

2025 NC SUMMER NUTRITION CHAMPION AWARDS

We want to celebrate you! The NCDPI School Nutrition team and the Carolina Hunger Initiative encourage all sponsors to consider applying to one of the 2025 North Carolina Summer Nutrition Champion Awards. Sponsors may be self-nominated or nominated by a third party such as a community partner. This is an opportunity for you to show your successes from summer 2025!

Eligibility Requirements

Sponsors are required to be in good standing with all School and/or Summer Nutrition Programs. This means the sponsor has had no major findings or program violations, has completed and implemented all corrective actions from the last compliance review, was not found seriously deficient in the past two years, and has never been terminated from the Summer Nutrition Programs.

WHICH AWARD APPLICATION IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

>>> Rural Non-Congregate Meals Innovation Award

Apply for this award if you served Meals To-Go (RURAL NON-CONGREGATE MEALS or NCM) meals in summer 2025 and used one or more innovative concepts and marketing strategies!

>>> Going the Distance in Congregate Meals Innovation Award

Apply for this award if you used one or more innovative concepts and marketing strategies to increase participation at CONGREGATE meal sites!

>>> Rising Star Award

Apply for this award if you are a NEW Summer Nutrition Program sponsor and if you operated either a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE meal site! (1st or 2nd year of operation.) Tell us what made your first or second year of operation of SFSP or SSO a standout success, such as: a menu with appealing, quality, healthy options; engaging, educational enrichment; and strategies and partnerships to support participation.

>>> Superior Site Award

Apply for this award if you have one specific open SITE (not sponsor) that performed above and beyond this summer to gain and maintain participation from the local community at either a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE meal site!

>>> Farm to Summer Best Practice Award

Apply for this award if you implemented FARM TO SUMMER initiatives in your summer program, including serving locally grown, caught or raised foods, and conducting agricultural and nutritional education activities. You can apply for this award if you operated either a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE meal site.

HOW TO APPLY?

1. Choose the award that best fits you and your successes. Each award overview includes a rubric that will be used to score your application. Review it carefully! Find them all at summermeals4nckids.org.
2. Create your presentation SLIDES. These are your application! (PowerPoint, Google Slides, Canva, or PDF are all OK. Use [WeTransfer.com](https://www.wetransfer.com) if your file is too big.) *Make sure you address all of the awards criteria from the rubric in your slides.*
3. Label your slides and supplemental materials: “[Award Name] – [Organization Name]”.
4. Attach everything to an email, and submit to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – [Your Organization Name]” in the subject line of the email.
5. **All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21, 2025 by 5 PM.** The winners will be notified the week of Nov. 3, 2025.



RURAL NON-CONGREGATE MEALS INNOVATION AWARD

The **Rural Non-Congregate Innovation Award** will be presented to a sponsor that operated at least one SFSP or SSO Meals To-Go or NON-CONGREGATE MEAL (NCM) site in 2025. The nomination should demonstrate how the sponsor used the new rules, innovative concepts, and marketing strategies to provide meals to families in underserved rural areas.

To apply for this award, please submit:

- **A slide presentation**, 3-5 slides, no more than 40 words per slide plus notes as needed. **These slides are your application!** Make sure you address all of the criteria from the rubric in your slides.

Please include a slide with information on your sites:

- Total number of sites in summer 2025.
- Number of meal sites that were congregate, non-congregate (NCM), and non-congregate hybrid (NCMH).
- Number of mobile non-congregate meal sites, and home delivery non-congregate meal sites.
- Descriptions of where non-congregate sites were located and why those locations were chosen.
- Number of meals served in each meal package and number of distribution days per week.

Please include a slide with detailed information on your menu:

- Fresh food? Shelf stable? Hot meals? How often were menu cycles rotated?

Please include a slide explaining how innovative concepts contributed to your non-congregate program. Innovative concepts could include but are not limited to: marketing efforts; unique staff roles; new and diverse community partnerships; distribution site selection; mobile or home delivery routes; site placement in unique areas; and more. (Innovation related to congregate sites should apply for the blue Going the Distance in Innovation Award.)

- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Supporting documentation could include but is not limited to news clips about your program, social media posts, photos, testimonials and feedback from youth, outreach and promotion materials, community statements, State Agency feedback, special events, activities at meal sites, etc.

See the rubric on the next page for the distribution of points and additional guidance in preparing your materials for submission.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Please send the presentation and all attachments in ONE email to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “**2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name**” in the subject line of the email. Label the documents and/or attachments with the title of the award you are entering and your sponsor/stakeholder title, Ex. “**Rural Non-Congregate Award – Apple County Schools**”. See the awards overview page for additional info.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the November 2025 SummerPalooza! planning summits, and may be asked to make a short presentation at a SummerPalooza! Summit. Further information regarding the presentation content will be provided to awardees. The Summer Nutrition Champion nominees will be evaluated by an independent party outside of the NCDPI School Nutrition Staff. For questions, please email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu.

