



Non-Congregate Meal Service in the USDA Summer Meal Programs, 2023 to 2024

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About this report

The [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023](#) permanently authorized a non-congregate meal service option for operators of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program in qualifying rural areas. The non-congregate meal service option allows sponsoring organizations to set up meal pick-up or meal delivery sites in rural areas where it may not be feasible to host summer activities for congregate meal service. This study monitored non-congregate meal service participation in summer 2024, the second year of the permanent non-congregate option, and compared it to summer 2023 using data from [a previous study](#).

Background information

The USDA Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program (SSO) provide meals for children during the summer months when school is not in session. The USDA has supported summer meal service in group settings (congregate meals) since 1968, and the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023](#) permanently authorized a non-congregate meal service option in qualifying rural areas. The non-congregate meal service option allows sponsoring organizations to set up meal pick-up or meal delivery sites in rural areas where it may not be feasible to host summer activities for congregate meal service.

The USDA collects administrative data about SFSP and SSO from the State agencies that oversee the programs in each State and Territory. USDA administrative data include information like the number of organizations sponsoring meal sites, the number of meal sites, and the number of meals served. Beginning in 2025, new procedures were implemented to enable separate reporting on congregate and non-congregate meal service. However, in 2023 and 2024, the USDA administrative data collection forms didn't distinguish between congregate and non-congregate meal service.

Through this study, we monitored non-congregate meal service participation in summer 2024, the second year of the permanent non-congregate option, and compared them to the first year, summer 2023. This study also gave us the opportunity to evaluate and adjust reporting requirements, while giving State agencies time to update their systems, ask us for clarification and technical assistance, and train their staff in advance of the new reporting forms in 2025.

How we did this study

We created a web-based survey that collected the same non-congregate meal service information that is now required for USDA administrative data reporting (see Appendix). State agencies reported the number of non-congregate meals served, the number of sites serving non-congregate meals, and the number and type of sponsors administering non-congregate meal service for each month in summer 2024.

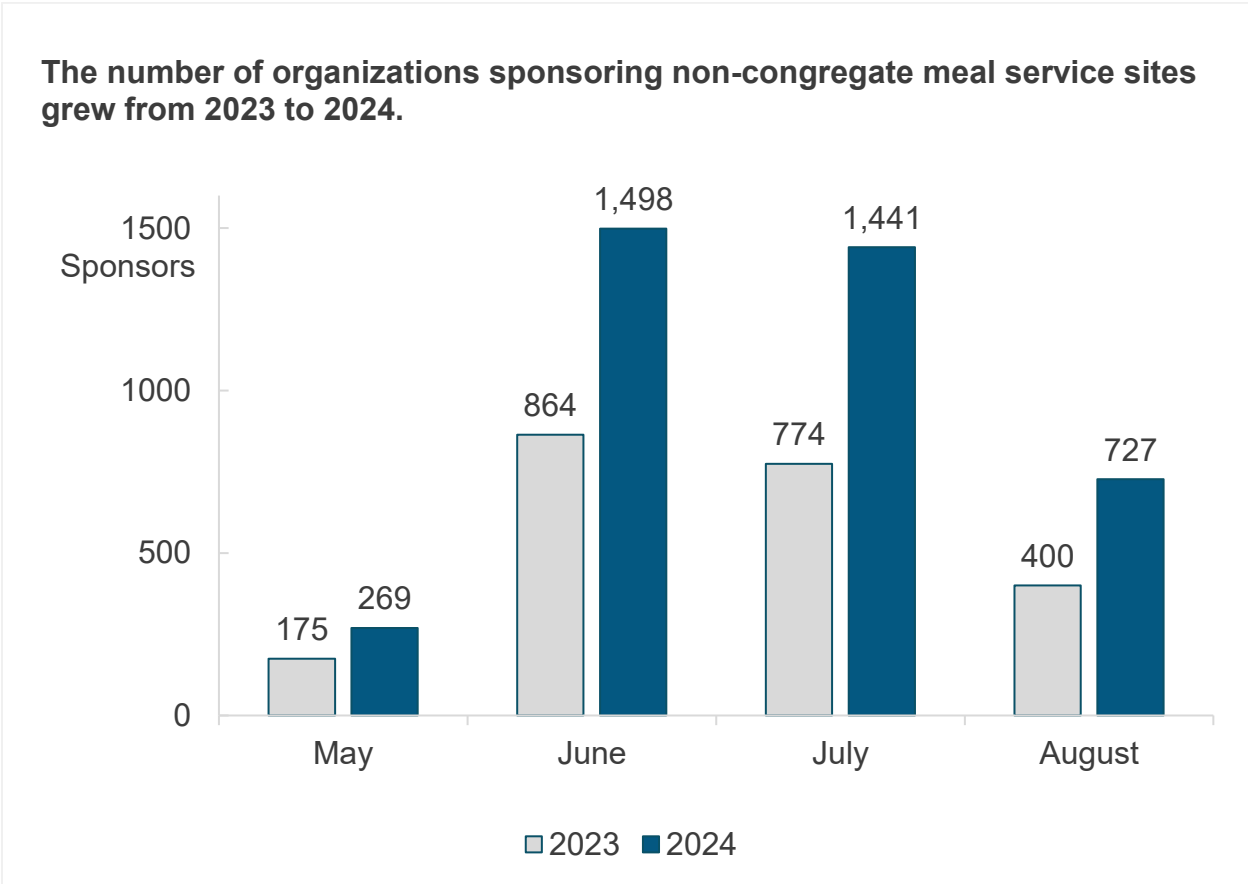
States submitted data on the same reporting schedule that they submit administrative data to USDA for congregate meal service. Generally, State agencies finalize their meal claim data 90 days from the end of the reporting period, though they may still make corrections after this point. Following the normal reporting schedule ensured data would be ready for reporting and reduced some of the burden of data collection. State agencies were given until the end of data collection (Jan. 15, 2025) to correct their submissions for summer 2024.

