

Requirements for Field Trip Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires that meals reimbursed under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) must be consumed on site, unless they are served on school-supervised field trips that are part of the curriculum, as defined by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). Field trips cannot be extracurricular events.

School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that food service staff and non-food service staff (such as teachers, teacher aides, and other applicable staff) involved with field trips understand and implement the USDA's requirements for off-site reimbursable meals. Meals served off-site must strictly adhere to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) procedures to avoid potential food safety issues. The CSDE strongly recommends that SFAs develop standard operating procedures (SOP) for field trip meals.



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Availability of Field Trip Meals

SFAs may choose whether to offer portable field trip meals for students. If offered, field trip meals must be available to all students, regardless of their eligibility for free, reduced-price, or paid meals. Field trip meals must be offered at regular meal prices.

SFAs should be aware of students with special dietary needs (such as food allergies) who request field trip meals. Field trip meals may require collaborative planning with school food service staff, the school nurse, and the child's parents or guardians to identify meal modifications that meet the child's dietary needs and comply with the food safety requirements for off-site meals.

Common Compliance Issues with Field Trip Meals

During Administrative Reviews of the NSLP and SBP, the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) school nutrition programs staff have observed multiple common compliance issues with field trips. These compliance issues include:

- lack of point-of-service meal counts, such as using field trip attendance as the meal count;
- lack of SOP for field trips;
- lack of HACCP procedures;
- not maintaining proper cold-holding temperatures;
- not complying with the meal pattern for the grade group;
- not offering the full serving (minimum daily amount) of all components (such as $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of vegetables for grades K-5 at lunch);
- not including milk or not offering a variety of milk;
- lack of monitoring by the SFA to ensure compliance, including reimbursable meals, meal counts, and leftover meals or foods (including milk); and
- lack of proper training for food service and non-food service staff, including [annual civil rights training](#).

This document provides guidance for SFAs on the USDA's requirements for field trips and how to avoid compliance issues.



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Overview of Requirements for Reimbursable Field Trip Meals

Field trip meals must meet the criteria below to qualify for NSLP and SBP reimbursement.

1. Field trip meals must meet the meal pattern requirements for the appropriate grade group (refer to [“Meal Pattern Compliance for Grades K-12”](#) and [“Meal Pattern Compliance for Preschoolers”](#) in this document).
2. SFAs must record field trip meals on the school’s daily food production record (refer to the CSDE’s [Requirements for Production Records in School Nutrition Programs](#) and visit the CSDE’s [Production Records for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage).
3. Field trip lunches must be served between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Field trip breakfasts must be served at or close to the beginning of the child’s day at school. Refer to [“Timing of Meals”](#) in this document.
4. SFAs must develop a local process to accurately count meals served during field trips. Field trip staff must conduct point-of-service meal counts for field trip meals (refer to [“Meal Counts”](#) in this document).
5. School food service staff and field trip staff (such as teachers, teacher aides, other school staff, parents, and volunteers) must follow appropriate food safety practices for field trip meals (refer to [“Food Safety”](#) in this document).

Meal Pattern Compliance for Grades K-12

SFAs must ensure that all field trip meals for grades K-12 meet the NSLP and SBP meal pattern requirements for the appropriate grade group (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12). The meal pattern requirements for field trip meals are summarized below.

- **Meal patterns:** The meal patterns for grades K-12 require daily and weekly amounts of five food components for lunch (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat/meat alternates [MMA]) and three food components for breakfast (milk, fruits (including vegetable substitutions), and grains). At breakfast, the MMA component may be offered in place of the grains component after offering 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) of grains. For example, a breakfast menu that includes a 1-oz eq whole-grain bagel may also include 2 tablespoons of peanut butter (1 oz eq of MMA). MMA substitutions credit toward the daily and weekly servings of grains.
- **Offer versus serve (OVS):** Field trip meals must contain all meal components in the minimum required amounts. OVS should not be implemented on field trips due to the

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difficulty of ensuring that non-food service staff can accurately identify reimbursable meals. The USDA does not require OVS as part of field trip meal service.

