



2023 Summer Meals & Rural Families: A National Survey

Summary of Findings

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2023 Summer Meals & Rural Families: A National Survey

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Background

- Prior to Summer 2023
 - Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) required group setting (“congregate”) meal service
- December 29, 2022
 - Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 signed into law
 - Non-congregate meal service for rural areas with no nearby congregate meal service made permanent in SFSP
- Summer 2023
 - Implementation of non-congregate meal service in rural communities.
- December 29, 2023
 - Interim final Rule implementing this option must be issued by Dec. 29, 2023.



Goal: to systematically understand, document, and share insights about implementation of non-congregate meals in Summer 2023.

The **objectives** of this survey were to:

- **Identify** meal site characteristics rural families consider when determining whether such sites are accessible.
- **Understand** rural parents' preferences for non-congregate and congregate meal sites.
- **Understand** preferences around non-congregate meal service to inform our recommendations around program design to USDA
- **Explore** differences in preferences and attitudes among survey respondents.

Methodology

Dates	July 8-August 9, 2023
Survey Type	Dual-mode Voter Survey
Research Population	Low-income Parents Living in Rural Areas with Household Incomes at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level
Total Interviews	600
Recruitment	 Telephone Calls  Email Invitations  Text Invitations
Data Collection Modes	 Telephone Interviews  Online Interviews



Survey Findings

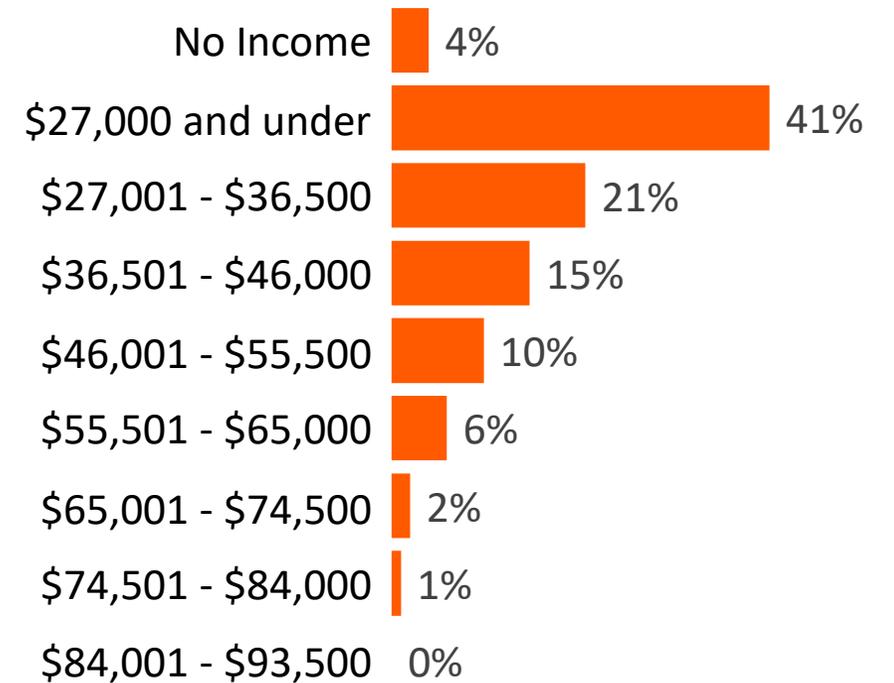
Respondent characteristics

Survey Sample

n = 600 parents

- 89% -- living in homes with 1-3 children
- 91% -- living in homes with 2-6 family members
- 50% female, 47% male, 2% non-binary, 1% DK/R

Combined Household Income



Experiences with Food Insecurity



Many rural families
with low income
faced food insecurity.

In the past year...

- **Two in five** often worried about running out of food before having money to buy more.
- **Nearly one-third** have often run out of food.
- **More than two in five** said their children sometimes or often did not eat enough.



African American parents were more likely to say their children were not eating enough.

Demographic Group (Often True)	Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.	Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.	Within the last 12 months the children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food.
All Parents	39%	29%	16%
Race/Ethnicity			
Whites Only	38%	30%	16%
Latinos	40%	33%	14%
African Americans	45%	28%	24%
All People of Color	43%	28%	17%
Region			
Northeast	48%	33%	24%
Midwest	26%	22%	14%
South	48%	37%	17%
West	39%	22%	14%



Summer imparts hardship on rural families.

