

# How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Public school districts that choose the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) under [Section 10-215f](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes must ensure that all foods sold to students separately from reimbursable meals meet the [Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) (CNS). Examples of sources that might sell foods to students include the school cafeteria, fundraisers, school stores, vending machines, concession stands, and any other groups, programs, or activities that sell foods to students. The CNS also applies to all foods served in the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP).

The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage includes brand-specific lists of commercially prepared food products that comply with the CNS and beverages that comply with the beverage requirements of [Section 10-221q](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Smart Snacks nutrition standards. HFC schools must use this list to determine which commercial foods and beverages may be sold to students.

## Reviewing Products

Before purchasing a commercial product that will be sold to students, check that the product is listed on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage. CSDE approval of products is specific to the brand and variety of the food or beverage. To ensure compliance with the CNS and state beverage statute, the commercial product must match the **specific information** on the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage, including the manufacturer name, product name, variety/ flavor, serving size, case pack, UPC or product code, and nutrition information per serving.

If a commercial product is not included on the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage, schools must determine that the product complies with the CNS (foods) or state and federal beverage requirements (beverages) **before** it is sold to students.

## Submitting Products

For commercial products not listed on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage, submit the product information to the CSDE for review. The CSDE's resource, [Submitting Food and Beverage Products for Approval](#), summarizes the information required to submit a commercial product to the CSDE. Please submit all product information by e-mail to [susan.fiore@ct.gov](mailto:susan.fiore@ct.gov).

# How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards

## Screening Products

Schools can use the CSDE’s worksheets below to screen commercial products for compliance with the CNS. Each worksheet evaluates a specific food category.

- Worksheet 1: Snacks
- Worksheet 2: Yogurt and Pudding
- Worksheet 3: Smoothies
- Worksheet 4: Fruits and Vegetables
- Worksheet 5: Soups
- Worksheet 6: Cooked Grains
- Worksheet 7: Entrees
- Worksheet 8: Non-entree Combination Foods
- Worksheet 9: Nutrient Analysis of Recipes
- Worksheet 10: Evaluating Recipes for Sugars

These worksheets and additional guidance on evaluating foods and beverages are available in the “[How To](#)” section of the CSDE’s [CNS](#) webpage.

For guidance on evaluating foods made from scratch, refer to module 4 of the CSDE’s [Complying with HFC training program](#) and the CSDE’s resources, *How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards* and *Guidance on Evaluating Recipes for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards*.



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## Avoiding Common Compliance Issues

Except for foods sold to students at events that meet the exemption criteria of Connecticut's HFC statute, all commercial food products sold to students separately from reimbursable meals must comply with the CNS. For guidance on food and beverage exemptions, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Exemptions for Foods and Beverages in Public Schools*.

Schools can ensure that commercial food products comply with the CNS by following the strategies below.

- **Evaluate all commercial products for CNS compliance before selling:** Schools must ensure that all commercial food products comply with the CNS and all beverages comply with Connecticut's beverage statute and the Smart Snacks beverage standards. Before purchasing any commercial products that will be sold to students, use the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage to verify that each product is listed. Check that each product matches the specific product information on the CSDE's list (refer to "[Reviewing Products](#)" in this document).
- **Check vendor assurances of product compliance:** Verify that all commercial products are included on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage, even when a food manufacturer, vendor, distributor, or salesperson provides a list of compliant products or indicates that a product meets the CNS or state beverage statute. The CSDE does not review or approve these types of vendor statements for accuracy. Vendor information about a product's compliance with the state nutrition requirements might not be correct.

Vendors often assume that products meeting the USDA's Smart Snacks nutrition standards also comply with the CNS. However, many products that comply with Smart Snacks do not comply with the CNS. The CNS requirements are stricter than Smart Snacks. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Comparison of the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and the USDA's Smart Snacks Nutrition Standards*.

- **Include accompaniments served with the food:** Foods must be evaluated for compliance with the CNS based on the amount served including any added accompaniments, such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, and condiments (e.g., ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and salad dressing). The nutrition information for both foods must be added together prior to determining if the serving complies with the CNS. Examples of foods with accompaniments include hamburger with ketchup and mustard, bagel with cream cheese, french fries with ketchup, waffles with syrup, whole grain-rich pasta with butter, and salad with dressing.

# How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards

- **Check deliveries:** Schools must ensure that the products received from vendors are the same as the products that were ordered. Deliveries might sometimes contain noncompliant products due to a variety of circumstances, such as vendor substitutions for product shortages or staffing changes. Schools can avoid these issues by providing school staff with a list of allowable snacks for the cafeteria, training staff to check deliveries against product orders, and providing clear instructions to vendors about allowable foods and the procedure for substitutions when an approved product is not available.
- **Check vending machines operated by an outside vendor:** Schools are responsible for ensuring that vending machines that are accessible to students on school premises sell only compliant foods and beverages, regardless of who operates them. When the district contracts with a vending company, vending machines might sometimes contain noncompliant products due to a variety of circumstances, such as vendor substitutions for product shortages or staffing changes. Schools can avoid these issues by providing the vending company and school staff with a list of allowable foods, training staff to check foods and beverages when the vending company stocks the vending machines, and providing clear instructions to vending companies about allowable foods and the procedure for substitutions when an approved product is not available.

