Section 1

Program Overview

Section 1, Program Overview

Update Guide	
June 8, 2026	Replaced references to *ARM Section 14a, USDA Foods Processing*. This section has been removed from the ARM and renamed to the "USDA Foods Processor Handbook." The handbook is located on the *Food Distribution Program for Child Nutrition Programs* landing page on SquareMeals, under *Policy/Handbook*.
May 19, 2023	Updated *Section 1, Program Overview* to correct minor typos. Created new *Definitions* and *Contact Information* sections, located at the beginning of the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*. Removed definitions and contact information from this section.
August 12, 2020	Updated *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 1, Program Overview* to update *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)* section references.
March 8, 2018	Updated *Section 1, Overview of School Nutrition Programs* to update the section titles in *Information Box 1*.

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Program Overview

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) administers the following United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition programs:

- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
- Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)
- Food Distribution Program (FDP)
- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
  - Afterschool Care Program (ASCP)
  - Seamless Summer Option (SSO)
  - Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)
- Special Milk Program (SMP)
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), also known as the Texas Commodity Assistance Program (TEXCAP)

The Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) addressed in this manual are the Afterschool Care Program (ASCP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP),[1] National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO), and the Special Milk Program (SMP). Funds allocated for these programs must be used only for those programs and cannot be used for any other nutrition programs.

For information about the any of these programs, use the Contact Information for the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) page that follows the Table of Contents.

These programs are also referred to as the School Nutrition Programs (SNP). The purpose of the SNP is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the nation's children by providing nutritional meals and snacks as well as milk each school day. This ensures that participating children gain a full understanding of the relationship between proper eating and good health as well as participating in learning experiences that will improve their eating habits. Each program has its own criteria for program participation.

There are multiple definitions for *child* in the nutrition programs. CEs should look at the regulations and guidance for the program(s) they administer to ensure that they are adhering to the definition for *child* for those programs.

For information on program participation, detailed explanation of program components, and regulatory guidance, see the appropriate section listed in *Information Box 1, Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*.

[1] See USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at *www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/FFVP/default.htm* for additional information on this program as well as the *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Handbook* located at *www.SquareMeals.org*.

Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM) Sections

For detailed information and requirements on the topics presented in the overview, see the following sections of the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*.

Program Application

- Section 1, Program Overview
- Section 2, Program Application & Agreement
- Section 2a, Meal Pattern Certification

Eligibility and Verification

- Section 3, Civil Rights & Confidentiality
- Section 4, Eligibility Determination
- Section 5, Special Provision Options
- Section 6, Verification of Eligibility

Nutrition Programs and Verification

- Section 7, Breakfast Meals
- Section 8, Lunch Meals
- Section 9, Pre-Kindergarten Meals
- Section 10, Afterschool Meals
- Section 11, Summer Meals
- Section 12, Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Program
- Section 13, Special Milk Program
- Section 14, USDA Foods

Financial Management

- Section 15, Program Integrity
- Section 16, Financial System
- Section 16a, Contract Management
- Section 17, Procurement
- Section 17a, Procurement Procedures
- Section 17b, Buy American
- Section 17c, Cooperative Purchasing
- Section 18, Food Service Contracts
- Section 19, Meal Pricing
- Section 20, Counting & Claiming

Operational Practices

- Section 21, Meal Service
- Section 22, Competitive Foods
- Section 23, Food Product Documentation
- Section 24, Disaster Situations
- Section 25, Meal Accommodations
- Section 26, Food Safety
- Section 27, Professional Standards
- Section 28, Residential Child Care Institutions
- Section 29, Local Wellness Policy & Stakeholder Engagement
- Section 30, Records Retention

- Section 31, Administrative & Other Compliance Reviews

All sections are available at *www.SquareMeals.org*.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federal entitlement program operating in public and private nonprofit schools and residential child care institutions (RCCIs). It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. In 1998, Congress expanded the NSLP to include reimbursement for snacks served to children in after school educational and enrichment programs to include children through 18 years of age.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), under the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), administers the program at the federal level. At the state level, the NSLP is administered in public schools, private schools, and RCCIs by TDA, which operates the program through agreements with contracting entities (CEs).

CEs that choose to take part in the NSLP receive cash subsidies and USDA-donated foods (USDA Foods) for each lunch they serve. In return, they must serve lunches that meet federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced-price lunches to eligible participants.

CEs receive different amounts of reimbursement based on the number of lunches served in each of the benefit categories: free, reduced-price, and paid.

Extended School Year Operation

Schools currently operating the NSLP during the school term may continue operation during the summer for students in academic summer school programs.

Nutritional Requirements for the NSLP

Decisions about the specific foods to serve and how food items are prepared are made by the CE. However, lunches must meet federal nutrition standards for calories, sodium, and saturated and trans fat established by USDA. These standards are based on the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

School Breakfast Program (SBP)

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a federal entitlement program operating in public and private nonprofit schools and RCCIs. Beginning as a pilot project in 1966, the SBP was made permanent in 1975 and is administered at the federal level by the FNS. TDA administers the program at the state level and local CEs administer the program at the local level in public schools, private schools, and RCCIs. Participating schools receive cash assistance from USDA for each breakfast served that meets program requirements. Like NSLP, CEs receive different amounts of reimbursement based on the number of breakfasts served in each of the benefit categories: free, reduced-price, and paid.

Nutritional Requirements for School Breakfast

Decisions about the specific foods to serve and how food items are prepared are made by the CE. However, breakfasts must meet federal nutrition standards for calories, sodium, and saturated and trans fat established by USDA. These standards are based on the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

Afterschool Care Program (ASCP)

To qualify for Afterschool Care Program (ASCP), a CE must (1) be approved to operate the NSLP

and (2) provide participants education or enrichment activities in an organized, structured, and supervised environment that is *open to all*.

Seamless Summer Option (SSO)

TDA administers the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) for CEs that participate in the NSLP and SBP. The purpose of operating an SSO is to feed children in low-income areas during the summer months with reduced paperwork and to limit the administrative burden that is normally associated with operating different programs.

Feeding sites for this program may include one or more open site(s) within the attendance zone of a qualifying school as determined by the school officials. Qualifying sites must be located in an attendance area with 50 percent or higher free and reduced-price eligible children.

Special Milk Program (SMP)

TDA administers the Special Milk Program (SMP) in nonprofit child care institutions, summer camps, or nonprofit schools that do not participate in the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, or the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Exception

A nonprofit child care institution or nonprofit school in which children do not have access to meal service through the NSLP, such as split-session kindergarten, is eligible to apply to participate in the SMP.

The SMP provides cash assistance to contracting entities to

- encourage the consumption of fluid milk by children and
- help defray the cost of providing milk to children.

Cash assistance includes general cash payments for milk served to children enrolled in the site.

To ensure the nutritional adequacy of milk served, the milk must meet the guidelines set by the USDA FNS.

Contracting Entities (CEs)

Contracting Entities (CEs) are agencies or organizations that provide the services through the programs that TDA administers.

NSLP, SBP, ASCP, and SSO

Any public school, public charter school, private nonprofit school or RCCI of high school grade or under, is eligible to participate in the NSLP, SBP, ASCP, and the SSO. Although charter schools are exempt from many state laws and regulations, they are not exempt from federal regulations regarding these SNPs. If the charter school decides to participate in the NSLP, SBP, ASCP, and SSO, all program regulations pertaining to the respective programs must be followed.

SMP

Any public school, public charter school, private nonprofit school or RCCI of high school grade or under and any child care institution or summer camp that is not participating in the NSLP, SBP, SFSP, and CACFP is eligible to participate in the SMP.