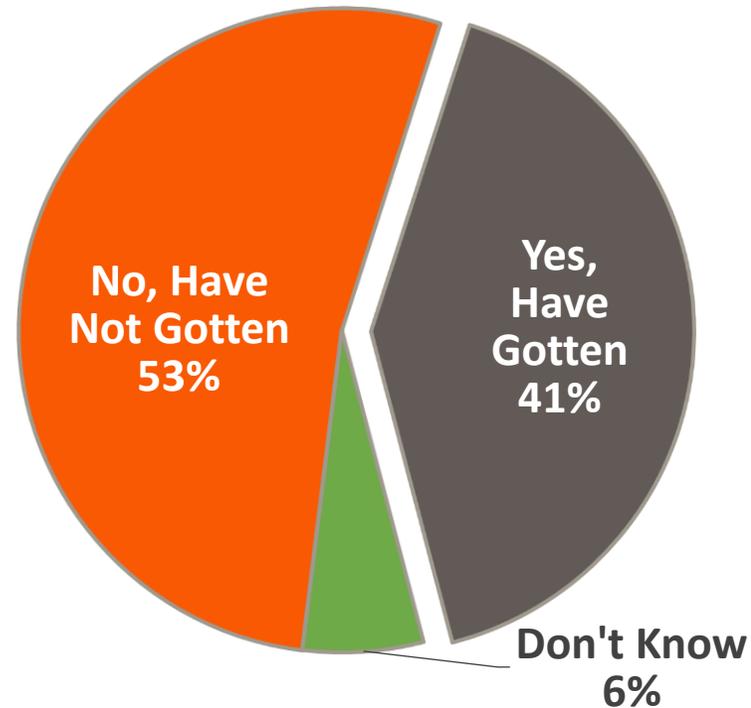
- 82% of parents reported spending more on groceries during summer.
- \$168 more per month on groceries during the summer, after holding household income and size constant.
- Those more likely to report increased summer grocery spending include:
 - Parents of children ages 5-10
 - Parents with more children



**Preferences and experiences with
School Meals and Out-of-School Time
Meals**

While a majority have gotten school meals, two in five said their children have gotten meals during summer breaks.

Has your child ever gotten a meal at a site run by a school or another provider, like a community organization, during summer breaks?



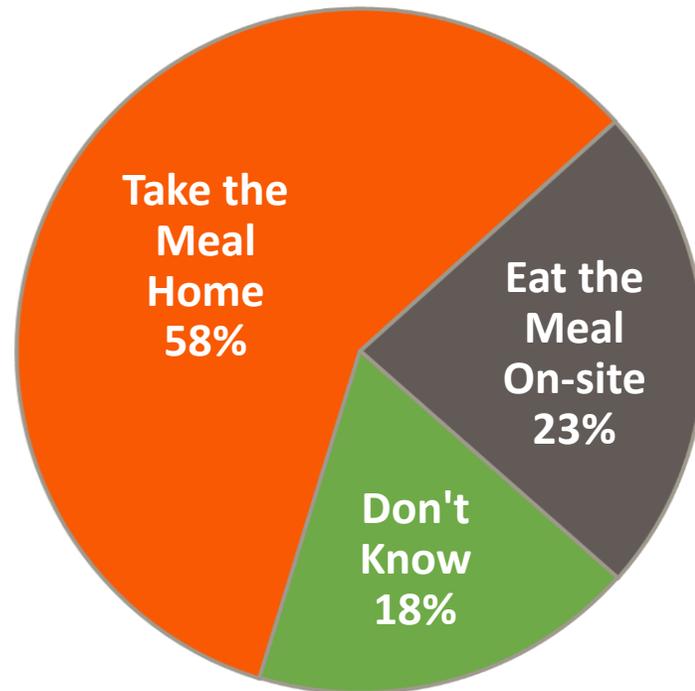
Those who reported prior participation in summer meals said...

...their children have gotten them at least a few times a week (64%).

...they have picked meals up to take home (72%).

A majority of parents preferred having their children take home meals, while one-quarter preferred having their children eat on site.

*In general, when accessing free meals during summer, do you prefer that your child be able to pick up and take a meal home **OR** eat the meal on-site?*



Preference for “taking meals home” cuts across age groups, region, and access to transportation.

Preferences



Those who preferred to take home the meal point to comfort and convenience.