The HFC district is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all food and beverage sales to students comply with the applicable state and federal nutrition standards. Districts must implement procedures to ensure that sales of competitive foods follow these requirements.

## Resources

CNS Worksheet 1: Snacks (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet1\\_Snacks.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet1_Snacks.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 2: Snacks (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet2\\_Yogurt\\_Pudding.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet2_Yogurt_Pudding.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 3: Smoothies (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet3\\_Smoothies.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet3_Smoothies.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 4: Fruits and Vegetables (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet4\\_Fruits\\_Vegetables.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet4_Fruits_Vegetables.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 5: Soups (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet5\\_Soups.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet5_Soups.xlsx)

# How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards

CNS Worksheet 6: Cooked Grains (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet6\\_Cooked\\_Grains.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet6_Cooked_Grains.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 7: Entrees (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet7\\_Entrees.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet7_Entrees.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 8: Non-entree Combination Foods (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet8\\_Nonentree\\_Combination\\_Food.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet8_Nonentree_Combination_Food.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 9: Nutrient Analysis of Recipes (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet9\\_Nutrient\\_Analysis\\_Recipes.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet9_Nutrient_Analysis_Recipes.xlsx)

CNS Worksheet 10: Evaluating Recipes for Sugars (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS\\_worksheet10\\_Evaluate\\_Recipes\\_Sugars.xlsx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/CNS_worksheet10_Evaluate_Recipes_Sugars.xlsx)

Complying with Healthy Food Certification (CSDE Training Program):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Healthy-Food-Certification/Related-Resources#ComplyingHFC>

Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Connecticut-Nutrition-Standards>

Ensuring District Compliance with HFC (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Ensuring\\_District\\_Compliance\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Ensuring_District_Compliance_HFC.pdf)

Evaluate Foods for CNS Compliance (“How To” section of CSDE’s Connecticut Nutrition Standards webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Connecticut-Nutrition-Standards/How-To>

Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Connecticut-Nutrition-Standards/How-To>

Exemptions for Foods and Beverages in Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Food\\_Beverage\\_Exemptions\\_Public\\_Schools.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Food_Beverage_Exemptions_Public_Schools.pdf)

Guidance on Evaluating Recipes for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluating\\_Recipes\\_CNS\\_Compliance.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluating_Recipes_CNS_Compliance.pdf)

# How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Guide to Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Competitive\\_Foods\\_Guide\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Competitive_Foods_Guide_HFC.pdf)

Healthy Food Certification (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Healthy-Food-Certification>

How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the CNS (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate\\_Scratch\\_Foods\\_CNS\\_Compliance.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate_Scratch_Foods_CNS_Compliance.pdf)

How to Evaluate Purchased Foods for Compliance with the CNS (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate\\_Purchased\\_Foods\\_CNS.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate_Purchased_Foods_CNS.pdf)

List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/List-of-Acceptable-Foods-and-Beverages>

Requirements for Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Requirements\\_Competitive\\_Foods\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Requirements_Competitive_Foods_HFC.pdf)

Requirements for Food and Beverage Fundraisers in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Fundraiser\\_Requirements\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Fundraiser_Requirements_HFC.pdf)

Requirements for Foods and Beverages in School Stores in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/School\\_Store\\_Requirements\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/School_Store_Requirements_HFC.pdf)

Requirements for Foods and Beverages in Vending Machines in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Vending\\_Machine\\_Requirements\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Vending_Machine_Requirements_HFC.pdf)

Requirements for Selling Foods and Beverages in Adult Education Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/AdultEdHFC.pdf>

Resources for Meeting the Federal and State Requirements for Competitive Foods in Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Resources\\_Federal\\_State\\_Requirements\\_Competitive\\_Foods.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Resources_Federal_State_Requirements_Competitive_Foods.pdf)

Sample Fundraiser Form for Healthy Food Certification (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Sample\\_Fundraiser\\_Form\\_HFC.docx](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Sample_Fundraiser_Form_HFC.docx)

Submitting Food and Beverage Products for Approval (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/FBlist/Submitting\\_Food\\_Beverage\\_Products.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/FBlist/Submitting_Food_Beverage_Products.pdf)

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Summary Chart: Federal and State Requirements for Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Summary\\_Chart\\_Requirements\\_Competitive\\_Foods\\_HFC.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Summary_Chart_Requirements_Competitive_Foods_HFC.pdf).

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/Connecticut\\_Nutrition\\_Standards\\_Summary.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/Connecticut_Nutrition_Standards_Summary.pdf)

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Healthy Food Certification](#) and [Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) webpages, or contact the [HFC coordinator](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate\\_Commercial\\_Food\\_Products\\_CNS.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate_Commercial_Food_Products_CNS.pdf).

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