

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards for School Year 2026-27

This document summarizes the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS) for Connecticut public schools for school year, effective July 1, 2026.

Contents

Overview of CNS.....	2
When CNS is required.....	2
CNS food categories.....	2
Allowable foods.....	3
Exempt foods.....	3
Prohibited foods and beverages.....	3
CNS General Standards.....	4
Category 1: Snacks.....	5
Nutrient Standards for Snacks.....	5
Exemptions for Snacks.....	6
Category 2: Entrees Sold Only A La Carte.....	7
CNS Entree Definition.....	7
Nutrient Standards for Entrees Sold Only A La Carte.....	8
Exemptions for Entrees Sold Only A La Carte.....	9
Category 3: Non-entree Combination Foods.....	10
Nutrient Standards for Non-entree Combination Foods.....	10
Exemptions for Non-entree Combination Foods.....	10
Category 4: Fruits and Vegetables.....	11
Nutrient Standards for Fruits and Vegetables.....	11
Exemptions for Fruits and Vegetables.....	12
Category 5: Cooked Grains.....	13
Nutrient Standards for Cooked Grains.....	13
Exemptions for Cooked Grains.....	13
Category 6: Soups.....	14
Nutrient Standards for Soups.....	14
Exemptions for Soups.....	14
Better Choice Recommendations.....	15
Beverages.....	15
Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance.....	15
Commercial food products.....	15
Foods made from scratch.....	16
Foods Requiring Standardized Recipes.....	17
Maintaining required CNS compliance documentation.....	17
Glossary.....	18
Resources.....	20

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Overview of CNS

The CNS applies to all foods available for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals and all foods served in the [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#) of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The CSDE developed the CNS in response to [Section 10-215e](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S), which required the CSDE to publish nutrition standards for foods offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals in public schools, effective with school year 2006-07. For detailed guidance on the rationale and implementation guidance for the CNS and a complete glossary, refer to the CSDE's [Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools](#).

The general standards and nutrients addressed in the CNS are based on current nutrition science and national health recommendations from the [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and national health organizations such as the National Academy of Medicine and American Heart Association. These standards focus on moderating calories; limiting fat, saturated fat, sodium, and sugars; and promoting more nutrient-dense foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat and nonfat dairy products, lean meats, beans, peas, and lentils, and nuts and seeds.

The CNS meets or exceeds the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Smart Snacks nutrition standards](#) for competitive foods. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Comparison of the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and the USDA's Smart Snacks Nutrition Standards](#).

When CNS is required

Public school districts that choose to implement the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) under [C.G.S. Section 10-215f](#) must follow the CNS for 1) all foods sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals, at all times and from all sources on school premises; and 2) all foods served in the ASP of the NSLP. Foods sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals include cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, culinary programs, and any other sources of food sales to students on school premises.

CNS food categories

The CNS includes the six categories of competitive foods below. Each category has specific nutrient standards.

1. Snacks
2. Entrees Sold Only A La Carte
3. Non-entree Combination Foods
4. Fruits and Vegetables
5. Cooked Grains
6. Soups

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Allowable foods

To be allowed for sale to students, commercial products and foods made from scratch must comply with the following CNS requirements: 1) the food must meet at least one general standard (refer to "[CNS General Standards](#)" in this document); and 2) the serving with its accompaniments must meet the specific nutrient standards for the applicable food category (refer to the categories 1-6 in this document).

Exempt foods

The three categories of foods below are exempt from the CNS general standards and all CNS nutrient standards.

1. **Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables** with no added ingredients except water.
2. **Canned fruits** with no added ingredients except water; or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup, or light syrup, all without added nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes).
3. **Low sodium/no salt added canned vegetables** with no added fats, nonnutritive sweeteners, or sugar alcohols.

All other foods are not exempt from the CNS. They must meet at least one general standard and all nutrient standards for the applicable food category.

Prohibited foods and beverages

The two categories of foods and beverages below are not allowed even if they meet the CNS or the requirements of the state beverage statute.