We compared the data from this study with data from the sample frame used to collect the [2023 Summer Non-Congregate Meal Service Sponsor Survey](#), in order to measure changes in the numbers of sites and sponsors from 2023 to 2024.

What we learned

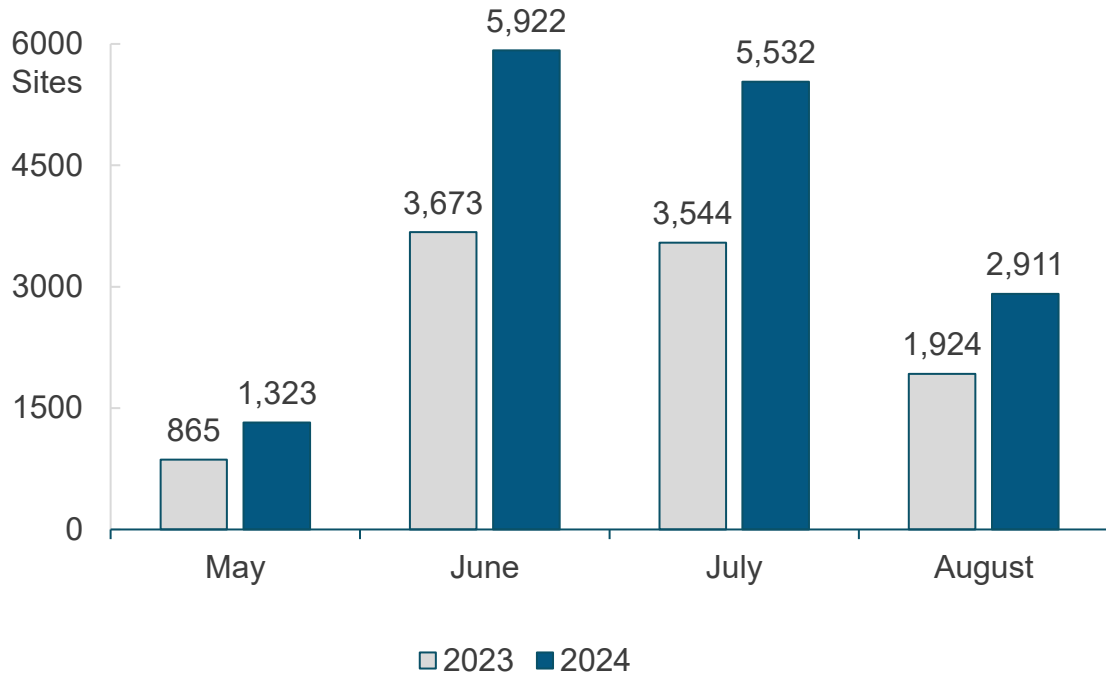
Key finding: In 2024, 74 percent more sponsors and 55 percent more sites provided non-congregate summer meals than in 2023.