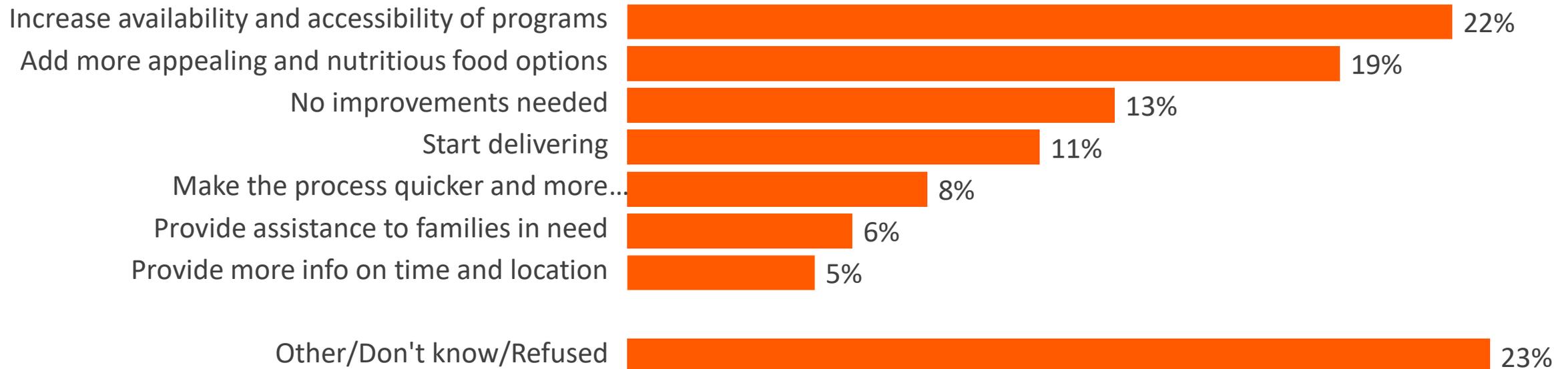
Those who favored on-site meals said the food is healthy and fresh when eaten on-site.

Accessibility, Appeal, and Choice

A majority (55%) of respondents said it is important to have both options (on-site and take-home) available.

How would you improve the experience of getting these types of meals that you take home when school is out for the summer?

(Open-ended; Asked of Parents Who Picked Up Meals During the Summer, n=179)





Views on Non-Congregate “Take Home” Summer Meals

72% said they would be likely to pick up and take home meals when school is not in session.

Parents of children ages 5-10 were most likely to participate in take-home meals.

Those with access to a car and/or bike most of the time more likely to participate in take-home meals.

Choosing take-home meals: **motivators**

Families likely to participate if:

