

# U.S. Department of Agriculture's National School Meal Programs

Bureau of Indian Education  
Indigenous Food Hubs





## USDA's History of Involvement in School Meals

- USDA has been providing free meals to needy students since 1937.
- By 1939, the USDA was providing 892,259 poverty-stricken students free meals using surplus meat, wheat, dairy and produce from farmers. By 1942, the number of children fed grew to 5,272,540.
- In 1946, President Harry Truman signed the National School Lunch Act, which contained the National School Lunch Program.
  - The USDA absorbs farm surpluses while providing food to school-age children.
  - The act is part of “national security to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation’s children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities.”
  - NSLA is still in effect today. In the 2022-23 school year, NSLP fed over 28 million children (Food Research and Action Center).

## USDA Programs 2024\*

\*All programs explained in detail later

### National School Lunch Program

- Free and low-cost lunches

### NSLP Afterschool Snack Service

- Subsidies for healthy snacks

### School Breakfast Program

- Reimbursement for breakfast programs

### Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

- Promotes produce

### Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program

- Maximizes Indigenous and local food with competitive grants





## **USDA Programs 2024**

(Continued)

### **Team Nutrition**

- Promotes healthy food choices and fitness

### **Healthy Meal Incentives**

- Improves school meal nutrition

### **Equipment Assistance Grant**

- State competitive grants for food service equipment

### **USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative**

- Works with Tribal-serving organizations to include Indigenous perspectives in programs.

### **Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids**

- Meals delivered to reach kids during summer

## National School Lunch Program

- One of the oldest USDA school meal programs, the NSLP was founded in 1946 under President Truman.
- It currently serves over 30 million students.
- Participating schools serve lunch and snacks in return for cash subsidies and USDA foods.
- Food being served must adhere to federal requirements, including the type of food and preparation.
  - Ex: Milkfat shall not exceed 1%; required fruits, vegetables and whole grains; limit on sodium, sugar and fat





## NSLP Eligibility

- Students may receive a reduced price or free lunch if they meet certain requirements
  - **Free:** schools must serve free meals to children if their household:
    - Is at or below 130% of federal poverty guidelines.
    - Receives benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
    - Participates in the USDA Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations; or
    - Benefits under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. (USDA, 2024). Food being served must adhere to federal requirements, including the type of food and how prepared.
  - **Reduced-priced:** children are entitled to a reduced price if their household income is above 130% but at or below 185% of federal poverty guidelines. (USDA, 2024).
- For more details about NSLP eligibility, see Section 5 of the [NSLP Factsheet](#)

## NSLP Afterschool Snack Service

- Participating schools receive subsidies to supply students with snacks that meet federal nutritional requirements.
  - Options: vegetables/fruits; whole-grain snacks or enriched bread or cereal; non-fat or 1% fat unflavored milk; 100% vegetable/fruit juice
- Eligibility:
  - Schools must hold after-school care programs that provide students with education and other enriching opportunities.
  - At least 50% of the students enrolled are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals.
- More Information: Please see [USDA site](#).





## School Breakfast Program (SBP)

- The SBP began in 1966 and is administered separately at the Federal and state levels.
  - Federal level: the USDA Food and Nutrition Service administers the SBP. This includes SBP provided at BIE schools.
  - State level: state agencies administer the SBP through agreement with local school food authorities. A list of the state agencies is provided [here](#).
- In 2023, SBP provided 2.4 billion breakfasts, totaling \$5.2 billion (USDA, 2024).
- Requirements:
  - Schools must serve breakfast that meets federal nutritional requirements [listed here](#) and offer free/reduced-price breakfast to all eligible children.
  - Children automatically qualify if...
    - They receive SNAP assistance;
    - They are enrolled in Head Start or a comparable state-funded pre-kindergarten program;
    - Their family income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty level; or
    - They identify as homeless, migrant, runaway or a foster child.
- Reduced-price breakfast: Children with family incomes between 130% and 185% of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price breakfasts, not to exceed 30 cents per meal.
- Participating schools receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each reimbursable meal served.
- To learn more, please click [here](#).



## Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

- FFVP provides elementary school children with fresh fruit and vegetables to increase their popularity with youth.
- Eligibility:
  - School must already participate in the National School Lunch Program.
  - The USDA prioritizes schools in low-income areas because these children have fewer opportunities to regularly consume fresh produce.
- Once an elementary school is selected, they will receive \$50-75 per student, which is determined by the state agency. Schools will use this money to buy the appropriate fruits and vegetables.
- To learn more, please click [here](#).





## Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program

- Competitive grant program that encourages the partnership of local farms and schools.
  - Grants fund a wide range of activities, including training, planning, creating new menu items to serve local foods, taste tests, buying equipment, planting gardens and agricultural field trips.
  - Eligibility:
    - Schools and other institutions operating child nutrition programs, Indian Tribal organizations, agricultural producers, nonprofits, and state and local agencies.
    - Indian Tribal organizations are encouraged to apply to ensure geographic diversity.
    - Grant applications are available each October.
- Further promotes food sovereignty for Tribes and integrates traditional foodways into Tribal meal programs.
  - Maximizes local and Indigenous foods in school meals.
- To learn more, please click [here](#).

## Team Nutrition

- Promotes healthy dietary choices and physical activity with 3 methods:
  1. Train nutrition professionals to serve healthier meals.
    - Ex: Training brochures to guarantee children get well-rounded nutrition can be found [here](#).
  2. Raise nutrition awareness for children to encourage smarter choices.
    - Ex: Dig In! Standards-based nutrition education program. Free download [here](#).
  3. Create a healthy environment that promotes nutritious diet choices and physical activity.
    - Ex: Promoting healthy breakfast with free posters, social media graphics, and creative ideas found [here](#).
- For more info, click [here](#). For Team Nutrition resources, click [here](#).





## Healthy Meal Incentives for Schools

- Launched in 2022 to improve nutrition in schools.
- 2023 grants: ~\$30 million for staff training, equipment upgrades, cafeteria modernization and food preparation.
- Categories
  - **Small/rural schools:**
    - ~\$150,000/school for staff training, kitchen updates and new prep techniques.
  - **Recognition awards:**
    - Rewards improvements to the nutritional quality of school meals.
    - National recognition through social media and Healthy Meals Summit.
    - Applications on a rolling basis. Apply [here](#).
  - **Transformation challenge:**
    - Collaborations between school districts, producers, suppliers and the community for better nutrition. Recent awardees [here](#).
  - **Summits:**
    - Sharing strategies for healthier meals and snacks. Find more information on this year's summit [here](#).



## Equipment Assistance Grant

- In 2024, Congress allocated \$10 million to USDA to be awarded competitively to states to purchase modern food service equipment for schools.
  - Selection criteria for grants:
    - Opportunity to impact nutrition
    - Age of existing food service equipment
    - Availability of state or local funding for equipment
    - Plan to provide more convenience and appeal to students
- Since 2010, this program has granted >\$480 million to all 50 states and territories.
- There is a limit of \$100,000 per school.
- Awards are annual and subject to funding.
- Find the application packet [here](#).





## USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative

- Reimagines USDA programs from an Indigenous perspective.
- Promotes traditional food practices and dishes that adhere to Indigenous needs.
- Encourages Indigenous recipes that meet nutritional requirements while promoting Indigenous culture.
  - Region by region, recipes and video demonstrations show how easy it is to incorporate Indigenous foods into USDA programs. [View here.](#)
- Educational resources teach students about native cooking practices.
  - The animated series “Sovereign Gardens” promotes indigenous knowledge in gardening, food sovereignty and healthy eating habits. [View here.](#)



## Summer Nutrition Program (SUN) for Kids

- Children get nutrition in summer when school meals are unavailable.
- Three programs
  - SUN Meals: Free meals are available at schools, parks and neighborhood [sites](#).
    - Eligibility: any child 18 and under. No application is needed.
  - SUN Meals To-Go: In hard-to-access rural communities, SUN Meals are delivered to homes at no cost. Check availability [here](#).
    - Eligibility: Any child 18 and under. No application is needed.
  - Sun Bucks: \$120 per child for summer groceries.
    - Eligibility:
      - Automatic if enrolled in SNAP or TANF or the child is in school with the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program and receives free or reduced-price meals.
      - Apply directly. The child must meet income limits and other requirements.
      - Tribal members: Applications vary by Tribe. Click [here](#) for an interactive map.
- For more information, click [here](#).

