

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,

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New Hampshire or Maine that are grown or produced at, or sold by, a regional farm 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 may not be used to purchase fluid milk.

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

- NSLP and SBP: In school year (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.

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

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, for the FY 2026 appropriation. 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.

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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.

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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General Purchasing and Allowable Cost Questions

19. **Can I purchase items such as meat patties, pickles, salsa, or marinara sauce?**

Yes, these items may be eligible **only if they meet the definition of minimally processed foods** and comply with program requirements.

- Meat patties are allowable if they are formed without fillers or non-eligible additives.
- Items such as pickles, salsa, and marinara sauce may be allowable **if they contain minimal ingredients and the primary agricultural ingredient is locally or regionally sourced.**

Sponsors must ensure all ingredients meet program requirements and maintain proper documentation.

20. **Can I purchase decorative or non-food items such as greenery or inedible flowers?**

No. Funds may only be used for the purchase of eligible food items intended for use in reimbursable Child Nutrition Program meals or snacks. Decorative or non-food items are not eligible for reimbursement.

21. **Can I purchase eggs for activities such as egg dyeing?**

No. While eggs are an allowable food item, purchases must be eligible food items for use in reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks within the Child Nutrition Programs. Eggs purchased for non-program purposes, such as crafts or activities, are not eligible for reimbursement.

22. **Can I purchase eggs from a local farm or farm stand for use in our food service operations?**

No. Eggs that are not inspected for use in institutional food service operations cannot be used in food service operations. Eggs purchased from local farms or farm stands often do not meet this requirement. Refer to question 23.

Eggs for consumption in schools must follow all applicable federal, state, and local health codes.

Eggs must be stored/transported at or below 45°F and labeled with safe handling instructions per the [FDA Food Code](#) adopted in the Connecticut General Statutes.

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23. **If I purchase eggs from an approved source that meets state/federal inspections and storage/transportation requirements, what documentation do I need to submit with this specific request for payment?**

SFAs purchasing from larger USDA inspected plant/farm must submit a photo of the required container label showing the USDA grademark/shield or plant number with their invoice when requesting a CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program payment.

- Eggs inspected by USDA will have a USDA grademark/shield on the carton or case, which indicates they were graded for quality and checked for weight.

Officially inspected shell eggs and egg products also feature a plant number (preceded by a "P") where they were processed, often shown as an official USDA inspection symbol.

SFAs purchasing from smaller plants/farms must submit a photo showing the name, address, and phone number of the grading plant, along with the invoice.

- The Small Shell Egg Processing Plant Inspection Program allows smaller farms (with flocks of 200–3,000) to sell to institutions if they complete a voluntary inspection conducted by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

24. **Are there labeling or documentation requirements for multi-ingredient foods?**

Yes. Any item with more than one ingredient must include clear documentation of its contents and origin.

Sponsors requesting CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds for multi-ingredient foods must submit the following documentation with their request for payment:

- a product label, specification sheet, or invoice that identifies all ingredients; and
- documentation verifying the origin of the primary agricultural ingredient.

25. **Is there a limit in the percentage of nonlocal ingredients that may be present in multi-ingredient foods?**

There is no specific percentage limit on nonlocal ingredients in multi-ingredient foods. However, for a multi-ingredient food to qualify, the combined local or regionally sourced ingredients must be the primary (predominant) agricultural ingredients in the product (i.e., typically listed first in the label ingredients).

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26. **Can I purchase items in individual units (e.g., single jars or small quantities)?**

Yes. However, CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds are intended to be used in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs reimbursable meals. Therefore, purchasing in bulk, when appropriate and cost-effective, is strongly encouraged to maximize the impact of available funding and support program efficiency.

27. **How do the dietary specifications apply to local items?**

All items served on the menu need to credit appropriately to adhere to the applicable meal pattern requirements including dietary specifications (calories, saturated fat, and sodium, and effective July 1, 2027, added sugars).

28. **Can I use 100% of my CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program allocations to purchase food for one event or special events only?**

No. Recipients of CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds may not use 100% of their allocation for special events only.

The CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds are intended to support the ongoing incorporation of local and regional (including New York) unprocessed and minimally processed foods into USDA Child Nutrition Program meals. While special events are valuable in raising awareness, funds may not be used exclusively for one-time or special events only. Examples include but are not limited to: CT Grown for CT Kids Week events, meals prepared exclusively for CT Great Plates, and back-to-school or end-of-school-year events.

SFAs are expected to prioritize using the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds to support sustainable purchasing practices and ongoing relationships with local farms and producers.

29. **How should sponsors operating multiple Child Nutrition Programs (e.g., NSLP, CACFP, SFSP, or SSO) account for funding?**

Sponsors operating multiple Child Nutrition Programs must ensure that:

- Funds are used only for allowable purchases.
- Costs are properly allocated and documented.
- Documentation is retained according to the federal records retention laws (refer to the CSDE's resource, [Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#)).

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30. Is there a deadline to spend all of the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds?

Yes. Due to increased allocations for SFA NSLP sponsors operating the Community Nutrition Programs, the deadline for all participating sponsors has been extended. The updated deadlines are below:

- CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds must be used for eligible purchases made between July 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026.
- Sponsors are encouraged to submit payment requests in a timely manner and ensure all required documentation is complete to avoid delays in reimbursement.

CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program – Reporting and Payment Schedule

Revised May 29, 2026

Reporting Period	Report Due (from schools)	UConn and CSDE Review Window	Payment Target
February – March 2026	April 15, 2026	April 16 – April 29, 2026	May 20, 2026
April – May 2026	June 15, 2026	June 16 – June 29, 2026	July 20, 2026
June – July 2026	August 15, 2026	August 16 – August 28, 2026	September 20, 2026
Aug - Sept 2026	October 15, 2026	October 16 - October 19 - 30, 2026	November 20, 2026

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Schools

31. How much CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds are the School Nutrition 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 \(SBP\)](#).

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

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

33. 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).

34. 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.

35. 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 in the USDA CNP meals to support participation in the CNPs.

36. 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.

37. Who should I contact with questions?

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

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Community Nutrition Programs

38. What are the Community Nutrition Programs?

The Community Nutrition Programs consist of the USDA Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

39. How will sponsors of Summer Meal Programs and the Child and Adult Care Food Program be able to apply for CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Funds?

In SY 2025-26, SFAs that are participating in the NSLP CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program received an upward adjustment to their NSLP application if they also sponsor Summer Meal Programs and/or CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Programs proportional to their overall reimbursements. SFAs may use the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds to support all these programs. Sponsors of the programs that are not SFAs will be eligible to apply for BLP funds in SY 2026-27.

40. How much CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds are the Community Nutrition Programs eligible to receive?

The CSDE allocated CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds to eligible NSLP sponsors of the SFSP, SSO, and CACFP using a proportional formula based on each sponsor's share of total meal claims for reimbursements in the Community Nutrition Programs in the prior year. Allocations were determined by comparing each sponsor's overall reimbursements to the statewide total and distributing funds accordingly.

There is no base allocation for the Community Nutrition Program funds. Funding is fully scaled based on each sponsor's proportion of total reimbursements. SSO sponsors received the upward adjustment within their initial NSLP allocation and did not receive additional funds during the upwards adjustment for SFAs sponsoring SFSP and CACFP. SFAs adjusted allocations are reflected in the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program School Year 2025-26 Allocations for the Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\) and Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#).

41. Can my SFA use CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds to purchase unprocessed and minimally processed foods from another SFA?

Yes. However, SFA to SFA purchases with CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funds cannot exceed 10 percent of the total CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program allocations for the SFA purchasing the food.

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1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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