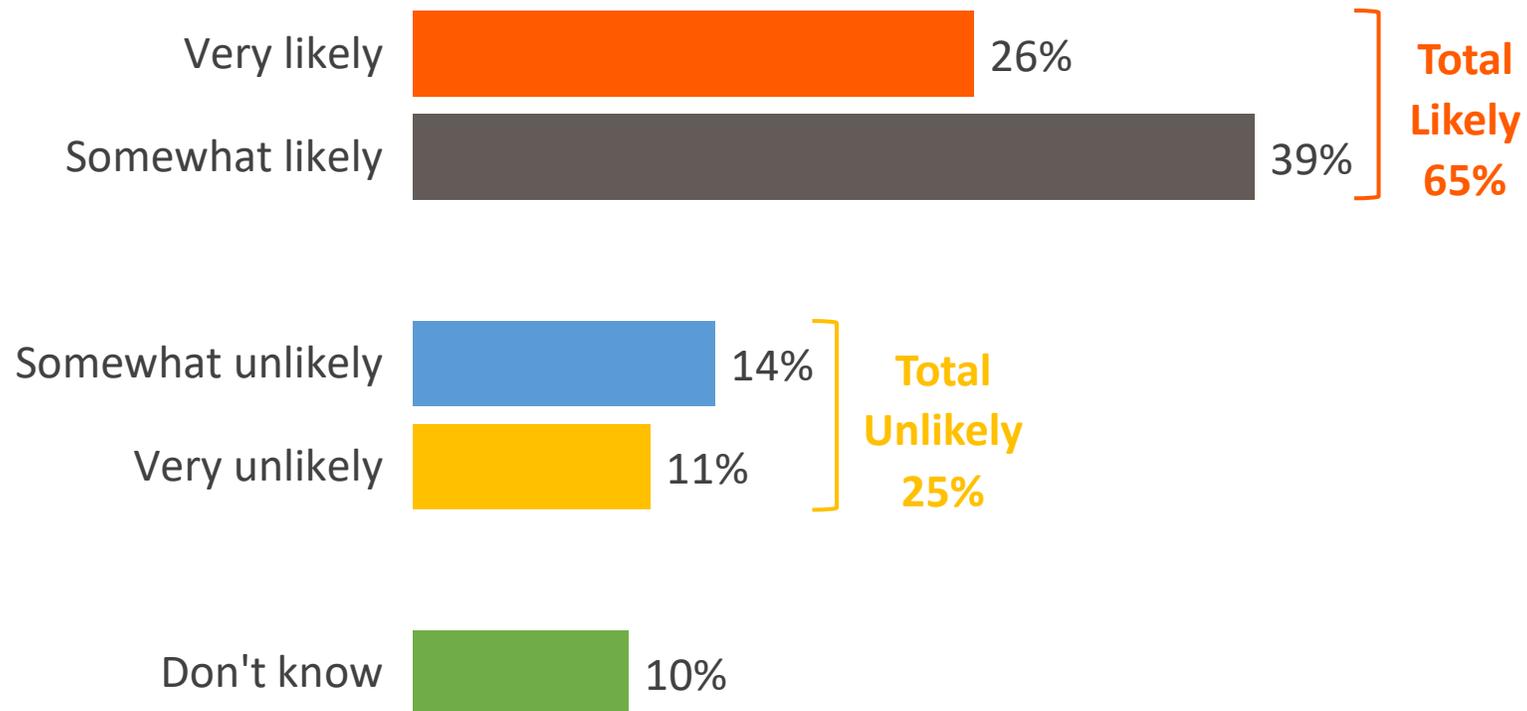
- Meals include foods children like and eat (77% of parents)
- The area is safe (76% of parents)
- Multiple meals were provided (73% of parents)
- Meals were delivered to your home (71% of parents)
- Meals meet standards to ensure healthy, nutritious meals (71% of parents)
- Available website with detailed info about program (71% of parents)
- Child can pick up for non-present siblings (70% of parents)
- Parents can pick up meals without child present (70% of parents)
- Meal pick-ups can be scheduled (70% of parents)



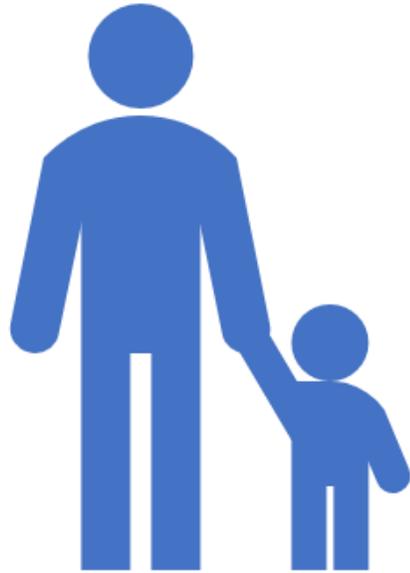
Views on Congregate “On-Site” Summer Meals

Two-thirds said they'd be likely to participate in on-site meals, but only one-quarter were very likely.

Suppose that during this summer break, free meals at a school or community organization were available for your child to eat on-site. If that were the case, how likely is it that you would have your child participate? Would you be very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?



Who is likely to participate in on-site meals?



- Likelihood of participating does not vary kids' age or household income.
- Families in the Northeast, Midwest, and South are more likely to participate than families in the West.
- African American and Latino families more likely to participate than White families.
- Those with reliable access to transportation (car/bike/public) were more likely to participate in on-site meals.
- 26% of those likely to participate in on-site meals said that it's because it would help financially.
- 25% of those unlikely to participate in on-site meals said it wouldn't be convenient.

Next steps

- Sharing insights with USDA
 - Interim Final Rule -- December 29, 2023
- Extended learning synthesis across SOS-NKH teams
 - Informal and formal discussions with State Agencies and Sponsors
 - Reviewing grant reporting data from NKH Summer Grantees (Sponsors)
 - Surveying of State Agencies and (potentially) Sponsors
 - Gathering insights from our State Campaigns teams
- Lingering issues
 - Clarifying the process for identifying and approving rural pockets
- <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals>



THANK YOU

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