The purpose of this reference is to provide an overview of how to participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) as a **contracting entity (CE)** in Texas. This is not a comprehensive guide; CEs must follow all regulations, program rules, policies, and guidance. If you need additional information, contact the Texas Department of Agriculture.

- **Calling** (877) TEX MEAL (839-6325)
- **Emailing** SquareMeals@TexasAgriculture.gov
- **Visiting** TDA’s website [SquareMeals.org](http://www.squaremeals.org)

**Contracting Entity** – an organization that signs a contract with TDA to operate a federal nutrition program administered by the agency.
The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally funded child nutrition program administered in Texas by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). SFSP was created to ensure that children in low-income areas could receive nutritious meals and snacks during the summer months when they do not have access to school lunch or school breakfast. The program reimburses contracting entities (CEs) for each summer meal served to eligible children. All reimbursable meals are no cost and must meet meal pattern requirements.

**SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**Sponsor** - A public or private nonprofit entity that enters into an agreement with TDA to assume responsibility for the administration of SFSP at one or more participating sites. Sponsors are referred to as contracting entities (CEs) in Texas.

**Site** - An accessible location with a provider serving SFSP meals to children; ideally in an accessible location where children naturally congregate in the summer. Sites operate under an approved SFSP sponsor; each site must meet eligibility criteria.

**Open Sites** - Open to all children based on area eligibility. The site is in an area where school or census data indicates at least 50% of the children living there are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

**Closed Enrolled Sites** - Sites with documentation showing 50% or more of the site’s enrolled children are from households that meet the federal income eligibility guidelines. These sites may also use area eligibility data (school or census data) that indicates at least 50% of the children living in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

**SFSP PARTICIPATION**

Approved SFSP meal sites provide meals at no cost to children and teens 18 years old and younger and enrolled students up to 21 with disabilities. Participating families do not have to apply, register, or provide identification at open SFSP meal sites. However, there may be registration requirements associated with camps or other organized programs that provide meals at closed enrolled SFSP meal sites.

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Organizations must meet certain eligibility criteria before applying to become an SFSP CE. CEs sign an agreement with TDA that details the contractual responsibilities of their role as a SFSP operator. Upon approval, the organization is referred to as a CE.

Organizations should contact TDA or their local education service center (ESC) for additional application information.

**Education service centers (ESCs)** - Regional service centers that provide SFSP sponsors with training and technical assistance at the local level. TDA maintains a contract with ESCs to provide these support services at no cost to the sponsors. See the resources section at the end of this reference for more information about how to find an ESC.

**DECIDING IF AN ORGANIZATION IS RIGHT FOR SFSP**

To determine eligibility for becoming an SFSP CE, organization administrators must submit a completed intake form at [SquareMeals.org/Summer](http://SquareMeals.org/Summer) using the Get Started tab.

The organization will receive an email from TDA in 3-5 business days with information regarding next steps. The email will include the following:

- **FND-101 Certificate of Authority for External Users** - Organization administrators must complete this form to gain access to the Texas Unified Nutrition Program System (TX-UNPS). TDA uses the web-based system to complete the program application.

- Details on the training that must be completed before an application is approved.
SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION

Prospective SFSP sponsors must submit an application in TX-UNPS and receive TDA approval before they can operate the program. They are also required to submit supporting documentation using one of the methods below:

- Upload the documentation in TX-UNPS
- Fax to (888) 223-8645
- Email to SFSP.Bops@TexasAgriculture.gov

TDA requires new SFSP CEs to take the ESC or web-based training. For training information visit SquareMeals.org/Summer and click the Training tab.

TDA will review submitted applications within 15 calendar days. If there are questions, errors, or missing information, TDA staff will note the issue in TX-UNPS and it should be addressed by the applying organization.

VISIT PRIOR TO APPROVAL

TDA conducts a Visit Prior to Approval (VPA) to assess an applicant’s viability, capability, and accountability to operate SFSP. The VPA is required for each new applicant that did not participate in SFSP the prior year and creates a report of the organization’s ability to operate the program.

If all program requirements are met, TDA will schedule a VPA. The VPA occurs at the end of the application process. TDA will request records for the VPA; expect TDA to be onsite at least 4 hours while conducting the VPA, which includes interviews with management and staff. During the VPA, TDA will perform the following assessments:

- Review and verification of the organization’s application, management plan, budget, financial documentation, and other records.
- Observe site operations, as applicable.
- Determine date the organization is eligible to file its first claim.
- Assess the adequacy of financial and staff resources.
- Determine compliance with civil rights requirements.

