

CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program

Questions and Answers

These questions and answers accompany the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Operational Memorandum No. 2-26: CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#). This memo pertains to the school nutrition programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

All Eligible Child Nutrition Programs

1. **What is the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program?**

The CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program, effective July 1, 2025, provides funding to eligible sponsors of USDA Child Nutrition Programs to support the purchase of locally and regionally sourced unprocessed and minimally processed foods for use in approved Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). The program is administered by the CSDE under [Section 10-215m](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.).

2. **Is this the same program as the Local Foods for Schools program?**

Two similarly named programs operated concurrently in Connecticut during the 2024-25 school year: the federally funded Local Foods for School Incentive Program (LFSIP) and the state-funded Connecticut Local Foods for Schools Incentive Program (CT LFSIP). Both funding opportunities supported school nutrition programs.

The CSDE continues to administer the federal LFSIP which provides 100 percent reimbursement for eligible program foods in school nutrition programs. This program ends on May 31, 2026.

The Connecticut State Department of Agriculture (DoAg), in consultation with the CSDE, previously administered the CT LFSIP, which reimbursed school nutrition program sponsors 50 percent for eligible Connecticut-grown foods and 33 percent for regionally sourced foods (including New York). The DoAg administered program ended on June 30, 2025, and effective July 1, 2025, the administrative authority transitioned to the CSDE, in consultation with DoAg.

To reduce confusion between the federally funded and state funded programs and to reflect the expanded eligible use of funds beyond school nutrition programs, the CSDE relaunched the former CT LFSIP as the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program.

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3. Which Child Nutrition Programs are eligible for the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program?

Although the first application for CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program is open to sponsors in good standing of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), sponsors in good standing of the CNPs below will be eligible to apply for CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds to support serving Connecticut and other regionally sourced minimally and unprocessed foods:

- NSLP
- SBP
- Afterschool Snack Program (ASP): *Note: Funds approved for the NSLP and SBP may be used in the ASP*
- Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), including the At-Risk Afterschool Meals component

Sponsors of the CACFP, SFSP, and SSO will be notified by the CSDE when those program applications are available.

4. What types of purchases are eligible for reimbursement?

Sponsors may be reimbursed for:

- 50 percent of expenditures on unprocessed and minimally processed foods sourced in Connecticut; and
- 33 percent of expenditures on unprocessed and minimally processed foods sourced from regional states (NY, MA, RI, VT, NH, ME).

Example: A \$2,000 purchase of Connecticut-sourced foods can receive \$1,000 reimbursement. A \$2,000 purchase of regionally sourced foods can receive \$667. Payment requests may combine local and regional items.

5. What are “locally” and “regionally” sourced foods?

- Locally sourced foods: produce and other farm products that have a traceable point of origin within Connecticut that are grown or produced at, or sold by, a local farm and includes, but is not limited to, value-added dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables and minimally processed foods.
- Regionally sourced foods: means produce and other farm products that have a traceable point of origin within New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire or Maine that are grown or produced at, or sold by, a regional farm

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and includes, but is not limited to, value-added dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables and minimally processed foods.

6. **What if an item is produced in another state, such as California, but is sold by a regional or Connecticut farm?**

The item would not be eligible for reimbursement under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program. To qualify as locally or regionally sourced, both parts of the definition must be met. The food item must have a traceable point of origin within Connecticut or one of the defined regional states, and it must be grown or produced at, or sold by, a Connecticut or regional farm. Foods that originate outside of Connecticut or the designated regional states (NY, MA, RI, VT, NH, ME) do not meet program eligibility requirements, even if they are sold by a Connecticut or regional distributor or farm.

7. **What counts as “minimally processed” foods?**

Minimally processed foods retain their natural character and may include: cooling, freezing, chopping, slicing, dicing, forming patties without fillers, packaging, pasteurization of milk, cleaning fish, and similar standard handling processes.

CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds cannot be used to purchase fluid milk.

8. **How much funding is available?**

- NSLP and SBP: In SY 2025-26, \$1,068,000 is available to support the NSLP and SBP.
- CACFP: In fiscal year 2026, \$108,000 will be available to support the CACFP.
- SFSP/SSO: In fiscal year 2026, \$24,000 will be available to support the SFSP and SSO.
- Funding available for fiscal year (FY) 2027 will be announced closer to the date. The current state legislative appropriation is set to increase funding available for all CNPs in FY 2027.

