) TEX-MEAL | For the hearing impaired: (800) 735-2989 (TTY)

Food and Nutrition Division
Nutrition Assistance Programs

This product was funded by USDA.
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Updated 5/24/2023
www.SquareMeals.org

- ALN/FAIN Numbers

- Disaster Resources

- Texas Farm Fresh information (can also be accessed from Industry Resources at the top of each)SquareMeals page).

- Statistics

- Resources

School Nutrition Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

3. Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the School Nutrition Programs (NSLP, SBP, and SMP)?

- Compliance

- Eligibility and Verification

- Texas ELMS

- Equipment Grant

- Food Service Management Company information (can also be accessed from Industry Resources at the top of each SquareMeals page)

- Local Wellness Policy Requirements

- USDA Foods

- Waivers

Food Distribution Program for NSLP – Important Program-Specific Pages

4. Which pages and resources are specifically important to the NSLP operators who are utilizing USDA Foods?

- Contracted Warehouses

- TX-UNPS Contract Packet Instructions

- USDA Foods Available for NSLP

- USDA Foods Processing Information

Child Care and Afterschool Care Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

5. Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Child and Adult Care Food Program?

- At-Risk Site Map

- National Disqualified List

Summer Meal Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

6. Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Summer Feeding Programs (SFSP and SSO)?

   - Food Safety

   - National Disqualified List

   - Summer Meal Site Map

   - Waivers

Farmers' and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs – Program-Specific Pages

7. Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Summer Feeding Programs (SFSP and SSO)?

   - Farmers' Market Maps for FMNP and SFMNP

Food & Nutrition Overview

1. **What special nutrition programs does the F&N division of TDA administer?**

   TDA administers the following programs:

   - School Nutrition Programs (SNP)

     o National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (including Afterschool Snack Program (ASCP))[i]

     o School Breakfast Program (SBP)[ii]

     o Special Milk Program (SMP)[iii]

     o Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)[iv]

     o Food Distribution Program for NSLP (FDP)[v]

   - Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)[vi]

   - Summer Meal Programs, including the Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option[vii]

   - Household Programs

     o Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)[viii]

- [The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)](#)[ix]

- [WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)](#)[x]

- [Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)](#)[xi]

In addition to the links above, links to the individual program pages are included on the SquareMeals.org homepage and from the Programs drop-down menu at the top of every SquareMeals.org page.

Use the menu of links listed on the lefthand side of each program's homepage to view the various resources and guidance for each program. This FAQ will address pages from that menu common to most programs as well as provide descriptions of Program-specific pages.

2. **What are the resources/pages that are common to most programs?**

The following pages are not only common to most of the nutrition programs, they are typically the pages most important to Program Operators:

- **Getting Started / New Applicant**

Each Program page will have either a Getting Started and/or New Applicants link in the left side menu. These pages will provide an overview of the program on the page and/or Quick Start reference guides. Also included are instructions for how to apply to be a Contracting Entity with TDA for the applicable program.

- **Renewing CEs**

The Renewing CEs page provides instructions to returning CEs on how to renew their applications, along with key dates, news, and instructions pertaining to the application process.

- **Policy/Handbook Page**

The Policy/Handbook page (called the Policy/ARM page for NSLP) provides links to TDA's all of our Program handbooks, available per chapter and in complete form. The handbooks provide in-depth policies and instructions for how to successfully operate the applicable program.

Also included on this page is a **Policy Updates and News** module that will list latest policy news, handbook and resource release announcements, FAQs, and other recent updates that require Program operator attention.

Finally, depending on the program, there are links to other policy-related resources, such as Texas Administrative Code Appeals procedures.

- **Administration/Forms Page**

The Administration/Forms page contains a list of forms, tools, templates, and other resources that Program operators will use while administering their respective programs. Forms are currently listed in alphabetical order. For information on how each resource is used, refer to the applicable Program handbook and/or the form/resource instructions, if available.

