

Feeding Futures: Free Summer Meals Reach San Clemente Youth

By Angélica Escobar Jun 19, 2025



Program Director Veronica Vega hands out lunches to children at the Boys & Girls Club of San Clemente, one of 49 sites participating in Second Harvest Food Bank's free summer meal program.

Photo: Angélica Escobar

As school cafeterias close for the summer, the need for accessible, nutritious meals remains urgent—especially for families relying on free or reduced lunch during the academic year. This summer, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County is helping fill that gap through its annual Kids Cafe program, offering free lunches and snacks to children 18 and under at 49 sites across the county, including the Boys & Girls Club of San Clemente.

Launched countywide on May 29, the Kids Cafe program operates in partnership with Meals on Wheels Orange County and is federally supported through the USDA's Summer Food Service Program. The program is open to all children, regardless of enrollment in summer programming, and requires no registration, paperwork, or proof of income.

"One in eight children in Orange County is food-insecure, so we want to ensure that families know this resource is available to them once school campuses close for the summer," said Claudia Bonilla Keller, CEO of Second Harvest Food Bank. "We want to give families one less thing to worry about and ensure their children have fuel to make the most out of their summer."

Kids Cafe is designed to supplement school-year meal programs during summer break.

"So, the Kids Cafe program offered through Second Harvest and Meals on Wheels attempts to supplement those meals through lunch and snacks," Bonilla Keller said. "By making it accessible locally in community to families, we try to overcome those transportation barriers again, by making it local, available in community, as opposed to having families have to come to a centralized location in the county."

At the San Clemente site, many children are receiving daily meals, according to Veronica Vega, Program Director at the SC Boys & Girls Club.

"We're serving around 70 kids each day," Vega said. "Most of them are already part of our summer program."

Asked whether the site sees outside visitors, Vega said it's rare.

"If I had to guess, maybe one or two kids this summer will come just for the lunch," she said. "We do have a sign outside advertising the program, and we send emails to families. Sometimes, older siblings stop by during lunch, and they're welcome to grab food. But from my experience, that doesn't happen often."

Meals are delivered fresh each weekday by Meals on Wheels Orange County and meet federal nutrition standards. Some options rotate weekly, and kids definitely have their favorites.

"We get the cereal meal, which has carrots, an apple, and string cheese," Vega said. "The kids like the pizza meal and the chicken nuggets. The chicken sandwich is really popular with the older kids—they'll use the condiments and eat the whole thing. The little ones usually just eat the patty and skip the lettuce."

For 7-year-old Melanie Velazquez, who attends the club each day, lunchtime is something to look forward to. "I like when they give us pizza or muffins," she said. "And I always eat all the apples."

Last summer, the Kids Cafe program served more than 54,000 lunches and 31,000 snacks across Orange County. With food insecurity rising, Second Harvest expects to surpass those numbers this year.

"There's always a demand for meals in the summer when school is out, because the federalized school—the federal school-subsidized meal programs—are such a big part of what public school children eat," Bonilla Keller said. "That can include breakfast, lunch and then supper."

To find a local meal site, families can visit [feedoc.org](https://www.feedoc.org) or call 2-1-1. Bonilla Keller also encouraged parents to act quickly, especially at busy locations like the SC Boys & Girls Club.

"I always tell parents, you know, make sure you sign your kids and their friends and cousins up quickly, because we want to make sure that all kids have access—not only to the food but to the great activities that are available for the next couple of months until school picks up again in August and September," Bonilla Keller said.