In summer 2023, non-congregate meal service was only available in 45 States and Puerto Rico. All States with eligible rural areas and Puerto Rico provided non-congregate meal service to children at some point in summer 2024.



The number of organizations sponsoring non-congregate meal service sites increased an average of 74 percent from 2023 to 2024, with increases ranging from 54 percent (May) to 86 percent (July) (see above). The number of non-congregate meal service sites also increased an average of 55 percent from 2023 to 2024, with increases ranging from 51 percent (August) to 61 percent (June) (see below).

The number of non-congregate meal service sites grew from 2023 to 2024.



In both 2023 and 2024, June had the largest number of sponsoring organizations and sites operating non-congregate meal service. The [USDA Summer Meals Study](#) found that most congregate summer meal sites operated an average of 4.5 days per week for 7 weeks between June and August in summer 2018. That study was conducted prior to the availability of the non-congregate meal service option, which allows sites to distribute multiple days' worth of meals to eligible participants. The typical operating schedule for non-congregate meal service sites is unknown as of the date of this publication.

About this publication

Suggested citation and related citations

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Data

The USDA Food and Nutrition Administration publishes program data at <https://www.fna.usda.gov/pd/child-nutrition-tables>

Funding and acknowledgements

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Appendix: Survey

Section: Respondent Information

Q1. Based on the link you used to access this survey, you are entering information for the following State agency and program contact:

State agency: [piped in from contact list]

Program contact: [name piped in from contact list]

Program contact email: [email address piped in from contact list]

Q2. Is the information above correct?

a. Yes

b. No

[If No, Q3 appears. If Yes, move on to next section.]

Q3. If the information above is incorrect, please update it below:

[Text Entry]

Section: Data Description

Q5. Please select the month for which you are providing data:

a. May 2024

b. June 2024

c. July 2024

d. August 2024

e. September 2024

Q6. Please select whether this is an original submission or a revision to an existing submission. If you are submitting a revision, please submit the entire report, not just the revised data.

a. 1 – Original

- b. 2 – First Revision
- c. 3 – Second Revision

Q7. Please select the summer program for which you are providing data:

- a. SFSP
- b. SSO
- c. Both SFSP and SSO

Section: SFSP

[Display if Q7=a or Q7=c. Skip if Q7=b]

SFSP-1. Please provide a total number of meals served in rural non-congregate settings by SFSP meal service in [choice selected in Q5]:

SFSP Breakfasts	
SFSP Lunches	
SFSP Suppers	
SFSP Snacks	
Total	[Auto-sum entries for Breakfasts, Lunches, Suppers, and Snacks]

SFSP-2. Please provide the number of sponsors serving meals in rural non-congregate settings in [choice selected in Q5]. Sponsors that serve non-congregate meals but did not offer meals this month should not be included in the total.

If the information requested in A and B is not available, please respond to C; if you respond to A and B, please ignore C.

	School Sponsors	Government Sponsors	Residential Camps	National Youth Sports Program	Private Non-Profit Sponsors	Total
A. SFSP sponsors operating only rural non-congregate sites						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]
B. SFSP sponsors operating both rural non-congregate and congregate sites						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]
C. Total SFSP sponsors operating rural non-congregate sites						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]

SFSP-3. Please provide the number of sites serving meals in rural non-congregate settings in [choice selected in Q5]. Sites that serve non-congregate meals but did not offer meals this month should not be in the total.

If the information requested in A and B is not available, please respond to C; if you respond to A and B, please ignore C.

	School Sponsors	Government Sponsors	Residential Camps	National Youth Sports Program	Private Non-Profit Sponsors	Total
A. SFSP sites serving only rural non-congregate meals						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]
B. SFSP sites serving both rural non-congregate and congregate meals (e.g., hybrid sites)						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]
C. Total SFSP rural non-congregate sites						[Auto-sum entries for the entire row]

SFSP-4. Please provide the average daily attendance and the number of operating days of rural non-congregate sponsors in [choice selected in Q5]. Please review the instructions for calculating average daily attendance for non-congregate meal service:

For the purposes of this calculation, sponsors should combine lunch and supper counts into a single meal service.