1. Significantly fortified products (except for naturally nutrient-rich foods fortified with nutrients at levels based on scientifically documented health needs, such as milk fortified with vitamins A and D).
2. Products that contain nutrition supplements, e.g., amino acids, extracts, herbs, or other botanicals. Commercial products may contain the following ingredients when used for color or flavor only: vegetable and fruit extracts (such as pomegranate extract, beet extract, and red cabbage extract) and [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)-approved food colors](#) from natural sources such as spirulina and turmeric extract.

Review the ingredients statement to determine if commercial products are in these categories.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

CNS General Standards

The food item must meet at least one of the three general standards below.

- **General Standard 1 – Whole Grain-rich (WGR) Foods:** The food item is a WGR grain product that meets the applicable WGR criteria below. For guidance on the foods in each grain group (A-I), refer to the CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#).
 - **Commercial grain products in groups A-G (e.g., breads, muffins, pancakes, and crackers) and group H (e.g., rice, pasta, quinoa, and cooked breakfast cereals like oatmeal):** 1) The product is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G or 6.99 grams per portion for group H.
 - **Ready-to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereals (group I):** 1) The first ingredient is a whole grain and the cereal is fortified or the cereal is 100 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
 - **Commercial combination foods containing a grain portion from groups A-I, e.g., pizza crust in pizza, noodles in lasagna, and breading on chicken nuggets:** 1) The grain portion is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains in the grain portion do not exceed 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G or 6.99 grams per portion for groups H-I.

For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

- **General Standard 2 – Food Groups:** The food item has one of the following food groups as the first ingredient: fruits, vegetables, dairy, or protein foods, e.g., meat, beans, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, and seeds. If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be a fruit, vegetable, whole grain, dairy, or protein food.
- **General Standard 3 – Combination Foods:** The food item is a combination food that contains at least $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of fruit and/or vegetable per serving.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 1: Snacks

The snacks category includes snack foods such as chips, crackers, popcorn, rice cakes, hard pretzels, pita chips, snack mix, and trail mix; cookies, cereal bars, and granola bars; bakery items such as brownies, pastries, toaster pastries, muffins, waffles, pancakes, French toast, soft pretzels, and rolls; ice cream, ice cream novelties, and frozen desserts; breakfast cereals, including cold RTE cereals and cooked hot cereals like oatmeal; nuts and seeds; peanut butter and other nut/seed butters; meat snacks such as jerky and meat sticks; cheese, pudding, and yogurt; and smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and/or fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice.

Nutrient Standards for Snacks

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, dips, sauces, and condiments.

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
 - **Breakfast cereals (RTE and cooked, e.g., oatmeal):** No more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
 - **Yogurt and pudding:** No more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (i.e., no more than 2 grams per ounce). No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
 - **Smoothies (made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice):** No more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (i.e., no more than 2 grams per ounce). No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. Portion size is limited to no more than 8 fluid ounces for elementary schools and 12 fluid ounces for middle and high schools.
- **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Exemptions for Snacks

This category allows exemptions for total fat, saturated fat, and sugars for certain foods.

- **Exemption 1 – Total fat and saturated fat:** The following foods are exempt from the total fat and saturated fat standards but cannot contain chemically altered fat substitutes:
 - low-fat or reduced fat 100 percent natural cheese (including part-skim mozzarella);
 - nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters (including products that contain small amounts of added fat from processing or roasting);
 - products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and
 - dried seafood with no added fat (exempt from total fat standard but not saturated fat standard). **Note:** Regular seafood is in the category of entrees sold only a la carte (refer to [Category 2: Entrees Sold Only A La Carte](#)).

All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.

The fat exemption does not apply to foods that contain cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and dried fruit as an **ingredient**, e.g., peanut butter cookies, pecan cookies, granola bars with nuts, cranberry walnut muffin, cheese crackers, cheese sauce, peanut butter crackers, and sesame seed crackers. These foods must meet the fat and saturated fat standards for the CNS snacks category.

