



How to Implement Summer Food Standards of Excellence in Your Community

As an anti-hunger advocate, you understand the clear link between the food served at summer food sites and participation rates. Simply put, if children don't find the meals appealing, they won't eat them. They may not even come to the site at all. Often it is the food drawing children into programs in the first place.

Quality, kid-friendly food attracts children to meal programs and makes them more likely to consistently participate throughout the summer. The primary goal of evaluating summer food sites and holding them to high standards is to increase the quality of food served and the site environment so that participation increases and more hungry children receive healthy and nutritious meals when school is out.

Ways to Use the Summer Food Standards

The attached checklist is meant to be used to call attention to the Summer Food Service Program and positively reinforce quality at sites. It can be used to evaluate sites serving breakfast, lunch, and/or suppers.

At the end of the summer, use the checklist criteria for any of the following:

- Evaluate what worked and didn't work at summer food sites in your area
- Distribute the checklist to site coordinators so they can perform a self-evaluation of their site
- Conduct city or county-wide evaluations of the Summer Food Service Program
- Determine high-quality sites and recognize them for their work
- Identify what areas need to be improved the following year and encourage sites to reach the next level of program excellence

Some of the questions will need to be answered by the site coordinators, and the person conducting the review may need to look through a monthly menu to accurately evaluate the meal patterns. If possible, the reviewer should purchase a meal at each site (they will need to pay, since federal funds for meals can only be claimed for children 18 years of age and under) and sit with the children to eat. This will give them a better understanding of the quality of the food and the experience of eating at the site. During this process be sure to clearly explain to site staff who you are so that they do not confuse you with the state agency monitoring staff.

Levels of Excellence

FRAC has identified three levels of quality summer food sites- bronze, silver and gold. In addition to meeting the state's nutrition and health and safety requirements, these sites have gone above and beyond the call of duty to encourage children to participate in the summer food program and offered quality sites and healthy, kid-friendly food.

Bronze sites- They go a step above the minimum requirements for a summer food site. They ensure that a variety of food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, is served throughout the menu cycle; the food is appealing; the site is welcoming to children of all ages and backgrounds; and the site staff conducts basic outreach activities to promote summer meals.

Silver sites- They meet and move beyond the requirements of a bronze site. They include a greater variety of fruits and vegetables; incorporate low fat dairy products and whole grains into the meals; offer opportunities for nutrition education and physical activity; conduct advanced forms of outreach that are culturally appropriate; and maximize the number of meals allowable under the Summer Food Service Program.

Gold sites- They meet the bronze and silver requirements but also take the site to a higher level. They offer children choices of meal components, additional servings of fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and more variety in the menu; operate for the majority of days when school is out, offer nutrition education once a week, provide opportunities for physical activity every day, and also conduct extensive community outreach by targeting children of all ages, canvassing neighborhoods and using all possible community resources.

Evaluating Sites

To evaluate summer food sites, a surveyor should visit each site, going through the standards of excellence criteria and marking off each item that the site meets. FRAC recommends that for a site to qualify as bronze, silver or gold they meet all of the criteria for that category. However, if you do not think that is realistic for your community, you may want to modify the standards or require a certain percentage of compliance for each category. Again, be sure to explain to site staff that you are not with the state agency.

Acknowledging Quality Sites

Consider giving quality summer food sites an award or special recognition for all their hard work. One option for some regions is to nominate them for a USDA Summer Sunshine Award. Contact your state child nutrition agency to find out if your state offers these awards and get more information. Quality sites also can be acknowledged with an award ceremony, mentioned in the local newspaper, or be given modest cash awards to be used at the site the following year.

Building on Success: Taking Summer Food Sites to the Next Level

For sites that have already met the standards of excellence, encourage them to take their activities to an even higher level, incorporating some of the following ideas:

- Incorporate additional educational and recreational programming opportunities at the site
- Expand publicity efforts and talk to other sites about ways they could do the same.
- Encourage public officials and members of Congress to visit the summer food site in order to gain their support for summer feeding programs.
- Host theme weeks throughout the summer and highlight different types of food.
- Include additional games, sports, movies and other special events and activities to draw children to the site and keep them coming back.
- Start a school or community garden, and if possible, serve some of the produce in, or Along with, the meals at the site.
- Reward children for trying every meal component.
- Introduce children to new types of produce by holding a taste testing each week for featured fruits and vegetables.
- Involve children in food preparation activities on a regular basis.
- Invite guest speakers such as a chef, farmer, police officer, firefighter, nurse, doctor or other “local celebrity” to the site.
- Make meals more attractive to children by packaging them in colorful bags or boxes or let the children decorate the bags as an art project and then package the meals in them the following day.
- Use food to teach children about cultural diversity and local history.



