

2024 Summer Food Service Program
Rural Non-Congregate (RNC) Meal Service
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

For 2024, non-congregate meal service is an option for use in rural areas where no other congregate meal service is available. As we receive questions about eligibility, the process, and other considerations, we will continue to update the FAQs below.

How do I know if I'm able to serve RNC meals?

RNC meal service is an option for sites located in rural designated areas. Please refer to the [USDA Food and Nutrition Service Rural Designation Map](#) to determine if your site is eligible. In addition to site eligibility, a sponsor must be in good standing to participate in RNC meal service.

What do I do next if I want to run a RNC meal service?

To participate and run RNC meal service, you must complete the [Intent to Participate Form](#) in the Grant Electronic Monitoring System/Michigan Administrative review System (GEMS/MARS) located on the SFSP website. After completion of the form, you must review the RNC Articulate Training on the SFSP website, train staff prior to RNC operations beginning and update the NexSys Coordinated Application to reflect RNC information.

Do I need to document verification of rural eligibility in the Coordinated Application?

Yes. On each SFSP site page in the Coordinated Application, you will be required to upload a screenshot of site eligibility from the USDA FNS Rural Designation Map. This will ensure that site eligibility is carried forward, in the event that the maps change over time. Site eligibility is good for 5 years.

Do I need to complete a Program Integrity Plan to operate RNC meal service?

This year we have added specific RNC questions to the application so there is no separate program integrity plan to complete. All RNC questions in the application must be completed, and it is important that you have all processes and procedures for RNC meal service in place to ensure compliance with federal regulations.

How many days of meals can I send home at one time?

For RNC meal service, you can provide up to 7 days of meals at one time. It is important that food safety and quality standards are maintained. It will be required that households receive a menu and cooking/prep/storage instructions to go along with the meals. Food preparation required by households should be minimal.

Can I serve bulk food items (e.g., a loaf of bread, package of lunch meat)?

The only bulk food items you can serve are whole fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and/or juice.

Can I use Offer Vs. Serve (OVS) at a RNC site?

No. All RNC sites must serve all meal components in at least the minimum serving size for the meal to be reimbursable. OVS is not permitted.

Can we serve both congregate and non-congregate at the same site through the SFSP?

Yes. You can serve both congregate and non-congregate at the same site through SFSP. However, you may not serve both models at the same time. An allowable example of this would be serving congregate meals Monday-Thursday and then serving non-congregate meals for Friday-Sunday. Another allowable example would be choosing to serve congregate breakfast every morning and sending children home with their lunch to be eaten off site. Please work closely with the SFSP team or your assigned analyst to ensure separation between these two serving models. You must ensure clear separation between models, meal service times and children served.

Can I serve congregate and non-congregate meals at the same time using the SFSP?

No. As mentioned above, you can serve congregate and non-congregate at the same site but not during the same time when serving meals through the SFSP.

What if the site has summer school students that eat congregate meals, but I would like to serve RNC meals for the community at the same site?

If summer school students are served meals using the extended school year option in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), then you can serve RNC meals at that site to your community using SFSP. In order to serve meals at the same time using both programs, you must have safeguards in place to ensure children will not receive more than the maximum allowance of meals per day in any Child Nutrition Program. An allowable example would be summer school students receive congregate meals for breakfast and lunch Monday-Friday (through NSLP) and the site also operates a RNC meal distribution for 7 days (through SFSP). Site staff would need to have the ability to ensure the students attending summer school are not receiving 7 days worth of meals at the RNC site and summer school students would only be eligible to receive a 2-day meal pack claimed through SFSP.

Can I serve congregate during summer school and switch to non-congregate once summer school ends?

Yes. If you choose to change your site to non-congregate, you can. You will need to fill out the intent to participate form, complete the RNC Articulate Training, train your staff before RNC operations begin, amend your application to make sure it has the most current information and complete a pre-operational visit form. All steps will need to be completed and your application must be approved before RNC operations can begin.

Can we deliver meals directly to student's homes?

Yes. However, you must keep a few things in mind when doing so. You must develop a method to notify households that SFSP meals are available to all children who request them, and sponsors must develop a method (e.g. written, email, survey, verbal) for households to provide consent to initiate meal delivery. Sponsors must also maintain and keep current: contact information, delivery location and the number of children requiring meals. Households must also have a way of notifying the sponsor of medical or other special dietary needs and you must adhere to state and local food safety regulations.

Can the new mobile meal counting application be used for multiple meal distribution?

No. Currently the mobile meal counting application does not allow for counting multiple meals. The Multiple Meal Count Form will need to be used to count during multiple meal distribution.

Are there any additional requirements for non-congregate multiple meal distribution?

- A daily meal count form, multiple meal count form, or point of service system must be used as meals are being distributed.
- Production records are required to be completed and maintained on file.
- Instructions for meal preparation/storage must be provided along with a menu.
- Sponsors must ensure that the required food components for each reimbursable meal served meets the meal pattern requirements.
- Food preparation required by households should be minimal.

Are there any additional monitoring requirements to participate in Rural Non-Congregate (RNC) Meal Service?

Yes. If a site is new (did not participate in RNC, switched from congregate to non-congregate meal service), experienced significant staff turnover or had operational issues in previous year, a pre-operational visit must be completed. All other required monitoring for Traditional SFSP sites must be conducted as well.

Can RNC operate in a community-based setting?

Yes. Both School Food Authorities (SFA's) and Community sponsors are able to serve meals using the RNC meal service option.

How do you determine crediting for whole fresh fruits and vegetables?

The [USDA Food Buying Guide](#) provides guidance on how foods may contribute toward the meal pattern requirements in Child Nutrition Programs.

If I begin the summer serving congregate meals and switch to RNC meals in the middle of the summer, will I be required to complete additional monitoring?

Yes. If you begin one type of meal service and then switch to a different model, you will have to complete a pre-operational, initial site visit and monitor site review for the new meal service model being used.

Additional questions and answers will be added as they arise.