



2026 SUMMER NUTRITION CHAMPION AWARDS



Celebrating you! The NCDPI School Nutrition team and the Carolina Hunger Initiative invite all sponsors to showcase your success. Apply for a 2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Award!

ELIGIBILITY

Sponsors must be in good standing with all School and/or Summer Nutrition Programs: no major findings or violations, all corrective actions from the last compliance review completed, no serious deficiency in the past two years, and no history of termination from the Summer Nutrition Programs.

WHICH AWARD APPLICATION IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Rising Star Award

Apply if you're a NEW Summer Nutrition Program sponsor (1st or 2nd year) operating a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE Summer Nutrition Program. Do not apply if you have previously operated congregate sites and are only new to non-congregate. What made your program stand out? Examples include appealing, healthy menus, engaging enrichment, and participation-boosting strategies or partnerships.

Farm to Summer Best Practice Award

Apply 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. Open to sponsors who operated either a CONGREGATE or NON-CONGREGATE meal site.

Superior Congregate Site Award

Apply if you have one specific open CONGREGATE SITE (not sponsor) that performed above and beyond this summer to gain and maintain participation at the site.

Superior Non-Congregate Site Award

Apply if you have one specific open NON-CONGREGATE MEALS (NCM) SITE (not sponsor) that performed above and beyond this summer to gain and maintain participation from the local community at the site.

Rural Non-Congregate Meals Innovation Award

Apply if you served SUN Meals To-Go (RURAL NON-CONGREGATE MEALS), meals in summer 2026 and used one or more innovative concepts and marketing strategies to increase participation in non-congregate meals distributed.

Congregate Meals Innovation Award

Apply if you used a strategic plan with one or more innovative concepts and marketing strategies to increase participation in CONGREGATE meal service.

HOW TO APPLY

- **Choose your award** – Pick the one that fits your successes best. Review its rubric (at summermeals4ckids.org) closely, since it's used to score your application.
- **Build your slides** – These are your application. Use PowerPoint, Google Slides, Canva, or PDF, and cover every rubric criterion.
- **Label everything** – Slides and supplemental materials: "Award Name" – "Organization Name."
- **Submit** – Email all materials to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu with the subject "2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards (Your Organization Name)."
- **Deadline** – **Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.** Winners notified week of December 14, 2026. Awards presented at SummerPalooza! in January 2027.

RISING STAR AWARD

The Rising Star Award recognizes new sponsors that delivered an exceptional first- or second-year SFSP or SSO program that promoted healthy menu options. The nomination should provide a summary of your operations with evidence of running a superior program. This award is open to all eligible sponsors who are new to Summer Nutrition Programs, that operated a CONGREGATE OR NON-CONGREGATE meal site in their first or second year. This is not for sponsors that have previously operated congregate sites and is only new to non-congregate.

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 2027. 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 at all sites? Was locally grown, caught, or raised food used?). The menu does not need to meet all additional criteria.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Rising Star Award – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. 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	2 points (Sponsor explains in detail and describes two or more examples if	Total Points				
Clear overview of program								
Menu promotes healthy options								
Site-level and/ or Sponsor-level activities and								
Future plans for Summer 2027								
Menu (up to 7 points)	1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	1 point	Total Pts
Promotion of healthy options through program's one month menu	Provided fresh, locally grown, caught, or raised foods. Farm must be GAP certified	Provided at least one hot meal per week	50% or more of fruits and veggies served per week were fresh	Did not provide any sweet grains (cookies, cakes, brownies, etc.)	Only provided 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:	out of 18			
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 recognizes SFSP or SSO sponsors that implemented Farm to Summer initiatives and demonstrated their positive impact. Open to all eligible sponsors operating CONGREGATE OR NON-CONGREGATE meal sites.

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.** Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Farm to Summer – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Good luck!



Farm to Summer Best Practice Rubric

Presentation Components (up to 6 points)	0 points (No examples)	1 point (One example)	2 points (Two or more examples)	Total Pts
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 (up to 6 pts)	1 point	1 point	1 point
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
1 point	1 point	1 point	Total Pts
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	No relevant supporting documentation	Provides one relevant supporting documentation	Provides two or more 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



SUPERIOR CONGREGATE SITE AWARD

The Superior Site Award recognizes SFSP or SSO sponsors and SITE representatives that operated an open CONGREGATE SITE that went above and beyond to gain and maintain participation. In addition to implementing practices to gain participation, the length of site operation will also impact the points awarded. 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 your site gained and maintained participation throughout summer at a CONGREGATE site. These may include special events or presentations, activities provided at the site, marketing and promotions, and program changes made in response to feedback. The length of the site operation will impact the number of points awarded.

- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance. Note: NCDPI will calculate the days of site operation based on the 2026 site application.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Superior Congregate Site – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Good luck!



