

Requirements for Cafeteria Entrees Sold A La Carte in Schools Participating in Healthy Food Certification

This document summarizes the requirements for entrees sold a la carte in school cafeterias in public school districts that choose the healthy food option of [Healthy Food Certification \(HFC\)](#) under [Section 10-215f](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes. “A la carte” means sold separately from reimbursable meals in the USDA’s school nutrition programs.

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School cafeterias in HFC public schools must follow the [Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) (CNS) for all foods available for sale to students on school premises separately from reimbursable meals. The CNS also applies to all foods offered in reimbursable snacks for the [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#).

The CNS entree standards apply only to entree items that are **sold only a la carte**, i.e., entrees that are not part of reimbursable meals. The CNS entree standards do not apply to entrees that: 1) meet the CNS entree definition; and 2) meet the entree exemption criteria, i.e., available for sale a la carte in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) during the same meal on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable meals.

CNS Entree Definition

The definition of “entree” for the CNS includes the three categories of main dish food items below.

1. A combination food of a meat/meat alternate and whole grain-rich (WGR) food, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on whole-grain bun, and bean burrito with whole-corn tortilla.
2. A combination food of a vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate, e.g., chef's salad with turkey, cheese and hard-boiled egg, fruit and cheese platter, yogurt and fruit parfait, smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice, baked potato with chili, and chicken vegetable stir-fry.
3. A meat/meat alternate alone, e.g., sausage patty, hard-boiled egg, and grilled chicken. **Note:** Yogurt, cheese, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, and meat snacks (e.g., beef jerky and meat sticks) are in the CNS snacks category and do not meet the CNS entree definition. These foods must comply with the CNS for the Snacks category.

Foods that do not meet one of the three categories above are not entrees. To be allowed for sale a la carte, these foods must meet the specific nutrient standards for the applicable CNS food category. For more information on the CNS food categories, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#).

Note: Foods defined by the menu planner as entrees for the NSLP or SBP might not meet the CNS entree definition. For example, a menu planner might feature French toast or pancakes as

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the “entree” for lunch. However, these foods do not meet the CNS entree definition because they do not contain a meat/meat alternate. French toast and pancakes are “baked items” in the Snacks category and must be evaluated using those nutrition standards.

Entree Exemption Criteria

Entree items that are sold a la carte during the NSLP or SBP meal service on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable meals are exempt from all CNS standards if they meet the three criteria below.

1. The entree item is the same or smaller portion size as the entree item served in reimbursable meals in the NSLP or SBP.
2. The entree item has the same accompaniments as the entree item served in NSLP/SBP reimbursable meals. Examples of entrees with accompaniments include hamburgers with ketchup and chicken nuggets with dipping sauce.
3. The entree item does not contain nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, or chemically altered fat substitutes.

This exemption applies only to the three categories of main dish entree items defined by the CNS (refer to “[CNS Entree Definition](#)” in this document). The example below shows how the entree exemption applies.

- **Example:** Tacos are the entree for Monday’s reimbursable lunch menu. Tacos may be sold a la carte during lunch on Monday and are exempt from the CNS. If the tacos are sold a la carte on Tuesday when they are not part of the reimbursable meal, the CNS applies. The SFA must have a standardized recipe and completed CNS worksheet on file to indicate that the tacos with their accompaniments comply with the CNS (refer to “[Required documentation for other meal items](#)” in this document).

The entree exemption does not apply to any other reimbursable meal items that are also sold a la carte, such as fruits, vegetables, soups, breads, rice, and pasta.

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Non-entree Meal Items Are Not Exempt from CNS

All other reimbursable meal items (non-entrees) available for sale a la carte are not exempt from the CNS and must meet all standards. The examples below illustrate this requirement.

- French fries and salad that are part of reimbursable meals cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with all standards for the CNS Fruits and Vegetables category.
- Muffins and bagels that are part of reimbursable meals cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with all standards for the CNS Snacks category.
- Soup that is part of reimbursable meals cannot be sold a la carte unless it complies with all standards for the CNS Soups category.
- Pasta and rice that is part of reimbursable meals cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with all standards for the CNS Cooked Grains category.

Before selling these menu items to students a la carte, the school food authority (SFA) must have documentation on file to indicate the serving with its accompaniments complies with the CNS.

Required documentation for selling non-entree meal items

SFAs must document that non-entree meal items comply with the CNS. Commercial foods must be listed on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#). Foods made from scratch (including commercial products with ingredients added by the SFA after purchasing) must have the following documentation: 1) a standardized recipe with the nutrition information per serving (including any accompaniments served with the food); and 2) the appropriate completed [CNS Worksheet](#) indicating that the standardized recipe's serving with its accompaniments complies with the CNS. For more information, visit the "[Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance](#)" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage.

Non-entree Items in Second Student Meals Must Meet CNS

Second student meals are a la carte purchases and are not reimbursable. All foods available for sale as part of second meals must comply with the CNS, except for entrees that meet the CNS entree definition (refer to "[CNS Entree Definition](#)" in this document) and are sold a la carte during the meal service on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable meals. This includes all commercial products and foods made from scratch.

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Resources

[CNS Worksheets](#) (“Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance” section of CSDE’s Connecticut Nutrition Standards webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/connecticut-nutrition-standards/evaluating-foods-for-cns-compliance#CNSWorksheets>

[Complying with Healthy Food Certification](#) (CSDE training program):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/healthy-food-certification/hfc-training-program>

[Complying with Healthy Food Certification Module 4: Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance](#)

(CSDE training program):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/healthy-food-certification/hfc-training-program>

[Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/connecticut-nutrition-standards>

[Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance](#) (CSDE’s Connecticut Nutrition Standards webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/connecticut-nutrition-standards/evaluating-foods-for-cns-compliance>

[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

[Healthy Food Certification](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/healthy-food-certification>

[How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#)

(CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/evaluate_commercial_food_products_cns.pdf

[How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#)

(CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/evaluate_scratch_foods_cns_compliance.pdf

[List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/list-of-acceptable-foods-and-beverages>

[Requirements for Cafeteria A La Carte Foods and Beverages in HFC Public Schools](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/cafeteria_requirements_hfc.pdf

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Standardized Recipes (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/standardized-recipes>

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/cns/connecticut_nutrition_standards_summary.pdf

For more information, visit the CSDE's [Healthy Food Certification](#) webpage and [Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) webpage or contact the [HFC Coordinator](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/cafeteria_entrees_requirements_hfc.pdf.



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