Thank you and good luck!



Rural Non-Congregate Meals Innovation Award Rubric

| Presentation Components (up to 6 points) | 0 points (Sponsor does not describe this topic) | 1 point (Sponsor describes one example) | 2 points (Sponsor describes two or more examples) | Total Points |
|--|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Innovative Concepts | | | | |
| Marketing Strategies | | | | |
| HOW did you meet the need of rural, underserved areas? | | | | |

| NCM Site Specifics | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | Total Points (up to 3) |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| (Refer to sponsor's slides) | Sponsor operated a mobile or home delivery NCM route | At least 50% of NCM sites were non-school sites | NCM site in unique setting (not operated before and meets a community need) | |

| Menu | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | Total Points (up to 3) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (Refer to sponsor's slides) | Included hot meals when possible | Included fresh fruits and vegetables | Menu cycle is at least 3 weeks | |

| Bonus: Supporting Documentation | 0 points | 1 point | 2 points |
|--|--|---|---|
| Circle one | Sponsor does not provide any relevant supporting documentation | Sponsor provides one form of relevant supporting document | Sponsor provides two or more forms of relevant supporting documentation |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|--|-----------|
| Bonus: Community Partnerships (1 point) | Total points: | | out of 15 |
| Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact | | | |



GOING THE DISTANCE IN CONGREGATE MEALS INNOVATION AWARD

The **Going the Distance in Congregate Meals Innovation Award** will be presented to a returning sponsor who used innovative strategies and saw increased participation in their SFSP or SSO program at CONGREGATE meal sites in 2025. Additionally, the nomination should demonstrate how using a strategic plan for growth increased program participation. The award is open to all returning eligible sponsors.

To apply for this award, please submit:

- **A slide presentation**, 3-5 slides, no more than 40 words per slide plus notes as needed. **These slides are your application!** Make sure you address all of the criteria from the rubric in your slides. The presentation should explain how using marketing and other innovative strategies increased participation in your program in 2025. Innovative concepts could include but are not limited to the use of the NC Capacity Builder Map to strategically identify site locations, social media for outreach, diverse partnerships, mobile feeding options, new sites in rural or underserved areas, appealing meals, engaging, educational enrichment, and participant feedback. Please include information regarding the number of sites, number of days served, and youth served.
- A written explanation of your **Strategic Plan**. Provide comments about your plans for 2025 related to: assessment of previous program and vision and goals for 2025; key tasks, activities, and strategies; important dates and possible promotional activities; and, integral staff and roles. Add in any documentation of successes and lessons learned.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation**. Supporting documentation could include but is not limited to news clips about your program, social media posts, photos, testimonials and feedback from youth, outreach and promotion materials, community statements, State Agency feedback, special events, activities at meal sites, etc.

See the rubric on the next page for the distribution of points and additional guidance in preparing your materials for submission. Note: NCDPI will calculate your change in participation based on claims data from 2024 and 2025.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Please send the presentation and all attachments in ONE email to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “**2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name**” in the subject line of the email. Label the documents and/or attachments with the title of the award you are entering and your sponsor/stakeholder title, Ex. “**Going the Distance Award – Apple County Schools**”. See the awards overview page for additional info.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the November 2025 SummerPalooza! planning summits, and may be asked to make a short presentation at a SummerPalooza! Summit. Further information regarding the presentation content will be provided to awardees. The Summer Nutrition Champion nominees will be evaluated by an independent party outside of the NCDPI School Nutrition Staff. For questions, please email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu.

Thank you and good luck!



Going the Distance in Congregate Meals Innovation Award Rubric

| Presentation Components (up to 6 points) | 0 points (Sponsor does not describe this topic) | 1 point (Sponsor describes one example) | 2 points (Sponsor describes two or more examples) | Total Points |
|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Innovative Concepts | | | | |
| Marketing Strategies | | | | |
| Connection to Growth | | | | |

| Strategic Plan (up to 4 points) | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | Total Points |
|--|---|---|--|---|---------------------|
| Refer to sponsor's Strategic Plan | Identified a clear goal/vision for growth in 2025 | Identified key tasks, activities, or strategies | Assigned tasks and due dates to team members | Documented results or completion of tasks | |

| Change in Participation from 2024 to 2025 (5 possible points) NCDPI will provide this information | 1 point | 2 points | 3 points | 4 points | 5 points | Points |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | 1% to 9% growth | 10% to 19% growth | 20% to 29% growth | 30% to 39% growth | 40% or more growth | |

| Bonus: Supporting Documentation | 0 points | 1 point | 2 points |
|--|--|---|---|
| Circle one | Sponsor does not provide any relevant supporting documentation | Sponsor provides one form of relevant supporting document | Sponsor provides two or more forms of relevant supporting documentation |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Bonus: Community Partnerships (1 point) | Total points: | out of 18 |
| Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact | | |



RIISING STAR AWARD

The Rising Star Award will be presented to a new sponsor that ran a superior first or second year of SFSP or SSO operation with a menu that promoted healthy options. Your nomination should provide a summary of your operations with evidence of running a superior program. This award is open to all eligible sponsors that operated a CONGREGATE OR NON-CONGREGATE meal site in their first or second year.