- **TX-UNPS**

The Texas Unified Nutrition Program System (TX-UNPS) is a web-based application that provides both TDA and our Contracting Entities (CEs) with efficient and immediate access to applications, meal claims, and related nutrition program functions. All program operators must set up an account and become familiar with the applicable system functionality.

On the TX-UNPS page, you will find getting started instructions, training and resources, link to the User Access Manager form required to request access, and a link to the tool itself.

- **Newsletter / News / Latest News**

TDA publishes four different newsletters for the School Nutrition Programs, CACFP, Summer Meals Programs, and the Household Programs. These newsletters, including previous versions, are available on SquareMeals from the Newsletter link. The Latest News Page also posts news items for the various programs.

- **Reimbursement Rates**

Child Nutrition Program operators are reimbursed for the eligible meals served to children and adult participants. The Reimbursement Rates page shows the annual rate of reimbursement, per meal type, that operators will receive per eligible meal. SFSP reimbursement rates are updated in January each year, and the other Child Nutrition Programs rates are typically updated each summer.

- **Income Eligibility Guidelines**

Most of the school and special nutrition programs have eligibility requirements ~~that~~ certain participants have to must meet to receive free or reduced-price meals. The Income Eligibility Guidelines page (listed as Eligibility and Verification on the NSLP page) lists income eligibility charts, broken down by total household income thresholds and household size, for each applicable program. Note that Program Operators should consult their program handbooks to see how these guidelines apply to their program's participants.

- **Program Year Calendar (Child Nutrition Programs Only)**

The Program Year Calendar page lists key dates for NSLP, SBP, CACFP, SFSP, and SSO for the entire calendar year. Included are dates ~~that~~ applications open and key reporting deadlines.

- **Training**

Operators of all programs must complete applicable mandatory training, including Civil Rights training. The Training page contains a menu across the top of the page that contains links to the Civil Rights training page as well as Program-specific training.

- **Area Eligibility (Child Nutrition Programs only)**

Programs that provide meals to all children for free, such as the Summer Meals programs and the afterschool programs, must operate sites in low income areas as determined by school data (student eligibility for free or reduced price meals at schools in the area) or census data.

FAIN (Federal Award Identification Number) is the unique identifying number assigned to all federal finance awards. Since October of 2013, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has required all Federal Agencies to issue a FAIN to all financial assistance awards or grants.

- **ALN/FAIN Numbers**

Assistance Listing Numbers (ALN), formerly known as Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA), are related to Federal programs, projects, services, and activities that provide assistance or benefits to the American public. They can be found on federal grant and cooperative agreement award notices (see example pictured below) and are often used in governmental reporting and auditing.

FAIN (Federal Award Identification Number) is the unique identifying number assigned to all federal finance awards. Since October of 2013, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has required all Federal Agencies to issue a FAIN to all financial assistance awards or grants.

Per federal regulations, Program Operators utilizing federal funds administered by TDA must document in their accounting records the FAIN and ALN numbers associated with those funds. While the ALN numbers associated with the programs and specific grants remain static, the FAIN numbers are updated annually. TDA notifies Program Operators of the updated numbers annually via the ALN/FAIN Numbers page on SquareMeals.org.

- **Disaster Resources**

The Disaster Resources page lists instructions and resources available to Program Operators in the event a disaster (for example, hurricane, flood, fire) prohibits operation of the Program.

- **Texas Farm Fresh information (can also be accessed from Industry Resources at the top of each) SquareMeals page).**

TDA works to create a Farm Fresh generation by connecting local schools with Texas agriculture. The movement is designed to cultivate an enduring mindset among new generations in which foods are chosen with the knowledge that those choices positively impact not only their own health, but the health of the community at large.

The Texas Farm Fresh page, also accessed from the Industry Resources drop-down menu at the top of each SquareMeals page, contains links to a variety of resources available to schools, childcare centers, community centers, farmers, ranchers, producers, and community members who want to be involved.