Superior Congregate Site Award Rubric

Presentation Components (up to 8 points)	0 points (No examples)	1 point (one example)	2 points (two or more examples)	Total Points
Special events at site (kickoff day, bringing in partners for presentations, etc.)				
Program changes made in response to feedback				
Activities provided at site				
Marketing and promotion 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 17
Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact		



SUPERIOR NON-CONGREGATE SITE AWARD

The Superior Site Award recognizes SFSP or SSO sponsors and SITE representatives that operated an open NON-CONGREGATE SITE that went above and beyond to gain and maintain participation. In addition to implementing participation-boosting practices, sponsors will earn points based on the increase in participation and the length of time the site operates. Sponsors and site representatives are encouraged to submit 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 you gained and maintained participation throughout summer at a NON-CONGREGATE SITE. Examples may include how volunteers supported the site, program changes made in response to feedback, how the site was marketed and promoted, and special events. The length of the site operation will impact the number of points awarded.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, surveys, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance. Note: NCDPI will calculate the days of site operation based on the 2026 site application.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Superior Non-Congregate Site – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Good luck!



Superior Non-Congregate Site Award Rubric

Presentation Components (up to 8 pts)	0 points (No examples)	1 point (one example)	2 points (two or more examples)	Total Points
How volunteers supported the site				
Program changes made in response to feedback				
Advertising or marketing of site				
Special events for the site (kickoff day, presentations, etc.)				

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)	
Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact	Total points: out of 17



RURAL NON-CONGREGATE MEALS INNOVATION AWARD

The Rural Non-Congregate Innovation Award recognizes sponsors that operated at least one SFSP or SSO SUN Meals To-Go or Non-Congregate Meal (NCM) site in 2026. Nominations should demonstrate how the sponsor leveraged NCM policy and regulations to implement innovative concepts and marketing strategies to reach 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. Menu choices and the growth in non-congregate meals distributed will impact points awarded.
- Include **NCM site information**:
 - Total number of congregate, non-congregate (NCM), and non-congregate hybrid (NCMH)
 - Type of site(s): drive-through pick up, grab and go/walk up, home-delivery, mobile route
 - Locations and rationale for non-congregate sites; meals per package; distribution days per week; and number of summer weeks.
- **Menu choices**: Use of fresh, shelf-stable, and hot foods, as well as menu-cycle frequency.
- **Innovation**: How marketing, staff roles, community partnerships, site selection, mobile or home-delivery routes, unique locations, and other innovative strategies supported your non-congregate program.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation**. Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Rural Non-Congregate Award – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Good luck!



Rural Non-Congregate Meals Innovation Award Rubric

Presentation Components (up to 6 points)	0 points (No examples)	1 point (One example)	2 points (Two or more examples)	Total Points
Innovative Strategies				
Marketing Strategies				
How did you meet the need of rural, underserved areas?				

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	

Growth in NCM Participation from 2025 to 2026 (5 possible points) NCDPI will confirm this information	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	5 points	Points
	1% to 50% growth	51% to 100% growth	101% to 150% growth	151% to 200% growth	200% 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)	
Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact	Total points: out of 17



CONGREGATE MEALS INNOVATION AWARD

The Going the Distance in Congregate Meals Innovation Award recognizes sponsors that operated at least one SFSP or SSO SUN Meals or Congregate Meal site in 2026. 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 3–5-slide presentation** (no more than 40 words per slide, plus notes) addressing all rubric criteria. **These slides are your application!** Explain how innovative concepts, marketing strategies, and thoughtfully planned menu choices increased 2026 program participation through strategic planning. Include the number of sites, days served, and youth served. Examples include strategic site selection, social media, partnerships, mobile feeding, new rural or underserved sites, enrichment, and participant feedback. Strategic menu choices and participation growth at congregate sites will be taken in
- **A written Strategic Plan** outlining your 2026 assessment, vision and goals, key activities and strategies, important dates and promotions, staff roles, successes, and lessons learned.
- **Bonus: Supporting Documentation.** Include relevant materials such as news clips, social media posts, photos, testimonials, outreach materials, community or State Agency feedback, special events, and meal-site activities.

See the next page's rubric for point values and submission guidance.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS: Email your presentation and all attachments in one message to carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Use the subject line: **"2026 Summer Nutrition Champion Awards – Your Sponsor/Stakeholder Name."** Label each file with the award title and sponsor/stakeholder name (e.g., **"Going the Distance Award – Apple County Schools"**). See the awards overview page for details.

All nominations should be submitted no later than Monday, November 30, 2026 by 5 PM.

Awardees will be recognized at the January 2027 SummerPalooza training summits and may be invited to give a brief presentation. Presentation details will be provided to awardees. Nominees will be evaluated by the Carolina Hunger Initiative. Questions? Email carolinahungerinitiative@unc.edu. Good luck!



Congregate Meals Innovation Award Rubric

Presentation Components (up to 4 pts)	0 points (No examples)	1 point (One example)	2 points (Two or more examples)	Total Points
Innovative Concepts				
Marketing Strategies				

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

Growth in Congregate Meals Participation from 2025 to 2026 (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	

Menu	1 point	1 point	1 point	Total Points (up to 3)
(Refer to sponsor's slides)	Included hot meals when	Included fresh fruits and	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)		
Describe how you partnered with other organizations to expand your reach and impact	Total points:	out of 19