Summer Food Standards of Excellence

BRONZE LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the following criteria along with all federal and state Summer Food Service Program and food safety regulations.

Food Quality

- The site offers at least a 2 week menu cycle, which includes a variety of food.
- Fresh produce is being served throughout the menu cycle.
- The food is served in an appealing manner. (No items are crushed, soggy, frozen or damaged. Fruits and vegetables are ripe and in good condition.)
- Most kids appear to like the food and are eating all components.
- Food is being served at the right temperature. (All cold foods are served cold and none are frozen. Hot foods are served hot and none are burnt or overcooked.)
- Alternative menu items exist for children who cannot eat a component of the meal due to religious or cultural reasons or because of food allergies.

Environment

- The site is generally an attractive and welcoming environment for children to eat.
- The site is accessible to all participants.
- The food service area and the path to it from the entrance are well lit and safe.
- If the site is an open site, there is a summer meals banner outside of the building clearly explaining that free summer meals are available at the site.
- The address listed for the site on all outreach and promotional materials is correct.
- All staff members at the site are aware of the summer meals program, welcome all children from the community, and assist them in accessing the program.
- The site operates 5 days a week for at least six weeks when school is out.
- The site has created a “sharing table” (if permitted by the state agency) so that children can place non-perishable food components they do not want on it and other students can take them.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites”

- The site has conducted outreach activities to promote the summer meals program such as handing out flyers or hanging a poster or banner at the site.
- All promotional materials effectively convey information about the program (e.g. free meals are offered at the site).
- Site staff have worked with area schools to promote the summer meals program.

Additional Notes:

SILVER LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze criteria and the following.

Food Quality

- Two different fruits and three different vegetables (can be canned, frozen or fresh) are offered each week for lunch.
- Fresh fruits or raw vegetables are offered three or more days of the week for lunch.
- Whole grain foods are offered during the week.
- Low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk is offered daily.
- No foods on the menu are deep fat fried. (Deep fat fried food is defined as any meal component that is cooked by total immersion into hot oil or fat, and foods that have been pre-fried or flash fried. This does not include foods that are stir fried or sautéed.)
- Vegetarian options are offered.

Environment

- If eligible, the site offers 2 meals each day. (3 meals a day if it is a migrant site)
- Site offers nutrition education throughout the summer.
- Site offers opportunities for physical activity throughout the summer.
- Vending machines, if available at or near the summer food site, are turned off during the meal service.
- The site operates for at least 8 weeks, leaving a minimal gap between the beginning and end of NSLP and summer food.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites”

- Site staff have conducted outreach to local businesses and organizations.
- A kick-off event took place at the site.
- Outreach efforts specifically target a diverse group of children.

Additional Notes:

GOLD LEVEL SUMMER FOOD SITE

To qualify at this level, the site must meet all of the bronze and silver criteria and the following.

Food Quality

- Children are offered choices of meal components. (Example: children are able to choose between yogurt or a cheese stick or an apple or banana.)
- In addition to low fat (1%) milk and/or skim (nonfat) milk being offered daily, whole milk is not offered at the site.
- Site offers children additional servings of fruits and vegetables (above and beyond USDA required amounts).
- The site has held a food tasting event or surveyed the children to find out what foods they would like to have served during the summer.
- Four different entrees or meat/meat alternates are offered throughout each week.
- No entrée or meat/meat alternate is offered more than 2 times within each month on the main lunch menu (not including food offered as a substitute meal for children with special dietary restrictions).
- Three different fruits and five different vegetables (can be canned, fresh or frozen) are offered each week in the lunch menu.
- Fresh fruits or raw vegetables are offered five days a week in the lunch menu.
- Whole-grain foods are offered three or more times a week.

Environment

- Site operates for the entire summer, leaving no gap between the beginning and end of NSLP and summer food.
- Site is able to maintain steady participation rates throughout summer.
- Site offers nutrition education several times a week.
- Site offers opportunities for physical activity every day.
- If the site has vending machines, children at the site do not have access to them at any point during the day.

Outreach Efforts

The following criteria are most applicable to “open sites”

- The site has conducted outreach specifically targeted to older children.
- Site staff and/or volunteers walked around the surrounding neighborhood to tell children and families about the free summer meals program.
- The summer food site is listed with a widely used community hotline service (such as the United Way’s 211 service) as a place that children can receive free meals throughout the summer.
- The site or sponsor used media (radio, newspaper, community or church newsletter, tv) to promote the program.

Additional Notes: