Introduction
The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides 200 million free meals to children during summer months. Marketing of SFSP is essential to reach unserved and underserved areas, reach specific segments (e.g., rural), and communicate the value of SFSP. Marketing efforts consist of branding, advertising, communication, social media, outreach, and public relations.

Research Objective
To explore marketing practices and innovations in operating a Summer Food Service Program through observations and interviews with key personnel.

Methods
- This study was an embedded, replicable, multiple-case, case study design.
- Site visits (n=25) were conducted in representative and innovative SFSPs in five USDA regions.
- Structured interviews were conducted with SFSP directors and staff in an array of sponsored program formats (n=16), including:
  - schools districts,
  - local government agencies,
  - religious organizations, and
  - non-profit organizations (n=6 rural/suburban, n=10 urban).
- Program-level characteristics were collected and practices and procedures were observed.

Results
Results indicated that SFSP managers market their programs involving and targeting three distinct shareholders:
- Families with children
- Media
- Other community organizations
Promoting SFSP to families and children included traditional promotional channels such as signage, posters/flyers, and word of mouth and non-traditional promotional channels including websites, social media, and apps. Media was also involved through news releases of kickoff events, site visits, and human interest stories. Managers of SFSP engage in marketing efforts with community organizations such as receipt promotional “taglines” with local retailers. Despite the USDA providing outreach and marketing toolkits for SFSP sponsors, challenges of marketing the program exist, including:
  - lack of funding for marketing,
  - lack of marketing knowledge, and
  - time for marketing.

Examples of Marketing

Quotations from Directors
"Our public relations professional works with the food bank public relations professional. We are blessed with marvelous partners and those partnerships have been built over 25 years.”

“From a marketing perspective, our bus was in the Fourth of July parade.”

“I would say a challenge would be getting the word out to more people. I definitely think that there are more youth in the community that could go up to receive a meal.”

“Well, they do have (advertisements) … on the back of the lunch menu … that goes home with all the students. They also have it online. And in the past we have had some yard signs and signs on this, front of the building.”

“Transportation is … become a big issue for me because of our school closings and being able to reach those outlying areas to get kids in here to participate, because they’re being robbed of, or being able to do this, especially with parents working and 11, I think the biggest issue is, you know, both parents work.”

“In the past, we have walked around where the site is and hung fliers on doors.”

“We need to be flexible and work around the bus schedule as well.”

“...these agencies have been in the community for a long time and have a presence. So they’re able to do outreach effectively because they know the community that they serve. I (the sponsor) can do it because they have a direct line of communication to their actual community.”

Application of Results
In addition to examples from this case study, resources such as the SFSP Outreach Toolkit are available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SFSP_toolkit.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/SFSP_toolkit.pdf) and the SFSP Marketing and Communications examples [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit).
Marketing is essential to a successful SFSP. This research provides an integrative framework for marketing of SFSP based on the respondents’ examples. Specifically, this research provides insight and tactics for current SFSP sponsors, as well as schools or agencies interested in becoming sponsors, for the marketing of SFSP.