- **Statistics**

The Program Statistics page (also called the Public Information Requests and Program Data page under the Public Resources menu) presents a snapshot of TDA Food and Nutrition data, including number of Program Operators and number of meals served throughout the state by meal type.

Also on this page are links across the top to the Texas Open Data portal, which allows members of the public to access datasets published by Texas government, and to the Public Information Request page, where members of the public can request any information that is unavailable on SquareMeals or the Texas Open Data portal.

- **Resources**

The Resources page for each Program will contain a variety of tools, links, and one-pagers that will assist operators in administration of their designated programs.

School Nutrition Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

3. **Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the School Nutrition Programs (NSLP, SBP, and SMP)?**

Beyond the pages described above, the following pages contain important resources, tools, and information specific to the administration of the School Nutrition Programs:

- **Compliance**

The Compliance page for the School Nutrition Programs includes review schedules, background on Administrative and Procurement Reviews, tools for Administrative Review preparation, and links to the required Financial Report.

- **Eligibility and Verification**

The Eligibility and Verification page for the School Nutrition Programs is a hub that links to a variety of resources related to establishing student meal eligibility through household application and the verification of those applications. In addition to the Income Eligibility Guidelines, resources available through this hub include templates for household applications, household eligibility notification letters, notice of verification letters, and media releases.

Finally, this page links to information about Special Provision schools that provide meals for free to all students and the eligibility requirements for Special Provision school participation.

- **Texas ELMS**

The Texas Eligibility List Management System (Texas ELMS) streamlines the process of matching enrollment records with the students in households receiving assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or some types of Medicaid. These students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals based on their household's participation in the programs. Texas schools are required to complete the matching process via Texas ELMS.

The Texas ELMS page provides information on the direct certification and direct verification processes as well as links to training and tutorials on how to use the Texas ELMS system.

- **Equipment Grant**

Each year, TDA competitively awards kitchen equipment assistance grants to eligible SNP operators that allow Program operators to purchase nonexpendable, tangible kitchen equipment with a useful life of more than one year. The Equipment Grant page provides links to the application and to forms required for awarded recipients.

- **Food Service Management Company information (can also be accessed from Industry Resources at the top of each SquareMeals page)**

SNP operators who plan to contract with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC) must adhere to regulations associated with procuring and doing business with an FSMC. The dedicated FSMC page provides FAQs, timelines, links to policy guidance, and required forms for not only Program Operators but for both potential and existing FSMCs on TDA's approved FSMC vendor list.

- **Local Wellness Policy Requirements**

Every school district participating in NSLP and/or SBP is required to develop, implement, and assess a local wellness policy (LWP). This page provides guidance on a Local Wellness Policy requires requirements, templates for development, checklists, and other related resources.

- **USDA Foods**

Public, charter, and private schools as well as residential childcare institutions (RCCIs) participating in a School Nutrition Program are eligible to receive an entitlement dollar amount of USDA Foods based on the number of reimbursable lunches served during the previous school year multiplied by the federal rate of assistance per meal.

This page acts a hub linking to Getting Started Instructions, contract packet instructions, lists of USDA Foods available, USDA Foods Processing information, and the USDA Foods rate of assistance.

- **Waivers**

This page lists specific program requirements that can be waived if the CE (1) meets certain criteria, (2) submits information to the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) as required, and (3) is approved for the exemption/waiver.

Food Distribution Program for NSLP – Important Program-Specific Pages

4. **Which pages and resources are specifically important to the NSLP operators who are utilizing USDA Foods?**

Beyond the pages described above, the following pages contain important resources, tools, and information specific to using USDA Foods within the School Nutrition Programs:

- **Contracted Warehouses**

This page provides information about each of the state contracted warehouses, such as rate schedules, executed contracts, and contact information. It also provides links to the Warehouse Management tool and NSLP USDA Foods Private Storage and Delivery Fees Reports.

