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Governor Phil Murphy

ICYMI: Free Meals Available For All Students Through September

03/11/2021

USDA Announces Extension For Summer Meals Programs

TRENTON – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has announced the nationwide extension of several waivers that allow all children to continue to receive free nutritious meals this summer when schools are out of session. These flexibilities are now available through Sept. 30, 2021.
"We want everyone to know these meals are available to every child in New Jersey," **NJDA Secretary Douglas Fisher said.** "The extension of these waivers for the summer feeding programs will allow this essential need to be met for all students."

Summer meal sites are places where children and youth, age 18 and under, can receive meals at no cost in a safe environment. The meals are also available to persons over age 18 with mental or physical disabilities. Sites may be located in a variety of settings including schools, parks, community centers, libraries, churches and more.

The locations, dates and times the meals are provided by participating schools who operate open sites can be found at http://bit.ly/3l3FLRa (https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids). Non-profit, non-school organizations providing meals can also be found with that link.

The USDA is extending these waivers to provide local program operators with clarity and certainty for the summer months ahead, when many children cannot access the school meals they depend on during the academic year.

The waiver extensions allow for safe meal distribution sites that serve all children for free, regardless of income. In addition, the waivers:

- Allow meals served through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) – collectively known as "summer meal programs" – to be made available in all areas at no cost;
- Allow meals to be served outside of the normally required group settings and meal times; and
- Allow parents and guardians to pick-up meals for their children, including bulk pick-up to cover multiple days of feeding children.

"We will do everything we can to make sure children get access to healthy, nutritious meals regardless of their families' financial circumstances," **said USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack.** "Our child nutrition professionals are doing a heroic job ensuring kids across the country have proper nutrition throughout this public health emergency, often times with limited resources. The USDA is committed to providing local operators with the flexibilities and resources they need to continue offering the best meal service possible

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to their children, given their day-to-day realities."

According to the USDA, there may be up to 12 million children living in households in the U.S. where there is not always enough to eat. These critically needed summer meals will provide relief to many children in families who have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 Pandemic and are fighting daily to put food on the table.

The USDA is issuing this guidance as early as possible to empower communities to establish as many meal sites as they can effectively manage this summer. To learn more about how the program works and the role of sponsors and meal sites, visit www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/how-become-sponsor (https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/how-become-sponsor).

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