- **Exemption 2 – Sugars:** The foods below are exempt from the sugars standard.
 - Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes).
 - Frozen desserts containing only 100 percent juice and/or fruit and no added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols).

All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 2: Entrees Sold Only A La Carte

This category applies only to foods that meet the CNS entree definition.

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 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), excluding yogurt, cheese, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., beef jerky and meat sticks. These foods must comply with the standards for the snacks category (refer to “[Category 1: Snacks](#)”).

Foods that do not meet one of the three categories above are not entrees and must be evaluated using the specific nutrient standards for the applicable CNS food category (refer to categories 1 and 3-6 in this document).

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Nutrient Standards for Entrees Sold Only A La Carte

The entree standards apply only to entree items that are **sold only a la carte**, i.e., entrees that are not part of a reimbursable meal. Entree items that are sold a la carte during the meal service on the **same day** that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable school meals are exempt from all nutrient standards if they meet the specified exemption criteria (refer to "[Exemption 1 – Entrees as Part of Reimbursable Meals](#)" in this document).

The standards below apply to the amount of the entree as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

- **Calories:** No more than 350 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- **Sodium:** No more than 480 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Exemptions for Entrees Sold Only A La Carte

The entree exemptions include an exemption from all standards for entrees that are also part of reimbursable meals and an exemption from the total fat standard for certain entrees.

- **Exemption 1 – Entrees as part of reimbursable meals:** Entree items that are sold a la carte during the 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 NSLP/SBP reimbursable meals.
 2. The entree item has the same accompaniments as the entree item served in NSLP/SBP reimbursable meals.
 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), i.e., entree items that are sold a la carte during the meal service on the same day that they are planned and sold as part of a reimbursable meal. This 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.

All other non-entree meal items that are sold a la carte are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards. For example, french fries that are part of a reimbursable meal cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with the CNS for fruits and vegetables (refer to [“Category 4: Fruits and Vegetables”](#)). Muffins that are part of a reimbursable meal cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with the CNS for snacks (refer to [“Category 1: Snacks”](#)).

- **Exemption 2 – Total fat:** The following entrees are exempt from the total fat standard but not the saturated fat standard:
 - seafood with no added fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes);
 - whole eggs with no added fat; and
 - bean dips (including products marketed as hummus and bean dips made from any variety of beans, peas, or lentils).

All other entrees are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet the criteria for [“Exemption 1 – Entrees as part of reimbursable meals”](#) above.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 3: Non-entree Combination Foods

This category includes nutrient-rich combination foods that are not entrees, such as WGR vegetable egg rolls, carrot sticks with peanut butter, and vegetables with hummus dip. Foods in this category either:

- do not meet the CNS main dish entree criteria (refer to “[CNS Entree Definition](#)” in “Category 2: Entrees Sold Only A La Carte”) or
- do not provide the minimum meal pattern requirements for meats/meat alternates and grains together, or meats/meat alternates alone.

Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the snacks category (refer to “[Category 1: Snacks](#)”).

Nutrient Standards for Non-entree Combination Foods

The standards below apply to the amount of the non-entree combination food as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Exemptions for Non-entree Combination Foods

This category allows an exemptions for total fat for certain foods.

- **Exemption 1 – Total fat:** Bean dips are exempt from the total fat standard. This exemption applies to products marketed as hummus, and bean dips made from any variety of beans, peas, or lentils.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 4: Fruits and Vegetables

This category includes fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits (including fruit snacks that are 100 percent fruit) and fresh, frozen, canned, and dried vegetables (including roasted beans, peas, and lentils, e.g., roasted chickpeas).

Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the CNS snacks category (refer to "[Category 1: Snacks](#)").

Nutrient Standards for Fruits and Vegetables

The standards below apply to the amount of fruit or vegetable as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Exemptions for Fruits and Vegetables

This category allows an exemption from all standards for certain types of fruits and vegetables and an exemption from the sugars standard for certain types of fruits and vegetables.

