

# Nebraska's Rural Non-Congregate Summer Food Service Program Option



*When school is out for summer, many kids across Nebraska go without consistent meals. The new Rural Non-Congregate (RNC) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) option is a way to get children the meals they need to be healthy, active, and ready to learn in fall.*

## What is the Summer Food Service Program?

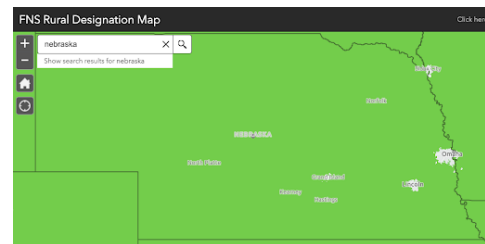
For 50 years, the SFSP has allowed sponsors like school districts, nonprofits or libraries to serve free meals to children ages 1-18 in low income areas across the US. For most of that time, SFSP meals were only allowed to be served to children who were physically at an SFSP site. This made meal service difficult particularly for rural districts given the long distances required for parents and children to travel between home and an SFSP site.

## What is the Rural Non-Congregate SFSP option?

The rural non-congregate (RNC) option, made permanently available nationwide starting Summer 2022, allows eligible rural sponsors to distribute multiple meals at a time through grab-and-go or delivery from an SFSP site. In Nebraska, sites may distribute meals in bulk for up to five days.

## Does my site meet "rural" designation requirements to operate RNC?

Check your eligibility using the USDA's Rural Designation Map Tool. Green zones on the map indicate rural areas that would allow RNC sites. If you have special requests or questions about rural designations for your area, please contact the Nebraska Department of Education Nutrition Services (NDE) for assistance (contact info below).



## What sites can participate in the RNC option?

Any site that meets standard SFSP site requirements (areas with 50% poverty or 50% of students participating in free or reduced-price meals), meets rural designation requirements, does not have a congregate site nearby, and that has prior approval from the state for the RNC option can participate. Sites that do not get state permission to be non-congregate will not receive reimbursement for meals served. Sites that do not meet the area poverty eligibility criteria can operate "conditionally" if they serve meals exclusively to students participating in free or reduced-price meals during the school year.

## How can sponsors operating RNC sites get meals to children?

There are three possible methods:

- Grab and Go or Drive Thru pick up from an SFSP site,
- Meal delivery to homes or a drop off location (this option is only available with guardian signed consent to receive meals for children - see below), OR
- Some hybrid of these methods and traditional service (without serving traditional and RNC for the same meal at the same site)

## How does summer school play into RNC meal service?

The USDA does not allow sponsors to serve RNC and traditional meals during the same meal. However, sponsors hosting summer school may serve hot lunch to students in their cafeteria and then send breakfast home with students for the following morning. Sponsors may also send students home with weekend meals following Friday meal service.

## How can RNC meals be packaged?

Either unitized (complete meals packaged as units) or in bulk (like-meal components packaged together). There may be one to five days worth of meals picked up or dropped off. Sponsors must decide the frequency of meal distribution prior to summer and communicate this to families.



## What information does NDE require RNC sponsors to keep for reporting?

As with traditional SFSP service, RNC sponsors must provide information regarding health and safety, storage, and discard dates for food. Additional requirements for non-congregate providers include identifying what makes up a meal in bulk meal packages and preparation instructions. RNC meals must not use ovens, stoves, or knives.

## How do RNC sponsors ensure program integrity?

Sponsors applying to serve meals through the non-congregate option must create an integrity plan and submit it to NDE to ensure children ages 1-18 are the ones consuming meals provided by a site. An example of a plan may include utilizing a caregiver sign up sheet to confirm the number of children in a family prior to distribution.

## What are the requirements for home delivery meal distribution?

Families must sign a consent form to receive meals for children that can be hard copy, email, or electronic. Additionally, a person must be present to receive meals when they are delivered and meals can not be left at a residence with no one to accept them (meals that never reach children can not be claimed for reimbursement). Grab-and-Go and Drive Thru meals do not require parent or guardian consent.

## What information should be included on the guardian consent forms for home delivery?

Forms must include:

- Household contact information
- Delivery address
- Number of eligible children in the household
- Names and ages of the children in the household
- Signature of the parent or guardian

## How does a site ensure parents or guardians know how the program works?

Sponsors should promote the program early and often. Sponsors can also send a weekly electronic meal sign up in the form of a google doc that includes the following information:

- Acknowledgement that the meals are for kids
- Acknowledgement that your site would like to minimize leftover or unused meals
- Specification of grab-and-go or meal delivery
- Identification of the meal delivery schedule and what meal will be provided
- Number of children in the household (from the guardian consent form)

## Where can I learn more?

Nebraska Appleseed is helping new or recent Nebraska RNC sponsors connect with more experienced ones to help make meal service the best it can be. Reach out to be connected!

Nebraska Department of Education Nutrition Services:  
(P) 402-471-2488 or 800-731-2233  
(Email) [nde.nsweb@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.nsweb@nebraska.gov)

For more information:  
Find USDA guidance, best practices, case studies,  
and more at [neappleseed.org/summerfood](http://neappleseed.org/summerfood)

P. 402-438-8852  
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