Step 1: The total number of meals served in each site’s primary meal service is first divided by the number of operating days (or meal service days) for the site during that claim period. The result of that calculation is the average number of meals distributed by the site on each operating day.

Step 2: To complete the calculation of ADA for non-congregate sites, the sponsor must divide the average number of meals distributed per operating day by the number of days’ worth of meals distributed to each child in one pickup or delivery service.

Step 3: Once the non-congregate ADA is calculated for each site, the sponsor will sum the non-congregate ADA for all sites that the sponsor manages. This will result in the non-congregate ADA for the sponsor.

Step 4: This number should be added to the Total non-congregate ADA for all other sponsors to get the cumulative ADA for the state’s non-congregate sites. Note that we display ADA to one decimal place.

	School Sponsors	Government Sponsors	Residential Camps	National Youth Sports Program	Private Non-Profit Sponsors
A. Average Daily Attendance - SFSP					
B. Operating Days - SFSP					

SFSP-5. How was this data collected? Please include any information that would help us understand the answers you provided or skipped (e.g. circumstances specific to your state, specific to a particular month, any data quality concerns). Write "N/A" if you would like to skip this question.

[Text Entry]

Section: SSO

[Display if Q7=b or Q7=c. Skip if Q7=a]

SSO-1. Please provide a total number of meals served in rural non-congregate settings by SSO meal service in [choice selected in Q5]:

SSO Breakfasts	
SSO Lunches	
SSO Suppers	
SSO Snacks	
Total	[Auto-sum entries for Breakfasts, Lunches, Suppers, and Snacks]

SSO-2. Please provide the average daily meals (ADM) and the number of operating days of rural non-congregate sponsors in [choice selected in Q5]. Please review the instructions for calculating average daily meals:

Step 1: The total number of meals served in each site's meal service is first divided by the number of operating days (or meal service days) for the site during that claim period. The result of that calculation is the average number of meals distributed by the site on each operating day.

Step 2: To complete the calculation of ADM for non-congregate sites, the sponsor must divide the average number of meals distributed per operating day by the number of days' worth of meals distributed to each child in one pickup or delivery service.

Step 3: Once the non-congregate ADM is calculated for each site, the sponsor will sum the non-congregate ADM for all sites that the sponsor manages. This will result in the non-congregate ADM for the sponsor.

Step 4: This number should be added to the Total non-congregate ADM for all other sponsors to get the cumulative ADM for the state's non-congregate sites. Note that we display ADM to one decimal place.

Average Daily Breakfasts – SSO	
Average Daily Lunches – SSO	
Average Daily Suppers – SSO	
Average Daily Snacks – SSO	
Operating Days – SSO	

SSO-3. Please provide the number of sponsors serving meals in rural non-congregate settings in [choice selected in Q5]. Sponsors that serve non-congregate meals but did not offer meals this month should not be included in the total.

If the information requested in A and B is not available, please respond to C; if you respond to A and B, please ignore C.

SSO sponsors operating only rural non-congregate sites	
SSO sponsors operating both rural non-congregate and congregate sites	
Total SSO sponsors operating rural non-congregate sites	

SSO-4. Please provide the number of sites serving meals in rural non-congregate settings in [choice selected in Q5]. Sites that serve non-congregate meals but did not offer meals this month should not be in the total.

If the information requested in A and B is not available, please respond to C; if you respond to A and B, please ignore C.

SSO sites serving only rural non-congregate meals	
SSO sites serving both rural non-congregate and congregate meals (e.g., hybrid sites)	
Total SSO rural non-congregate sites	

SSO-5. How was this data collected? Please include any information that would help us understand the answers you provided or skipped (e.g. circumstances specific to your state, specific to a particular month, any data quality concerns). Write "N/A" if you would like to skip this question.

[Text Entry]

Section: Feedback

[Display if Q7=a, Q7=b, or Q7=c]

- Pilot Test Feedback. What was it like to fill out this form? Please provide any notes about clarity of instructions, response burden, or timing of this data collection.

[Text entry]

End of Survey

Thank you for submitting the non-congregate meal service data for [Program selected in Q7] in [choice selected in Q5].

We appreciate your participation!

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