- **Dietary specifications:** Lunch and breakfast menus (including field trip meals) must meet the USDA's weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fats, and sodium. Refer to the "[Dietary Specifications](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- **Milk:** Field trip meals must always include milk. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 require a variety (at least two different choices) of low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, either unflavored or flavored. SFAs cannot offer juice or water as a substitute for milk unless a child has a disability that specifically requires this substitution, as documented by a medical statement signed by the child's recognized medical authority. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Program](#), and visit the CSDE's [Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.
- **Vegetable subgroups:** Field trip lunches are not required to include the same vegetable subgroup as the cafeteria lunch menu. SFAs have the option to offer a different vegetable subgroup or a different vegetable from the same subgroup. For example, if the cafeteria lunch menu includes sweet potatoes, the field trip lunch may include a different vegetable from the same subgroup (e.g., carrot sticks) or a vegetable from a different subgroup (e.g., celery sticks). For information on the vegetable subgroups, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program](#).
- **Weekly requirements:** SFAs must include field trip meals when determining if the planned lunch or breakfast menu meets the weekly requirements for the grains and MMA components; the weekly vegetable subgroups (lunch only); and the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

For more information on the NSLP and SBP meal patterns and dietary specifications for grades K-12, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12](#) webpage.



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Meal Pattern Compliance for Preschoolers

SFAs must ensure that all field trip meals for preschoolers meet the NSLP and SBP meal pattern requirements for the appropriate age group (1-2 or 3-4).

- **Meal patterns:** The meal patterns for preschoolers require daily amounts of five food components for lunch (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and MMA) and three food components for breakfast (milk, fruits and vegetables, and grains). Unlike the meal patterns for grades K-12, the preschool meal patterns do not require weekly servings of the meal components or weekly dietary specifications. However, the preschool meal patterns require nutrition standards for some specific foods, such as sugar limits for yogurt and breakfast cereals. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Crediting Yogurt in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Milk:** Field trip meals must always include milk. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns for preschoolers require unflavored whole milk for age 1 and unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk for ages 2-4. Flavored milk cannot be served. SFAs cannot offer juice or water as a substitute for milk unless a child has a disability that specifically requires this substitution, as documented by a medical statement signed by the child's recognized medical authority. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Program](#), and visit the CSDE's [Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.
- **OVS:** OVS is not allowed for preschool meals. Field trip meals must contain all meal components in the minimum required amounts.

For information on the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for preschoolers, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Preschool Meal Patterns and Crediting Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#) and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Meal Counts

The USDA requires that NSLP and SBP meal counts for all grades must be determined at the point of service. For field trips, the point of service is the point in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that all required components for a reimbursable meal have been served to the child. The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine field trip meal counts, such as student field trip attendance, student orders for field trip meals, the number of meals sent on the field trip, or the number of meals returned from the field trip. Meal counts must be taken by trained staff. Students cannot take meal counts.

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Acceptable point-of-service meal count procedures

SFAs must develop a local process to obtain accurate point-of-service meal counts for field trips. The examples below show some acceptable procedures for field trip meal counts.

- The teacher supervising the field trip has an attendance roster of the students on the field trip. During mealtime at the field trip site, the teacher checks off the student's name after verifying that the student has received all components for a reimbursable meal. The teacher returns the completed student roster to the cafeteria after the field trip. The cafeteria manager reviews the information on the completed student roster by comparing the meal counts to the number of leftover meals. The cafeteria manager adds the number of field trip meals to the school's lunch counts for that day.
- Students come through the cafeteria serving line and purchase a bag meal at the point of service prior to leaving for the field trip. Bag meals that contain foods that require time/temperature control for safety are stored in a transport container that can maintain temperatures at 41°F or below (refer to "[Food safety](#)" in this document). Milk choices are transported separately in a container that can maintain temperatures at 41°F or below.

Note: If transport containers cannot maintain this temperature, students must eat their meals within specific timeframes (refer to "[Meal service](#)" in this document) or the bag meal must include only shelf-stable foods and milk (aseptically packaged) that do not require refrigeration. Examples of shelf-stable foods include nut butters (e.g., peanut butter and sunflower seed butter), breads and crackers, whole fresh fruit, pre-packaged, shelf-stable fruit (such as fruit cups and applesauce), carrot and celery sticks, and cherry tomatoes.

Meal count instructions

The SFA's SOP for field trip meals should include clear meal count instructions for field trip staff that indicate how to identify reimbursable meals, take point-of-service meal counts, and handle leftover meals or foods (including milk). The SOP should also include a plan for informing substitutes of the requirements for field trip meals.

As a best practice, SFAs should include these instructions with the delivery of the field trip meals. This helps everyone understand the required procedures and prevents noncompliant meals that can result from staffing variations such as teacher absences, substitutes, and parent volunteers.

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Timing of Meals

The NSLP regulations ([7 CFR 2010.10 \(l\)](#)) specify that schools and institutions participating in the NSLP must serve lunches during the period of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The SBP regulations ([7 CFR 220.2](#)) require that breakfast must be served at or close to the beginning of the child's day at school. These requirements apply to all NSLP and SBP meals, including field trip meals. For more information on the requirements for lunch periods in the NSLP, refer to [CSDE Circular Letter C-9: Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students](#) and [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#).

