



July 6, 2021
Embedded attachments with this issue

Refer to the COVID Page for Updates

Your Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) newsletter has returned, but SquareMeals.org/CVNSLP will still be your source for all COVID-19-related regulatory information. The most current information regarding program operations that has been modified due to COVID-19 will continue to be found on our Coronavirus page to ensure that TDA shares updates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in a way that is timely and consistent.

Reminder: Update SSO & SFSP Site Application End Dates in TX-UNPS

CEs should update their SSO and SFSP site end dates in their TX-UNPS site applications. Site application information should reflect current summer operations. TDA uses data from SSO and SFSP site applications to populate the www.Summerfood.org map and the No Kid Hungry Texting Tool. 211 also uses the summer meals map to connect callers to meal sites. SSO and SFSP site applications that are classified as open sites and the site end date has not passed are displayed on the map and texting tool. The public uses these tools to identify sites that are open for children in the community. If a site is no longer serving meals, please update the end date in the TX-UNPS site application.



Policy Updates



SSO Media Release Prototype, Letters to Household Templates, Eligibility Notification templates

F&N Policy has created seven new templates/resources to assist schools operating SSO in School Year 2021-2022:

- Media Release Prototype for SSO Schools NOT Processing Applications – All SSO schools are required to issue a media release describing the meal program they have chosen to operate and the availability of free meals. This template should be used by schools that are not planning to process household applications in 2021-2022.
- Media Release Prototype for SSO Schools that Plan to Process Applications in 2021-2022 – Schools wishing to process applications to establish SY 2022-2023 carryover eligibility can use this new template to announce their decision to operate SSO, the availability of free meals in 2021-2022, and reasoning for processing applications in 2021-2022.
- 2021-2022 Application Letter to Household for Schools Operating SSO – The standard Application Letter normally used for NSLP operations has been modified to contain reasoning for processing applications in a school year when all students are eligible for free meals.
- Letter to Household, 2022-2023 Carryover Eligibility Based on Household Meal Application – The standard Eligibility Letter normally used for NSLP operations has been modified to explain that while all students are eligible for free meals in 2021-2022, eligibility established via the Household Application processed in 2021-2022 will be used to establish eligibility for the first 30 operating days of SY 2022-2023.
- Direct Certification Eligibility Letter Templates - All districts operating SSO are still required to conduct all Direct Certification activities, including notification to households of Direct Certification eligibility. TDA has created the following Direct Certification household letter templates with language to explain why households are receiving this letter in a school year when all students are eligible for free meals.

- Letter to Household, Directly Certified Free Eligibility for Household (SSO Version) - Sample notification letter when all students in household are directly certified to be eligible for free meals.
- Letter to Household, Directly Certified Reduced-Price Eligibility for Household (SSO Version) - Sample notification letter when all students in household are directly certified to be eligible for reduced-price meals.
- Letter to Household, Directly Certified Free Eligibility for Individual Student(s) (SSO Version) - Sample notification letter when one or some of the students in household are directly certified to be eligible for free meals.

These resources are located on the following dedicated page on SquareMeals:

<https://squaremeals.org/Programs/NationalSchoolLunchProgram/EligibilityandVerification/SSOTemplatesandResources.aspx>

P-EBT Update

P-EBT Request for Review Process

Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is contacting schools to assist with the request for review process for the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program. HHSC is verifying all P-EBT applications against student eligibility data to determine if applicants are eligible for P-EBT benefits. (For eligible public/charter schools, the student eligibility data is from school's PEIMS socioeconomic data reported to TEA. Eligible private schools submitted student eligibility data directly to TDA.) If a student is denied benefits because their application could not be matched to the list of eligible students, then the family can appeal through the request for review process.



As part of this process, schools may receive these two forms from HHSC:

The P-EBT Eligibility Verification Form needs to be completed by a school staff member that is familiar with students that are approved for free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program. The form should be emailed back to HHSC.

- The Virtual Attendance Percentage (VAP) Verification/Modification Form needs to be completed by a school staff member that is familiar with students that learned virtually in SY20-21.
- The Primary Parent/Guardian Verification form needs to be completed when more than one parent has applied for student benefits. HHS is requesting verification on the primary and secondary parent information.

