

FEBRUARY 12, 1999

SUBJECT: Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Policy Memorandum #17-99:
“Mobile Feeding Sites” in Rural Areas

TO: Regional Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All Regions

Based on questions and comments from those in attendance at the last national meeting, this memorandum provides guidance on the use of “mobile feeding sites” in the SFSP. This memorandum is effective upon issuance and will remain in effect until superseded by regulation or future guidance.

Traditionally, urban SFSP sites are located at schools, playgrounds, parks, churches, community buildings, or similar places. However, State agencies have found that it can be exceedingly difficult for SFSP sponsors to locate their sites in such places in rural areas. Rural schools are far less likely to be open during the summer months, and other locations which might be open in urban areas under the supervision of a parks and recreation department or a private nonprofit organization often cannot be utilized as food service sites in rural towns. Furthermore, the rural population may be very dispersed and, even though the regulations permit the use of operating funds to transport children in rural areas to rural sites, it is not always cost-effective to transport children from the countryside to a site located in a rural town.

Based on this input, we have permitted—and even encouraged—the use of nontraditional means of meeting the nutritional needs of low-income rural children during the summer. This involves transporting meals to children in rural areas, rather than requiring children to be transported to a meal service site. In some instances, sponsors serving rural areas have employed busses as meal sites. The bus stops in a number of places and provides meals to children at each stop along its route, with the children eating on or near the bus.

We wish to encourage this innovative and effective practice, subject to the following:

- (1) Each place where a bus or other vehicle stops to dispense meals in a rural area must meet the site eligibility criteria and other requirements set forth in the regulations (e.g., the meal service must be supervised, meals must be consumed on site [on or near the bus], times of meal service must be established, the sponsor must have the ability to adjust meal deliveries to fluctuations in attendance, etc.)
- (2) Sponsors utilizing mobile sites in rural areas must take extra precautions to ensure the safety of the food being provided to children. Proper temperatures for holding of food must be maintained along the entire meal delivery route, and State and local health and safety standards must always be met.

- (3) In accordance with the definition of “Operating costs” at Section 225.2, the cost of transporting children to feeding sites in rural areas is an allowable operating cost is also reasonable and permissible to count as an “operating cost” the cost of transporting food to children in rural areas.
- (4) Once the meal service route and its stops are defined, the sponsor should make efforts to inform residents along the route of the program’s availability.

State agencies should provide technical assistance to sponsors providing mobile or other innovative meal service methods in rural areas. In addition, State agencies must ensure that a sponsor’s mobile food service sites can be adequately monitored by the sponsor and the State agency.

Please share this information with your State agencies as quickly as possible. Please contact Ed Morawetz or Melissa Rothstein of my staff if you have any questions regarding this guidance.

/ORIGINAL SIGNED/

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