9. **What will approved sponsors receive from CSDE?**

Upon approval, sponsors will receive a:

- confirmation of participation;
- payment schedule;
- payment request form and instructions; and
- reporting form.

Completing all required reporting associated with these funds is a condition of participation.

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10. When does the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program start?

Although launching in January 2026, the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program will be accepting requests for payment for eligible foods purchased from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026. The CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program application must be approved before the participating school food authority (SFA) may submit requests for payments.

11. What documentation is required?

Participating entities must meet the requirements below.

- Maintain records of expenditures for locally and regionally sourced foods in accordance with the records retention requirements. Refer to the applicable CSDE document, [Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#), [Records Retention Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#), or [Records Retention Requirements for the Summer Food Service Food Program](#).
- Maintain documentation verifying the place of origin of those foods.
- Submit records and documentation to the CSDE upon payment request or for review as needed.

12. Are CNP sponsors required to complete a survey?

Yes. Sponsors that receive reimbursement under this program are required to complete CSDE-administered surveys to support program evaluation and continuous improvement. Failure to complete the required surveys may result in ineligibility for reimbursement under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program.

13. Can foods purchased with CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds be used in a la carte sales?

No. CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds may only be used in support of the USDA CNP reimbursable meals and snacks.

14. Can I conduct taste tests with foods purchased with CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds?

Taste tests conducted in support of incorporating more minimally and unprocessed Connecticut and regionally sourced foods into the USDA CNPs is an allowable use of the funds.

15. Can I use the funds for administrative purposes?

No. CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds may only be used towards qualifying food purchases.

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16. How does the program promote equity?

The statutory language establishes that program guidelines are required to promote geographic, social, economic, and racial equity, which may include a preference for historically underserved farmers or small farm businesses.

17. Who can assist sponsors with local food purchasing?

[Connecticut's Regional Farm to School Coordinators](#) are available to help with:

- local food purchasing;
- procurement and menu planning support;
- training related to processing, preparation, and service of local and regional foods in the school nutrition programs;
- integrating local products into Child Nutrition Program meals; and
- outreach and evaluation support.

18. How can I determine whether food sourced from a farm is safe to purchase and serve to students?

Connecticut does not have a single, universal “food safety–certified farm” designation; however, several official certifications, registrations, and food safety programs can help determine whether a farm meets recognized food safety standards. SFAs are encouraged to visit and assess the food safety practices of any new farm supplier with whom they have not previously worked, using a food safety checklist readily available through USDA and many land-grant university websites.

- [Verifying Farm Food Safety](#) (USDA)
- [Farm Food Safety Checklist](#) (University of Northern Iowa)
- [Checklist for Producers Selling Produce to Local K-12 Schools](#) (Wyoming Department of Education)
- [Food Safety](#) (University of Connecticut)

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Schools

19. How much is my program eligible for?

The CSDE allocated funds to eligible NSLP and SBP sponsors using a predetermined formula. Each allocation includes a base amount of \$2,000 per approved school food authority (SFA) operating the NSLP in SY 2025-26 plus a proportional share based on each SFA's share of statewide student enrollment. The base allocation ensures that all participating SFAs receive a meaningful level of funding, while the proportional component scales funding to reflect the enrollment of each SFA. Specific allocations are included in the CSDE's document, [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program School Year 2025-26 Allocations National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\) and School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#).

20. How can my school food authority (SFA) apply?

SFAs participating in NSLP and SBP for school year (SY) 2025-26 must complete the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program application](#). Only approved sponsors can submit reimbursement requests for eligible foods.

21. Who can submit the application on behalf of the SFA?

The application must be submitted by the SFA's authorized signer 1 or 2, as identified on the ED-099 Agreement for Child Nutrition Programs (not the food service director or representative from the food service management company).

22. When is the application for the SFA due?

Applications for the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program will be accepted on a rolling basis. The CSDE strongly encourages eligible SFAs to apply as soon as possible in order to secure their allocated funds for use during School Year 2025–26.

23. Does my CNP have to be Healthy Food Certified to participate?

No. However, to be eligible to participate in the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program, the CNP sponsor must be in good standing and use the food purchases to support participation in the CNPs.

24. Are private schools eligible to participate?

NSLP and SBP private school sponsors in good standing, as well as private schools operating the NSLP and SBP under an interschool agreement, are eligible to receive foods purchased with CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds in support of their programs.

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25. **Who should I contact with questions?**

SFAs should direct any questions to their [CSDE school nutrition team member](#).

SFSP and SSO

Coming soon

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