- **Exemption 1 – All nutrient standards:** The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from all nutrient standards:
 - fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables with no added ingredients except water;
 - canned fruits with no added ingredients except water; or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup, or light syrup, all without added nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and
 - low sodium/no salt added canned vegetables with no added fats, nonnutritive sweeteners, or sugar alcohols.

All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.

- **Exemption 2 – Sugars:** The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from the CNS sugars standard:
 - dried whole fruits or vegetables without added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes);
 - dried whole fruit or vegetable pieces without added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and
 - dehydrated fruits or vegetables without added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes).

All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet the criteria for “Exemption 1 – All Nutrient Standards” above.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 5: Cooked Grains

This category includes all cooked grains such as rice, pasta, and quinoa, except cooked breakfast cereals. Cooked breakfast cereals like oatmeal are in the CNS snacks category (refer to "[Category 1: Snacks](#)").

Nutrient Standards for Cooked Grains

The standards below apply to the amount of the cooked grain item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, oil, mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

- **Whole grain-rich (WGR):** Cooked grains (group H) must be WGR: 1) the food is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Exemptions for Cooked Grains

- None

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Category 6: Soups

This category includes all soups, e.g., ready-to-serve, canned, frozen, and rehydrated, and made from scratch.

Nutrient Standards for Soups

The standards below apply to the amount of the soup as served, including any added accompaniments such as sour cream, grated cheese, or croutons.

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Sugars:** No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols.
- **Sodium:** No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Caffeine:** No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances.

Exemptions for Soups

- None

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Better Choice Recommendations

The Better Choice Recommendations are additional recommendations beyond the CNS requirements. They are listed in the green and white columns on the right of each food and beverage list on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage](#). The Better Choice Recommendations are not required, but help schools identify foods that are even better choices. Foods that meet these recommendations are often less processed and more nutrient-rich.

The Better Choice Recommendations vary for each food category but generally include the following:

- no artificial flavors or colors;
- no high fructose corn syrup;
- at least 2.5 grams of fiber (a “good” source of fiber as defined by the Food and Drug Administration); and
- 100 percent whole grain (applies only to products containing grains).

The CSDE strongly encourages schools to choose foods that meet these recommendations.

Beverages

The requirements for beverages allowed for sale to students in public schools are separate from the CNS. The beverage requirements are defined by C.G.S. [Section 10-221q](#), and apply to all public schools, regardless of whether the district participates in HFC or the NSLP. Some state beverage requirements are stricter than the Smart Snacks beverage standards. Schools must follow whichever requirements are stricter. For more information on the beverage requirements, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Beverages in Connecticut Public Schools](#), and visit the CSDE's [Beverage Requirements](#) webpage.

Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance

Foods must be evaluated for CNS compliance based on the amount of the food as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, salad dressing, and condiments. Some examples include bagels with cream cheese, tortilla chips with salsa, french fries with ketchup, salad with dressing, and chicken nuggets with dipping sauce.

Commercial food products

The CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage includes brand-specific lists of commercial food products that comply with the CNS and beverages that comply with the state beverage requirements of C.G.S. [Section 10-221q](#). For information on how to evaluate commercial products for CNS compliance, refer to the CSDE's resource, [How to Evaluate Commercial Food](#)

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

[Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#). Districts may submit commercial products to the CSDE for review following the guidance in the CSDE's resource, [Submitting Food and Beverage Products for Approval](#).

If a commercial product is served with accompaniments, the selling entity must add the nutrition information for accompaniments to the nutrition information for the approved product to determine if the serving still complies with the CNS. The serving of the food with its accompaniments must meet each nutrition standard for the applicable CNS food category, as documented by the completed CNS worksheet for the applicable food category (refer to "[CNS Worksheets](#)" in the "Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage).

Foods made from scratch

Foods made from scratch cannot be sold to students on school premises unless the selling entity has documentation on file to indicate that the serving with its accompaniments complies with the CNS. The required CNS documentation includes the two items below.