To apply for this award, please submit:

- **A slide presentation**, 3-5 slides, no more than 40 words per slide plus notes as needed. **These slides are your application!** Make sure you address all of the criteria from the rubric in your slides. The presentation should give an overview of your summer program, explain how your menu promoted healthy options, site-level and/ or sponsor-level activities and events, and what you are planning for your program in 2026. Note any nutrition education and promotion you provided. Please include details about your operating dates, number and types of sites, and meals served.
- A **one-month cycle menu** that was used in your program and helped you promote healthy options. Please note the menu cycle interval, i.e., 2-week, 3-week, 4-week, etc. The rubric on the next page details the menu evaluation criteria. Make sure your menu answers the questions the rubric will pose (i.e. Was water available at no cost as all sites? Was locally grown, caught, or raised food used?). The menu does not need to meet all additional criteria.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Supporting documentation could include but is not limited to news clips about your program, social media posts, photos, testimonials and feedback from youth, outreach and promotion materials, community statements, State Agency feedback, special events, activities at meal sites, etc.

See the rubric on the next page for the distribution of points and additional guidance in preparing your materials for submission.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Please send the presentation and all attachments in ONE email to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “**2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name**” in the subject line of the email. Label the documents and/or attachments with the title of the award you are entering and your sponsor/stakeholder title, Ex. “**Rising Star Award – Apple County Schools**”. See the awards overview page for additional info.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the November 2025 SummerPalooza! planning summits, and may be asked to make a short presentation at a SummerPalooza! Summit. Further information regarding the presentation content will be provided to awardees. The Summer Nutrition Champion nominees will be evaluated by an independent party outside of the NCDPI School Nutrition Staff. For questions, please email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu.

Thank you and good luck!



Rising Star Award Rubric

| Presentation Components (up to 8 points) | 0 points (Sponsor does not describe this topic) | 1 point (Sponsor adequately explains and describes one example if applicable) | 2 points (Sponsor explains in detail and describes two or more examples if applicable) | Total Points |
|--|---|---|--|---------------------|
| Clear overview of program | | | | |
| Menu promotes healthy options | | | | |
| Site-level and/ or Sponsor-level activities and events | | | | |
| Future plans for Summer 2026 | | | | |

| Menu (up to 7 points) | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | Total Points |
|---|--|---|--|--|---|-------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Promotion of healthy through program's one month menu | Sponsor provides fresh, locally grown foods (grown, caught, or raised). Farm must be GAP certified | Sponsor provides at least one hot meal per week | 50% or more of fruits and vegetables served per week are fresh | Sponsor does not provide any sweet grains (cookies, cakes, brownies, etc.) | Sponsor only provides low-fat (1%) or fat-free dairy products | Water is available at no cost | 50% or more whole grain or whole-grain rich food | |

| Bonus: Supporting Documentation | 0 points | 1 point | 2 points |
|--|--|---|---|
| Circle one | Sponsor does not provide any relevant supporting documentation | Sponsor provides one form of relevant supporting document | Sponsor provides two or more forms of relevant supporting documentation |

| Bonus: Community Partnerships (1 point) | Total points: | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact | | out of 18 |



SUPERIOR SITE AWARD

The Superior Site Award will be presented to a SFSP or SSO sponsor and SITE representative that operated an open site that went above and beyond to gain and maintain participation at either a CONGREGATE OR NON-CONGREGATE meal site. In addition to implementing practices to gain participation, the length of site operation will also impact the points awarded. The award is open to all eligible sponsors operating an open congregate or non-congregate meals site. Sponsors and site representatives are encouraged to send in supporting documentation.

To apply for this award, please submit:

- **A slide presentation**, 3-5 slides, no more than 40 words per slide plus notes as needed.

These slides are your application! Make sure you address all of the criteria from the rubric in your slides. The presentation should demonstrate how the site utilized volunteers, activities provided at the site, and how the site was marketed and advertised. All this information should convey how your site gained and maintained participation throughout summer.

- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Supporting documentation could include but is not limited to news clips about your program, social media posts, photos, testimonials and feedback from youth, outreach and promotion materials, community statements, State Agency feedback, special events, activities at meal sites, etc.