Staff Training

SFAs must provide appropriate job-specific training for all employees, including non-food service staff, whose responsibilities include duties related to the operation of school nutrition programs. For example, teachers and other applicable staff who conduct field trip meal counts must receive appropriate training to ensure they perform their jobs effectively and in compliance with the USDA's regulations.

Training resources for the meal pattern for grades K-12 are available on the CSDE's [Meal Pattern Training for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Crediting guidance for the meal pattern for grades K-12 are available on the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training resources and crediting guidance for the preschool meal patterns are available in the "[Preschool Meal Pattern Training](#)" section of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

In addition, the USDA requires annual civil rights training for all staff who interact with NSLP and SBP applicants or participants, including staff involved with field trip meals. The CSDE's PowerPoint presentation, *Civil Rights: Your Responsibilities in the School Nutrition Programs PowerPoint Presentation*, provides civil rights training for schools and is available on the CSDE's [Civil Rights for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

SFAs must log all staff training on the SFA's annual professional standards tracking log. This includes training for field trip staff whose responsibilities include duties related to the operation of school nutrition programs. For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Professional Standards Tracker Log](#) and the USDA's [Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs](#), and visit the CSDE's [Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals](#) webpage.

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Food Safety

The USDA regulations ([7 CFR 210.13\(c\)](#)) require SFAs to develop a written food safety plan for compliance with HACCP. HACCP is a systematic approach to reduce the risk of foodborne hazards by focusing on each step of the food preparation process. For more information, refer to the USDA's [Guidance for School Food Authorities: Developing a School Food Safety Program Based on the Process Approach to HACCP Principles](#).

Field trip meals must comply with HACCP procedures. The greatest food safety concern for field trip meals is ensuring that foods defined by the [Food and Drug Administration's \(FDA\) Food Code](#) as "Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food" (TCS) – formerly known as potential hazardous foods (PHFs) – stay at proper temperatures during transport and service. TCS require time/temperature control for safety to limit pathogenic microorganism growth or toxin formation that can lead to foodborne illness.

Examples of TCS include dairy products, meat (beef, pork, lamb, and poultry), fish, shellfish, and eggs), heat-treated plants foods (e.g., baked potatoes; cooked rice, beans, and vegetables; and tofu or other soy proteins), raw seed sprouts, cut melon, cut leafy greens, cut tomatoes, and garlic-in-oil.

The SFA's SOP for field trip meals should include appropriate TCS food safety procedures during meal preparation, transport, and service. School food service staff and field trip staff (such as teachers, other school staff, parents, and volunteers) must work together to ensure that field trip meals are safe to eat. The practices below help to ensure the safety of field trip meals. For SOP examples, refer to the Iowa State University's [Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals](#) and the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) [Standard Operating Procedures](#) webpage.

Meal preparation

- Ensure that school food service staff follow all applicable HACCP procedures during the preparation and storage of field trip meals.
- Chill TCS that will be served cold before placing in transport containers. Examples include sandwiches (e.g., turkey, ham, roast beef, tuna salad), cut fresh fruit and vegetables, especially melons, tomatoes, and leafy greens (excludes whole fruit and pre-packaged, shelf-stable fruit such as fruit cups and applesauce), and dairy products (e.g., milk, yogurt, and cheese).
- If the transport containers cannot maintain milk at 41°F or below, use shelf-stable (aseptic) milk that does not require refrigeration.

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Meal transport

- Maintain TCS at appropriate temperatures during transport and storage. Cold foods must be kept at 41°F or below. Hot foods must be kept at 135°F or above. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Hot and Cold Holding for Time Temperature Control for Safe Foods](#).
- Transport TCS in insulated portable food transport containers like coolers. Clean and sanitize transport containers before use. Use ice or cold packs to maintain the temperature of PHFs. Keep the containers tightly closed until meals are distributed. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Transporting Food to Remote Sites \(Satellite Kitchens\)](#).
- Store transport containers and foods out of direct sunlight and away from engines.

