

# Baylor Collaborative awarded \$7.2M for program

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WACO—The U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded the [Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty](#) \$7.2 million to operate its Meals-to-You program for a fifth summer.

The program began in 2019 to reach children in rural, frontier and tribal regions who often are underserved in the Summer Food Service Program.

Children participating in the Meals-to-You program receive shelf-stable meals delivered directly to their home addresses throughout the summer while school is out of session.



Jeremy Everett

Jeremy Everett, executive director of the Baylor Collaborative, said Meals-to-You has revolutionized how the United States operates summer child nutrition programs.

“Before 2019, the only summer option for children to receive free, publicly funded meals was through the USDA Summer Food Service Program requiring children to eat on site at a congregate setting,” he said.

While the Summer Food Service Program is “an excellent tool that has proven extremely effective at strengthening food security, it has limitations

in regions without a high concentration of children in one place,” he noted.

Program guidelines for the Summer Food Service Program historically included a congregate requirement, meaning meals are provided to children who eat at a single, centralized location such as a summer camp or school cafeteria. Unfortunately, these aren’t always available to children in more remote areas.



In 2019, more than 32,000 boxes of food were delivered to students in selected rural counties throughout Texas who participated in the Meals-to-You pilot program, spearheaded by the Texas Hunger Initiative at Baylor University, now part of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty. That approach was used as part of a national effort to serve rural children in schools that have been closed in response to the spread of COVID-19. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Meals-to-You began in 2019, serving 20 East Texas and West Texas

counties, to test whether meal delivery could be a successful alternative in areas with limited access to the Summer Food Service Program.

In March 2020, as schools shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Baylor Collaborative was asked to scale up the program rapidly to include 43 states and Puerto Rico in what was known as Emergency Meals-to-You.

Throughout each version of the program, the Baylor Collaborative has worked with vendors such as McLane Global, Chartwells, and PepsiCo to assemble boxes of meals that follow USDA nutrition guidelines for child meal programs.

An evaluation of Meals-to-You by the Urban Institute found the program successful in strengthening food security among participants.

The program's success and other lessons learned during the pandemic have expanded the options for children to receive healthy meals during the summer months.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 made noncongregate and summer meal delivery a permanent option for children beginning this summer. It also allows for summer electronic benefit transfer options beginning next summer.

Everett praises these developments.

"We have known for a long time the limitations of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to childhood food security work. We are incredibly excited about the new options available next year and are humbled to have been a small part of changing the landscape of these programs," he said.

The 2023 iteration of Meals-to-You will serve eligible children in select communities in Texas, New Mexico, Utah and Alaska.