After the VPA, TDA sends notification if the application is approved.

See the resources section at the end of this reference for more information about TX-UNPS.
NEXT STEPS

TDA will review the organization’s submitted application along with all required documentation. The organization’s status will then be updated in TX-UNPS with one of the following designations:

- **Approval** - The application has been recommended for approval and will receive an approval through TX-UNPS.
- **Returned** - The application has been reviewed but is either incomplete or incorrect.
- **Submitted** - The application has been submitted to TDA for review.
- **Withdrawal** - The organization is not prepared to operate the program and will be given an opportunity to withdraw its application. To request a withdrawal, an email should be sent to SFSP.BOps@TexasAgriculture.gov. The organization may reapply at a later date.
- **Denial** - If an organization’s application is denied, TDA will notify the organization in writing of the specific reason for denial. If an organization’s application is denied, the organization may reapply at a later date.

APPLICATION MAINTENANCE AFTER APPROVAL

Organizations must ensure any operational changes are reported to TDA timely and needed updates are made in their TX-UNPS application. Actual operations must match what has been submitted as true and correct to TDA. To change or update an application after approval the organization must submit an amendment in TX-UNPS. TDA will review amendments within seven (7) TDA business days.

Once an organization becomes an SFSP CE, it is required to submit a renewal application every year (TX-UNPS renewal applications open each year on January 15). SFSP application deadlines are posted on SquareMeals.org.

CEs are encouraged to reach out to their local ESC for training and technical assistance.

ESC 90-DAY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE VISIT

The ESC will schedule a Technical Assistance visit within 90 days of approval for new CEs from the date the Permanent Agreement is signed by TDA. See the resources section at the end of this reference for more information about how to find your local ESC.
OPERATING AS A SFSP CONTRACTING ENTITY

MEAL PROMOTION

TDA’s summer meals promotion campaign includes distribution of printed materials, digital marketing, and local awareness strategies aimed at community partners. TDA promotion encourages families to use one of the following to find a meal site:

- Call 2-1-1 to speak to a live operator when trying to find a meal site
- Text “Food” or “Comida” to 877-877 to find a close meal site
- Visit SummerFood.org to view an interactive live map of all the current meal sites

SERVING MEALS/SNACKS

In addition to reducing food insecurity for children, summer meals should show children how to build a healthy plate and establish lifelong nutritious eating habits. To be reimbursable under SFSP rules, meals served must meet certain meal pattern requirements. These meal pattern requirements help the menu planner provide well-balanced, healthy meals that meet the needs of children.

Meal pattern requirements at a glance are available at SquareMeals.org/Summer on the Meal Pattern tab. For additional information, contact your Education Service Center (ESC).

TDA offers printed promotional resources at no cost to CEs to increase awareness about the availability of summer meals. TDA also offers a variety of downloadable materials, including social media images, web banners, posters and more. Go to SquareMeals.org/Summer and click on the Resources tab for promotional materials.
FILING A CLAIM

In order to be reimbursed for SFSP meals, a CE must file a claim in TX-UNPS each month meals are served.

CEs must have an application in approved status and correct information entered for each site in TX-UNPS to file a claim. Strict timelines govern when claims can be filed after the last meal of the month is served.

TDA recommends that CEs file claims as soon as possible after the end of the month.

Processing of claims occurs on Tuesdays and Thursdays and takes approximately 5-7 business days before payment is issued.

Check the SFSP updates in TX-UNPS on the welcome page for up-to-date information on claiming deadlines.

Claims questions can be directed to the claim hotline at 800-264-5732 or BCT.Bops@Texasagriculture.gov.

TIP! Please keep your organizations direct deposit information up-to-date in TX-UNPS.

KEEPING UP WITH KEY PROGRAM CHANGES

All current SFSP information is maintained on TDA’s website Squaremeals.org.

In addition, TDA sends a monthly e-newsletter, SFSP In the Loop, to all SFSP sponsors. The SFSP In the Loop contains critical updates from TDA regarding policy changes, clarifications, resources, and trainings.

In order to receive the monthly newsletters, CEs should keep their contact information (email address) in TX-UNPS updated. Past newsletters will be available for 3-months on SquareMeals.org.
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires TDA to conduct periodic administrative reviews (ARs). ARs ensure CEs comply with all program rules and regulations and provide an opportunity for technical assistance to improve program operations. Reviews occur at least once every three years. During an AR, CEs can expect TDA staff to review all required records and observe meal service at selected sites.

**REVIEW NOTIFICATION**

The CE will receive a letter approximately one month prior to the review stating when the review will occur, who will conduct the review, and any documentation that is required to be submitted to TDA prior to the review.