See the rubric on the next page for the distribution of points and additional guidance in preparing your materials for submission. Note: NCDPI will calculate the days of site operation based on the 2025 site application.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Please send the presentation and all attachments in ONE email to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “**2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name**” in the subject line of the email. Label the documents and/or attachments with the title of the award you are entering and your sponsor/stakeholder title, Ex. “**Superior Site Award – Apple County Schools**”. See the awards overview page for additional info.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the November 2025 SummerPalooza! planning summits, and may be asked to make a short presentation at a SummerPalooza! Summit. Further information regarding the presentation content will be provided to awardees. The Summer Nutrition Champion nominees will be evaluated by an independent party outside of the NCDPI School Nutrition Staff. For questions, please email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu.

Thank you and good luck!



Superior Site Award Rubric

| Presentation Components (up to 6 points) | 0 points (Sponsor does not describe this topic) | 1 point (Sponsor describes one example) | 2 points (Sponsor describes two or more examples) | Total Points |
|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Utilization of volunteers at site | | | | |
| Activities provided at site | | | | |
| Advertising or marketing of site | | | | |

| Length of Site Operation (up to 6 points) NCDPI will provide this information | 0 points | 2 points | 4 points | 6 points |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Site operated 10 or less days | Site operated between 11 and 25 days | Site operated between 26 and 40 days | Site operated 41 days or more |

| Bonus: Supporting Documentation | 0 points | 1 point | 2 points |
|--|--|---|---|
| Circle one | Sponsor does not provide any relevant supporting documentation | Sponsor provides one form of relevant supporting document | Sponsor provides two or more forms of relevant supporting documentation |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Bonus: Community Partnerships (1 point) | Total points: | out of 15 |
| Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact | | |



FARM TO SUMMER BEST PRACTICE AWARD

The **Farm to Summer Best Practice Award** will be presented to a SFSP or SSO sponsor who implemented Farm to Summer initiatives in their programs. Your nomination should detail all Farm to Summer related activities and demonstrate how Farm to Summer positively affected your program. This award is open to all eligible sponsors. You can apply for this award if you operated either a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE meal site.

To apply for this award, please submit:

- **A slide presentation**, 3-5 slides, no more than 40 words per slide plus notes as needed. **These slides are your application!** Make sure you address all of the criteria from the rubric in your slides. The presentation should give an overview of your Farm to Summer initiatives, including use of local foods and how they were procured, nutrition and agricultural education activities and events, and Farm to Summer resources utilized.
- A calendar documenting **Farm to Summer activities** in your program including days local foods were served (in menu or in activities), agricultural education activities, special events, and outreach through social media or resources sent home with participants. The rubric on the next page details the calendar evaluation criteria.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation** relevant to your Farm to Summer programming. Supporting documentation could include but is not limited to news clips about the program, social media posts, photos, testimonials and feedback from youth, outreach and promotion materials, community statements, State Agency feedback, special events, activities at meal sites, etc.

See the rubric on the next page for the distribution of points and additional guidance in preparing your materials for submission.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Please send the presentation and all attachments in ONE email to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the title “**2025 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name**” in the subject line of the email. Label the documents and/or attachments with the title of the award you are entering and your sponsor/stakeholder title, Ex. “**Farm to Summer Award – Apple County Schools**”. See the awards overview page for additional info.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Tuesday, October 21 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the November 2025 SummerPalooza! planning summits, and may be asked to make a short presentation at a SummerPalooza! Summit. Further information regarding the presentation content will be provided to awardees. The Summer Nutrition Champion nominees will be evaluated by an independent party outside of the NCDPI School Nutrition Staff. For questions, please email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu.

Thank you and good luck!



Farm to Summer Best Practice Rubric

| Presentation Components (up to 6 points) | 0 points (Sponsor does not describe this topic) | 1 point (Sponsor describes one example) | 2 points (Sponsor describes two or more examples) | Total Points |
|--|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Educational enrichment activities centered around local food and agriculture | | | | |
| Incorporation and procurement of locally grown foods | | | | |
| Use of Farm to Summer resources | | | | |

| Farm to Summer Calendar (up to 6 points) | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | 1 point | Total Points |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Based on schedule of farm to summer related programming: | Served locally grown foods at least twice as part of reimbursable meal | Served locally grown foods as part of a taste test or other agricultural education activity | Toured a virtual or local farm, farmer's market, or garden OR invited a representative from the agricultural community to visit | Hosted special events or activities in conjunction with Farm to Summer Week | Posted at least once on social media promoting Farm to Summer | Sent home Farm to Summer or agricultural/ nutritional education related materials at least once | |

| Bonus: Supporting Documentation | 0 points | 1 point | 2 points |
|--|--|---|---|
| Circle one | Sponsor does not provide any relevant supporting documentation | Sponsor provides one form of relevant supporting document | Sponsor provides two or more forms of relevant supporting documentation |

| Bonus: Community Partnerships (1 point) | Total points: | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|
| Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact | | out of 15 |