1. **Standardized recipe:** An accurate standardized recipe that indicates the calories, fat, saturated fat, sodium, and sugars per serving. For guidance on developing and using standardized recipes, visit the "[Standardized Recipes](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.
2. **CNS worksheet:** The completed CNS worksheet for the applicable food category documenting that the serving with its accompaniments complies with the CNS (refer to "[CNS Worksheets](#)" in the "Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage).

Accompaniments are foods that accompany another food or beverage, such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and salad dressing. Foods must be evaluated for CNS compliance based on the serving including any added accompaniments.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Foods Requiring Standardized Recipes

Standardized recipes that include the nutrition information per serving are required for the two categories of foods made from scratch below.

- **Category 1 – Foods Prepared from Ingredients Using a Standardized Recipe:**
Examples include entrees sold only a la carte (i.e., not as part of reimbursable meals in the National School Lunch Program [NSLP] and School Breakfast Program [SBP]) such as pizza, chef's salad, lasagna, and sandwiches; soups; cooked grains (e.g., rice and pasta) with added salt and fat, e.g., oil, margarine, or butter; cooked vegetables with added salt and fat; salad with dressing; fruit smoothies; and baked goods, e.g., muffins and cookies.
- **Category 2 – Commercial Products with Ingredients Added After Purchasing:**
Examples include popping popcorn kernels in oil and adding salt; making muffins from a mix and adding butter and eggs; and adding sprinkles to commercial frozen cookie dough.

Adding ingredients to a commercial product changes its nutrition information per serving. The selling entity must create a standardized recipe for these foods based on the specific amount of each ingredient, then conduct a nutrient analysis to determine the nutrition information per serving.

For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Guidance on Evaluating Recipes for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) and [How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#), and visit the "[Standardized Recipes](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage. Training is available in Module 4: Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance of the CSDE's [Complying with Healthy Food Certification](#) training program.

Maintaining required CNS compliance documentation

Schools must maintain CNS documentation on file for the annual HFC documentation (due by November 30) and the CSDE's [Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs](#). For easy access, the CSDE recommends storing this information electronically in a computer folder. For more information on the HFC documentation requirements, visit the "[Annual HFC Documentation](#)" section of the CSDE's HFC webpage and refer to the CSDE's resource, [Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#).

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Glossary

a la carte sales: Foods and beverages that are sold separately from reimbursable meals in the USDA's [school nutrition programs](#). Also known as “competitive foods.”

accompaniments: Foods that accompany another food or beverage item, such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and salad dressing. Foods must be evaluated for CNS compliance based on the serving including any added accompaniments. Examples include hamburger with ketchup and mustard, bagel with cream cheese, waffles with syrup, WGR pasta with butter, salad with dressing, and fruit crisp with whipped cream.

artificial sweeteners: A category of nonnutritive sweeteners used as sugar substitutes to sweeten foods and beverages. The six artificial sweeteners approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) include 1) acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) (e.g., Sweet One®, Sunett®, and Sweet & Safe®); 2) advantame; 3) aspartame (e.g., Nutrasweet®, Equal®, and Sugar Twin®); 4) neotame (e.g., Newtame®); 5) saccharin (e.g., Sweet and Low®, Sweet Twin®, and Necta Sweet); and 6) sucralose (Splenda®). These nonnutritive sweeteners are calorie-free except for aspartame, which is very low in calories.

bean dip: A spread made from ground pulses (beans, peas, and/or lentils) with one or more of the following optional ingredients: ground nut/seed butter (such as tahini [ground sesame] or peanut butter; vegetable oil (such as olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil); seasoning (such as salt, citric acid); vegetables and juice for flavor (such as olives, roasted peppers, garlic, lemon juice); and for manufactured bean dip, ingredients necessary as preservatives and/or to maintain freshness.

chemically altered fat substitutes: Compounds made by chemically manipulating food products to mimic the texture and flavor of fat while providing fewer calories and less metabolizable fat. Examples include olestra (Olean®) and microparticulated whey protein concentrate (Simplese®).

combination foods: Products that contain two or more components representing two or more of the recommended food groups, which include fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins, or grains. Many combination foods also meet the definition for entrees, e.g., pizza, lasagna, and hamburger on a whole-grain bun.