**PRIOR TO THE REVIEW**

TDA will ask the CE for documentation and it must be uploaded to TX-UNPS.
TX-UNPS

Accessing TX-UNPS
The Texas Unified Nutrition Program System (TX-UNPS) is a single, integrated, web-based application that serves all nutrition programs and provides contracting entities (CEs) with efficient and immediate access to applications, claims, and related nutrition program functions.

User access is required to use TX-UNPS. Obtaining access to TX-UNPS can be achieved by contacting the User Access Manager (UAM) within your organization. If your entity has not assigned a UAM, fill out the Security Authority for User Access Manager (FND-135) form to appoint someone from your organization. To determine if a UAM has already been designated, CEs should refer to the list at SquareMeals.org/UAM. TX-UNPS is located at https://txunps1.TexasAgriculture.gov

How to Navigate
The SFSP CEs will utilize three main menus in TX-UNPS:
- Applications
- Claims
- Compliance (includes review information)

Important! Users must log in to TX-UNPS every 90 days or else their account will be deactivated. If a user’s account is deactivated.

Password Reset
Users may utilize the “Forgot Your Password” feature as needed. The feature can be found on the homepage of TX-UNPS.

Users of the system will be locked out of TX-UNPS after 5 failed login attempts. Once a lock-out has occurred, users can wait 15 minutes and attempt their password again. If the user continues to have difficulty, it would be best to request a new password using the “Forgot Your Password” feature of TX-UNPS, by calling: (877) TEX MEAL (839-6325), or by emailing SquareMeals@TexasAgriculture.gov. Entities with a UAM can also request for their UAM to reset their password as needed.
EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

Education Service Centers (ESCs) are regional service centers that provide SFSP sponsors training and technical assistance. TDA maintains a contract with ESCs to provide these support services at no cost to the SFSP sponsors.

ESC SERVICES

The following are a few examples of topics ESCs can provide training and technical assistance:

- Recordkeeping
- Claim filing
- Application assistance
- Eligibility
- Meal pattern requirements
- Meal planning
- Meal appeal and acceptability

HOW DO I FIND MY ESC LOCATION?

There are 20 ESCs located across Texas; each location is assigned a region number. Contact information for each ESC region is available on SquareMeals.org. Hover over the About tab and click on the Contact Food and Nutrition tab to find the appropriate contact.

TDA POINTS OF CONTACT

To contact the Texas department of Agriculture (TDA) regarding questions about program applications, program operations, flexibilities/ waivers, or financial issues, visit SquareMeals.org, hover over the About tab and click on the Contact Food and Nutrition tab to find the appropriate contact.

TEXAS FARM FRESH INITIATIVE

TDA’s Texas Farm Fresh initiative connects Texans of all ages with locally grown food and agricultural education. Farm Fresh initiatives also benefit Texas farmers and ranchers by connecting meal sites with local producers. Texas meal sites can access TDA’s support and resources needed to develop farm-to-summer site activities, including the Farm Fresh Network, local purchasing information, and sample menus. Explore the possibilities at SquareMeals.org/TexasFarmFresh appropriate party.
POLICY GUIDANCE

Rules and regulations related to serving as an SFSP sponsor in Texas are documented in manuals maintained by TDA referred to as “handbooks.” Access the handbooks by going to SquareMeals.org/Summer and clicking on the Policy/Handbooks tab.

FOOD SAFETY

All CEs are required to ensure their sites maintain proper sanitation and health standards in conformance with all applicable State and local laws and regulations. For more information visit SquareMeals.org/Summer and click on the Food Safety tab.

TRAININGS

In addition to trainings offered by ESCs, the following training resources related to SFSP are available:

TDA Conferences
Conferences held by TDA are offered at no charge to the SFSP sponsors. The point of contact listed in the TX-UNPS application (the SFSP CE Administrator) will receive conference details.

Online Trainings
- CEs new to SFSP must take the Annual SFSP Training as part of their application process.
- Online trainings are available on SquareMeals.org/Summer via the Training tab, then click the SFSP tab.
- Visit this page to access TDA’s mandatory annual Civil Rights training for all CEs.
- ESCs offer a variety of training opportunities to assist program operations. Contact your local ESC for more information

AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

TDA analyzes aggregate data related to common findings from the SFSP ARs and publishes this data so that the SFSP sponsors can apply lessons learned.

Please review TDA’s Detailed Results for Reviews with Findings to implement processes to prevent errors. Visit SquareMeals.org/Summer and click on the Compliance tab.
In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (AD-3027) found online at: https://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov

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