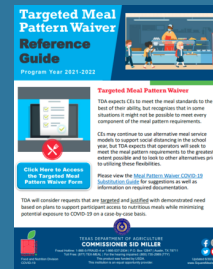
Resources and Opportunities

Meal Pattern Waivers PY 2021-2022

Target Meal Pattern Flexibility Waivers are now available here for PY 21-22. The TDA expects CEs to seek to meet meal pattern requirements to the greatest extent possible. TDA will consider requests that are targeted and justified with demonstrated need based on plans to support access to nutritious meals while minimizing potential exposure to COVID-19 on a case-by-case basis. CEs can request meal pattern flexibilities for:

- All grains items offered must be whole-grain rich
- At least one whole grain-rich serving per day for pre-schoolers, across all eating occasions
- Offer a variety of vegetables from the vegetable subgroup
- Meeting age/grade group
- Meeting Sodium Target 2

Please refer to the [Targeted Meal Pattern Reference Guide](#) for more information and the [Targeted Meal Pattern Substitution Guide](#) for suggestions.



Procurement Training Webinars

TDA is hosting a series of webinars designed to explain procurement and how it applies to the school nutrition programs. TDA invites you to attend the following:

- July 7 2:00-3:30pm, Procurement Basics
- July 21 2:00-3:30pm, Procurement and the Administrative Review (AR)
- August 4 2:00-3:30pm, Food Service Management Companies (FSMCs)
- August 11 2:00-3:30pm, Cooperatives

If you do not receive the emailed invitations to these virtual meetings already, please feel free to request the link at FNDZoom@texasagriculture.gov.

Food Safety Series

Four Steps to Food Safety: Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate. Prevent bacteria from spreading by following these tips:

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs away from other foods. This applies when transporting, storing, and cooking food.
- Use separate cutting boards, utensils and plates for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- [Download](#) the SEPARATE factsheet and share with staff.

New Training Guide from Team Nutrition

USDA's Team Nutrition initiative is pleased to announce the release of a new training guide for school nutrition professionals titled "Offering Smoothies as Part of Reimbursable School Meals Grades Kindergarten Through 12 (K-12)." Developed as a complement to Memo SP 40-2019 "Smoothies Offered in Child Nutrition Programs," this publication includes menu planning ideas, crediting tips for both homemade and commercially-prepared smoothies, and sample menus to show

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also find a new standardized Peach and Yogurt Smoothie recipe and success stories that show how schools around the country have offered smoothies at breakfast and lunch.

This publication can be viewed and downloaded from USDA's website [here](#). It will be made available in Spanish and in print at a later date.

USDA Foods

New Program Year Default

TX-UNPS now defaults to SY 2021-2022 upon login. If a CE needs to locate a prior year Weekly Commodity Bulletin, or review prior year activity, roll back the program year, via the dropdown menu.

Reminder: Weekly Commodity Bulletins are "live". Although SY 2020-2021 has ended, TDA, USDA Foods will be completing reconciliations to the total balance spent utilizing DoD Fresh Program funds as well completing the weighted average adjustment for further processing pounds, regular, USDA Foods cases (brown box), as well as Farm to School. Please allow the month of July for these reconciliations. Recommendation to capture end of school year data (now) to provide to the business office, then re-run the Weekly Commodity Bulletin for SY 2020-2021 at the end of July to review adjusted values.

DoD Fresh Program funds are loaded into FFAVORS (Fresh Fruits and Vegetables/Order Receipt System) for all pre-existing participants. For new participants, funds may be delayed until USDA/Dept. of Defense Contracting is done with setting up the new accounts. A "welcome email" will be sent out by the Dept. of Defense, Texas Produce Representatives, sometime in early August. The "welcome email" provides valuable information as to the assigned delivery day for produce deliveries along with other helpful hints to utilize the program during the school year. DoD Fresh Program funds for SY 2021-2022 must be at least **half-way spent** no later than mid-year (end of December). The remaining funds must be spent no later than the third week of June 2022. The best variety of items in the FFAVORS catalog are at the start of school starts. Variety reduces during the winter months.

TDA Contracted Warehouse Customer Service Feedback

The Texas Department of Agriculture requested feedback from Contracting Entities (CEs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) regarding the customer service provided by TDA Contracted Warehouses in Program Year 2020-2021. Please see the CE's responses [here](#).



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