- **TX-UNPS Contract Packet Instructions**

This page provides TX-UNPS contract packet instructions to NSLP operators that intend to utilize USDA Foods. Operators will need to complete Contracting Entity Information Update and the Checklist sections within TX-UNPS as well as indicate which USDA Foods program(s) they wish to participate in for the school year (Processing, Farm to School and/or DoD Fresh Fruits and Vegetables).

- **USDA Foods Available for NSLP**

In addition to listing the USDA Foods available to NSLP operators, this page also provides information on surplus inventory, product information sheets, bonus orders, CN labels, and other resources.

- **USDA Foods Processing Information**

This page provides information about how NSLP operators can process USDA Foods. Processing of USDA-purchased foods allows eligible operators participating in NSLP to convert raw bulk USDA foods into more convenient, ready-to-use end products.

Child Care and Afterschool Care Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

5. **Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Child and Adult Care Food Program?**

Beyond the pages described above, the following pages contain important resources, tools, and information specific to the administration of the CACFP:

- **At-Risk Site Map**

The CACFP At-Risk program offers additional meals that meet nutritional guidelines for children when not in school. This program provides meals, snacks, and activities that are safe and fun for Texans 18 and younger after the end of the school day. The After School Meal site map tool can assist with identifying meals offered, though site schedules are subject to change.

- **National Disqualified List**

Institutions and individuals on the National Disqualified List are not eligible to participate in the CACFP. Sponsors are required to check if any potential sites or employees at potential sites are on the list before sponsoring those sites. This page provides a link to how to request access to the NDL from USDA.

Summer Meal Programs – Important Program-Specific Pages

6. **Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Summer Feeding Programs (SFSP and SSO)?**

Beyond the pages described above, the following pages contain important resources, tools, and information specific to the administration of the Summer Meal Programs:

- **Food Safety**

SFSP operators are required to meet all applicable state and local health, safety, and sanitation standards. This page provides resources from a variety of sources on the requirements that must be met along with best practices. Included is a link to the Texas Department of State Health Services health department locator.

- **National Disqualified List**

Institutions and individuals on the National Disqualified List are not eligible to participate in the SFSP. Sponsors are required to check if any potential sites or employees at potential sites are on the list before sponsoring those sites. This page provides a link to how to request access to the NDL from USDA.

- **Summer Meal Site Map**

The Summer Meal Site Map lists open SFSP sites across the state providing summer meals to children. This information is pulled from approved site applications in TX-UNPS.

- **Waivers**

This page lists any available program requirement waivers for certain SFSP and SSO operators, along with instructions on how to request those waivers.

Farmers' and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs – Program-Specific Pages

7. **Which pages and resources are specifically important to the administration of the Summer Feeding Programs (SFSP and SSO)?**

Beyond the pages described above, the following page contains information specific to the administration of the Farmers' and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs:

- **Farmers' Market Maps for FMNP and SFMNP**

Farmers' markets approved to operate FMNP and/or SFMNP are shown on a Texas map, so that participants can identify the nearest location in which to redeem vouchers for the applicable program.

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 (including gender identity and sexual orientation), 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/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.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;

(2)   fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

(3)   email: program.intake@usda.gov.

        This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

[i] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/National-School-Lunch-Program
[ii] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/School-Breakfast-Program
[iii] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Special-Milk-Program
[iv] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Fresh-Fruit-and-Vegetable-Program
[v] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Food-Distribution-Program-for-NSLP
[vi] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Child-and-Adult-Care-Food-Program
[vii] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Summer-Meal-Programs
[viii] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Commodity-Supplemental-Food-Program
[ix] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/The-Emergency-Food-Assistance-Program
[x] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Farmers-Market-Nutrition-Program
[xi] https://squaremeals.org/Programs/Senior-Farmers-Market-Nutrition-Program