Meal service

- Ensure that students eat meals at the appropriate time to ensure correct implementation of time and temperature controls for food safety. Cold foods must be kept at 41°F or below; or eaten within four hours if stored below 70°F; or eaten within one hour if kept at temperatures above 90°F.
- Wash hands prior to distributing meals. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is not a suitable substitute for handwashing because it is not effective against foodborne viruses and allergens. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Washing Hands](#).
- Use clean disposable gloves or utensils when distributing any unwrapped or unpackage ready-to-serve food, such as whole pieces of fresh fruit or sandwiches packaged in bulk containers. For more information, refer to the ICN's sample SOP, [Using Suitable Utensils When Handling Ready-to-Eat Foods](#).
- Have students thoroughly wash their hands before receiving meals and eating. To avoid potential allergic reactions, ask students not to share foods.
- Discard all leftover food items returned in coolers from the field trip.

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Best Practices

- Develop a SOP that provides clear written procedures regarding the requirements for field trip meals including:
 - how students provide field trip orders to the cafeteria;
 - appropriate food safety procedures for preparing, transporting, storing, and serving field trip meals, including temperature control, handwashing, and proper food handling procedures during transport and meal service;
 - how to identify reimbursable meals;
 - instructions for conducting field trip point-of-service meal counts;
 - how to handle leftover meals or foods (including milk); and
 - a plan for informing substitute staff of the requirements for field trip meals.
- Disseminate the district's SOP for field trip meals to food service staff and all applicable field trip staff, including teachers, teacher aides, other school staff, parents, and volunteers; and post on the SFA's website.
- Provide regular training (at least annually) for all food service and non-food service staff involved with field trip meals.
- Include point-of-service meal count instructions for field trip staff with the delivery of the field trip meals. For example, SFAs could laminate the meal count instructions and attach them to the food transport containers.
- Use clear signage on the transport containers to help field trip staff identify the required meal components.
- Reinforce proper procedures for field trip meals through various communication channels, such as staff meetings, emails, employee handbooks, written instructions, and the SFA's website.

For additional guidance and technical assistance on implementing classroom meals, SFAs may contact their CSDE [school nutrition team member](#).

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Resources

2022 Food Code (U.S. Food and Drug Administration):

<https://www.fda.gov/media/164194/download>

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Programs:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/milk_substitutes_snp.pdf

Civil Rights for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/civil-rights-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Crediting Foods for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs>

CSDE Circular Letter C-9: Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/circular-letters/circ07-08/c9.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/memos/om2022/om03-22.pdf>

FNS Instruction 786-8 (rev. 1) Reimbursement for Off-Site Meal Consumption:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/fnsinstruction/786-8.pdf>

Food Safety Standard Operating Procedures (Institute of Child Nutrition webpage):

<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/standard-operating-procedures/>

Guidance for School Food Authorities: Developing a School Food Safety Program Based on the Process Approach to HACCP Principles (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/fs/developing-school-food-safety-program-based-process-approach-haccp>

Guide to Meeting the Preschool Meal Patterns and Crediting Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/preschool/guide_preschool_meal_patterns_snp.pdf

Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/guide-professional-standards-school-nutrition-programs>

Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-counting-and-claiming-for-school-nutrition-programs>

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Meal Pattern Training for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs>

Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs>

Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals>

National School Lunch Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/national-school-lunch-program>

Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training>

Production Records for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/production-records-for-school-nutrition-programs>

Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/professional-standards-for-school-nutrition-professionals>

Professional Standards Tracker Log (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/formsprofessional_standards_tracker_log_snp.xlsx

Requirements for Production Records in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/prodrecord/requirements_production_records_nslp_sbp.pdf

Sample SOP: Hot and Cold Holding for Time Temperature Control for Safe Foods (ICN):

<https://theicn.org/resources/181/food-safety-standard-operating-procedures/105686/hot-and-cold-holding-for-time-temperature-control-for-safe-foods.docx>

Sample SOP: Transporting Food to Remote Sites (Satellite Kitchens) (ICN):

<https://theicn.org/resources/181/food-safety-standard-operating-procedures/105731/transporting-food-to-remote-sites-satellite-kitchens.docx>

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Sample SOP: Using Suitable Utensils When Handling Ready-to-Eat Foods (ICN):

<https://theicn.org/resources/181/food-safety-standard-operating-procedures/105735/using-suitable-utensils-when-handling-ready-to-eat-foods-2.docx>

Sample SOP: Washing Hands (ICN):

<https://theicn.org/resources/181/food-safety-standard-operating-procedures/105741/washing-hands.docx>

School Breakfast Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/school-breakfast-program>

Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs>

Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals (Iowa State University):

<https://iastate.app.box.com/s/umtbvbe21qgrd5qy2pwan22ui9cavw3q>

Standard Operating Procedures (ICN webpage):

<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/standard-operating-procedures/>

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/mealcount/requirements_field_trip_meals_nslp_sbp.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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