Healthy Lincoln County (HLC) runs the Summer Meals Program each year to help ensure kids and teens have access to free, nutritious meals when school is out. We've created this FAQ to answer common questions and explain what's different in 2025.

1. What is the Summer Meals Program and who runs it locally?
The Summer Meals Program is a federally funded initiative overseen by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered in Maine by the Department of Education (ME DOE). HLC has served as a local sponsor since 2015, expanding its role during the COVID-19 pandemic to increase access to free meals for youth across Lincoln and parts of Knox County.

2. When and where are meals available?
We deliver meals along two different mobile routes-- a Waldoboro route and a Wiscasset route. The Waldoboro route runs on Monday and Wednesdays; the Wiscasset route runs Tuesday and Thursdays. Anyone ages 18 or under is eligible to access a free meal along the mobile route, no questions asked. For the full route schedule, and for live updates from Lulu the Lunch Wagon along the route visit HLC's Facebook page. In addition to our public routes, we also deliver meals directly to summer camps, summer schools, and other youth programs-- these delivery sites are not open to the public and serve only enrolled participants.

3. Why has the route changed since last year? Why is my typical site not available?
Each year, each delivery site must be qualified through the USDA and ME DOE. Qualification data can shift year after year. We work very hard to try to qualify previous sites, however USDA and ME DOE regulations may make this not possible. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. For the full route schedule, and for live updates from Lulu the Lunch Wagon along the route, visit HLC's Facebook page.

4. How is the summer program different from the school-year meal program?
During the school year, all Maine students receive free meals regardless of household's income. However, the Summer Meals Program operates under different federal rules. It has separate eligibility rules and must follow federal USDA guidelines, which have recently been more strictly interpreted and enforced.

5. Do I need to submit income eligibility forms to access meals along the Mobile Delivery route?
No. All sites along the route are considered "open" sites, which means anyone ages 18 or under is eligible to access a free meal along the route.

6. Why are camp families being asked to submit additional paperwork this year?
To receive free meals through the Summer Meals Program, camps must verify each camper's eligibility based on household income. Because schools no longer required to collect detailed income data due to universal free school meals, camps now need to gather this information directly from families, typically through a short income eligibility form during registration. We understand this is a change and are here to support families through the process.

7. My child does not qualify as eligible for free meals, now what?

Any child is welcome at our 'open' meal sites. If your child is participating in a camp program, please reach out directly to the camp your child is attending. Camps were provided with several different options for how to support ineligible youth.

8. What options do camps have for feeding youth this summer?

Camps have several options for providing meals to youth this summer. They can collect income eligibility forms to qualify campers for free meals or, where possible, coordinate with schools to verify eligibility. For campers who do not qualify, camps may choose to purchase meals from Healthy Lincoln County or another vendor at USDA reimbursement rates, or ask families to send meals from home.

9. Can camps charge tuition and still participate?

Yes. Camps can charge tuition but must offer a sliding scale or similar option to ensure no child is turned away due to cost. If meals are included in tuition, those meals are not eligible for USDA reimbursement.

10. How many meals were served to youth in camps last year?

In 2024, approximately 7,000 meals were served to youth participating in camps over the summer. Many of those meals may no longer be reimbursable unless campers are individually qualified.

11. What is HLC doing to address these challenges?

HLC is offering meal purchasing options, raising funds to support non-eligible youth, maintaining mobile and community meal sites, and planning a strategic session in Fall 2025 to develop a long-term solution for Summer 2026.

12. How is the program funded?

The USDA reimburses HLC $5.40 per lunch and $2.99 per breakfast served to eligible youth. These funds, along with donations, support administrative costs, Lulu the Lunch Wagon, volunteer coordination, and direct support for camps.

13. How can I help?

You can make a difference by donating, volunteering, or spreading the word. Every bit of help means more kids get the meals they need.

- Donations or sponsorships can help cover the cost of meals for children who don't qualify under federal guidelines. Donate online at https://donate.stripe.com/5kA6pA4OoebycYU3ci, or mail checks made out to Healthy Lincoln County to PO Box 1287 Damariscotta, ME 04543.
- Volunteer to deliver meals along the mobile route with Lulu, or to be on-call for meal and cooler transport. Help deliver food and supplies to events, sites, or individuals across the county as needs arise. Please reach out to SummerMeals@healthyLincolnCounty.org for more information about volunteer opportunities.
- Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and help share our messages with your network.
- Visit our Summer Meals website for updated information and materials about HLC's program.

14. Where can I get updates or ask questions?

Follow Healthy Lincoln County on Facebook and Instagram for real-time updates on Lulu the Lunch Wagon's route and special events. For site-specific questions, contact our Summer Meals Coordinator, Kelly, SummerMeals@healthyLincolnCounty.org