

Summer Food Programs

The Come to the Table Project - www.cometothetablenc.org

What is a summerfood program?

The USDA offers a program to supplement food for schoolchildren in the summer months. The USDA invites churches and other nonprofits to host summer food service program sites. The USDA covers most administrative and food preparation costs and the base prices of the meals.

Why participate in a summer food program?

During 2008, nearly 680,000 school children in North Carolina received free or reduced lunch. However, only seven out of every 100 of them took part in the summer food service program. More organizations are needed to prepare meals and host programs in order to provide enough meals to the children who need them.

How can churches participate?

Large churches may be interested in being sponsor organizations. Sponsors prepare meals and coordinate the sites where children go to eat. Other churches may act as sites. Sites serve meals and provide programming for the children who attend. Churches who are not sponsors or sites can still take part by volunteering to help with cooking, transportation, programming, or filling out the extensive documentation that the programs require. Some churches opt not to participate in the USDA program but still serve lunch to low-income children as part of their summer programs.

How can summer lunch programs link children to local farms?

North Carolina summers bring lots of delicious foods, from sweet potatoes and squash to watermelons and blueberries to pork and chicken. Using food from small farms as part of the USDA program can be challenging because menus must be planned in advance and each meal has a set price. Consider donating church funds to offset the extra cost of buying from local farms, taking gleaning trips, or asking farmers for suggestions on affordable, dependable and nutritious foods.

Since traveling to a church just for lunch is hard for parents, most sites offer a summer program as well as a meal. These programs can include trips to farms, growing summer gardens, simple cooking projects, nutrition education, and more.

For more information:

North Carolina Summer Food Service Program at the Department of Health and Human Services and Division of Public Health: www.nutritionnc.com/snp/sfsp.htm.

Ashe Outreach Ministries developed a non-USDA summer food program that used local foods and included farm and garden projects. (336) 385-1314

Growing Minds at the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project works to get local foods into schools. Many of its curriculum and farm resources would be helpful in planning a summer food program as well. growing-minds.org/components.php