

April 22, 2003

SUBJECT: Summer Food Service Program (SFSP): Flexibility of Time Restrictions on Meal Service for 2003

Regional Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All Regions

The purpose of this memorandum is to extend the flexibility previously provided to State agencies to approve changes in the length of time between meal services and duration of meal services in special cases. Section 225.16(c) requires that at least three hours elapse between the beginning of one meal service and the beginning of another (four hours must elapse between lunch and supper if no snack is served). The duration of meal service is limited to two hours for lunch and supper and one hour for all other meals.

Program operators tell us that these restrictions impose barriers to participation for some feeding sites in the SFSP. As such, we are allowing reasonable variances from the meal service requirements to accommodate unique circumstances. For example, a school sponsor may wish to serve SFSP meals on the same schedule that it serves meals during the school year under the National School Lunch Program, a program that has different meal service requirements than SFSP. In this case, a site that serves breakfast at 9:00 a.m. and lunch at 12:00 p.m., with busses scheduled to pick the children up at 12:15 p.m., may be extended relief by the State agency to allow the site to begin lunch service at 11:45 a.m. to give the children more time to eat.

We are also aware that the one-hour time limitation for the breakfast meal service in Section 225.16(c) may pose a barrier to SFSP feeding sites. To accommodate this situation, we are allowing State agencies to approve sponsor requests for an extended breakfast service (beyond the one-hour time limit) so long as the State is reasonably certain that appropriate procedures are in place to ensure food safety and oversight are not compromised. Two hours for breakfast has been suggested, and we feel this is reasonable in many situations. These requests may be made as part of the usual sponsor application process.

Sponsors that are interested in serving SFSP meals that vary from the requirements in Section 225.16(c) must first receive approval from their State agency. Sponsors must provide written justification, detailing their need for flexibility in the SFSP meal service requirements, to their State agency. States may approve requests that are reasonable and continue to support the Department's efforts to minimize abuses of SFSP funds and plate waste (i.e., well-spaced meal services). State agency approvals should be made on a case-by-case basis. It is important to note that this flexibility should be allowed on a limited, as needed basis.

Regional Directors

We believe this memorandum best accommodates school sponsors; however, the State agency may, at its discretion, allow other organizations to vary from the regulatory requirements if there is an acceptable need.

Please contact Keith Churchill at (703) 305-2590 if you have any questions regarding this memorandum. Please share this information with your States.

Original Signed

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