competitive foods: Any foods and beverages that are available for sale to students anytime on school premises, other than meals served through the USDA's school nutrition programs. Competitive food sales include, but are not limited to, *cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, and fundraisers*. Sales of competitive foods include any activity during which currency, tokens, tickets, or similar items are exchanged for foods or beverages.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

entrees: A food item that is one of the following three categories of main dish food items: 1) a combination food of meat/meat alternate and whole grain-rich (WGR) food, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on a whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on a whole-grain bun, and bean burrito with whole-corn tortilla; 2) a combination food of vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate, e.g., chef's salad with turkey, cheese and hard-boiled egg; cheese and egg; fruit and cheese platter; yogurt and fruit parfaits; school-made yogurt and fruit smoothies; baked potato with chili; and chicken vegetable stir-fry; and 3) a meat/meat alternate alone (e.g., sausage patty, hard-boiled egg, grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., jerky and meat sticks. Yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and meat snacks must meet the nutrition standards for the snacks category.

nonnutritive sweeteners: Ingredients without calories that are hundreds of times sweeter than sugars and are used as sugar substitutes to sweeten foods and beverages. Nonnutritive sweeteners include the six FDA-approved artificial sweeteners (acesulfame potassium (Ace-K), advantame, aspartame, neotame, saccharin, and sucralose) and three plant-based sweeteners (stevia, monk fruit, and thaumatin) that are [Generally Recognized as Safe \(GRAS\)](#) by the FDA. For more information on nonnutritive sweeteners, refer to the FDA's [Aspartame and Other Sweeteners in Food](#) webpage.

portion size: The amount of the item as packaged or served. The individual serving size or package cannot exceed 350 calories for entrees or 200 calories for all other foods, including any added accompaniments.

reimbursable meal: A meal that meets the meal pattern requirements of the USDA's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).

school day: The period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. For example, if school ends at 3:00 p.m., the school day is from midnight to 3:30 p.m. Summer school programs operated by the school governing authority are part of the regular school day.

school premises: All areas of the property under the jurisdiction of the local or regional board of education, the regional vocational-technical school system, or the governing authority district or school.

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

sugar alcohols (polyols): A type of carbohydrate used as a sugar substitute to sweeten foods and beverages. Sugar alcohols are incompletely absorbed and metabolized by the body and contribute fewer calories than most sugars. They also perform other functions such as adding bulk and texture to foods. Common sugar alcohols include sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, maltitol, maltitol syrup, lactitol, erythritol, isomalt, and hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH). Products with sugar alcohols are often labeled “sugar free.”

total sugars: All sources of sugars including naturally occurring sugars (e.g., fruits, vegetables, and milk) and added sugars (e.g., brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar, and syrup).

For more definitions, refer to the glossary in the CSDE’s publication, [Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools](#).

Resources

[Annual HFC Documentation](#) (CSDE’s Healthy Food Certification webpage):

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

[Beverage Requirements](#) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/beverage-requirements>

[Complying with Healthy Food Certification](#) (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>

[Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#)(CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_cereals_snp.pdf

[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>

[Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/grain_oz_eq_snp.pdf

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

[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

[Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/guide_wgr_requirement_snp_grades_k-12.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>

[Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/adminrev/records_retention_snp.pdf

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

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

[Summary Chart of 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

[When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#) (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/when_commercial_grain_products_require_pfs_snp.pdf

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards

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 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/cns/connecticut_nutrition_standards_summary.pdf.



The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race; color; religious creed; age; sex; pregnancy; sexual orientation; workplace hazards to reproductive systems, gender identity or expression; marital status; national origin; ancestry; retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, intellectual disability; genetic information; learning disability; physical disability (including, but not limited to, blindness); mental disability (past/present history thereof); military or veteran status; status as a victim of domestic violence; or criminal record in state employment, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes. Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Attorney Louis Todisco, Connecticut State Department of Education, by mail 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103-1841; or by telephone 860-713-6594; or by email louis.todisco@ct.gov.