

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

School Year 2025-26 (July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026)

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 in the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#) and [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#). The [Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#) of the NSLP follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. Grain-based desserts do not credit in the [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#) of meal pattern for grades K-12 or the [NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns](#).

For information on the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



Contents

Crediting Grain-based Desserts	2
Foods that are Not Grain-based Desserts	3
Limit for Grain-based Desserts at Lunch	3
Grain-based Desserts at Breakfast.....	3
Grain-based Desserts Served with Daily Alternate Lunch Choices	3
Grain-based Desserts Served as Extra Foods	4
Identifying Grain-based Desserts	4
Product names may be misleading	4
Table 1. Creditable grain-based desserts for breakfast and lunch	5
Required Crediting Documentation.....	6
Documentation for commercial grain-based desserts.....	6
Documentation for grain-based desserts made from scratch	7
Storing documentation	7
Resources.....	8



Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Crediting Grain-based Desserts

Grain-based desserts must meet three criteria to credit as the grains component in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12:

- they must be whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched;
- they cannot exceed the limit for noncreditable grains (no more than 3.99 grams per portion); and
- they must meet the specific meal pattern requirements for breakfast and lunch.

For guidance on identifying WGR and enriched 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 [Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

Creditable grain-based desserts are allowed in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12. However, not all grain-based desserts credit at all meals. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns allow different types of grain-based desserts and have different crediting restrictions (refer to [table 1](#)).

Some examples of grain-based desserts include brownies, cookies (including animal crackers, graham crackers, and vanilla wafers), cakes, cupcakes, coffee cakes, cinnamon streusel quick breads, piecrusts in sweet pies (e.g., apple, coconut, blueberry, and pecan), cinnamon rolls, doughnuts, cereal bars, granola bars, breakfast bars, sweet rolls, pastries, toaster pastries, sweet scones (e.g., blueberry, orange cranberry, and chocolate chip), sweet croissants (e.g., chocolate or almond filled), sweet rice puddings (e.g., cinnamon and vanilla), sweet bread puddings (e.g., made with cinnamon, fruits, chocolate, or icing), and sweet pita chips (e.g., cinnamon sugar).

Grain-based desserts often contain more fat and added sugars than traditional grains. School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that grain-based desserts do not cause the weekly breakfast or lunch menus to exceed the weekly [dietary specifications](#) (nutrition standards). The CSDE recommends offering nutrient-dense whole grains instead of grain-based desserts.

For information on the dietary specifications, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) and visit the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Foods that are Not Grain-based Desserts

Grain-based desserts do not include quick breads such as banana bread and zucchini bread (except for cinnamon streusel), cornbread, pancakes, waffles, French toast, savory scones (e.g., cheese and herb), and piecrusts in entrees (e.g., quiche, meat pies, and chicken potpie).

Limit for Grain-based Desserts at Lunch

The lunch meal pattern requires a limit of no more than 2 ounce equivalents (oz eq) of grain-based desserts per week. For example, the lunch menu may include a 2-oz eq grain-based dessert once per week or a 1-oz eq grain-based dessert twice per week. This limit applies to all WGR and enriched grain-based desserts.

Grain-based Desserts at Breakfast

The breakfast meal pattern does not require a limit for grain-based desserts but restricts the types that are allowed. For example, cookies, brownies, cupcakes, and fruit cobblers do not credit at breakfast.

Some examples of allowable grain-based desserts at breakfast include animal crackers and graham crackers, cereal bars, granola bars, doughnuts, fruit turnovers, pastries, and sweet rolls (refer to [table 1](#)).

The CSDE recommends limiting grain-based desserts at breakfast. Menus that frequently include grain-based desserts might not meet the weekly dietary specifications for school meals.

Grain-based Desserts Served with Daily Alternate Lunch Choices

SFAs cannot offer grain-based desserts like graham crackers or animal crackers as the grains component of a daily alternate lunch choice. An example is an alternate lunch menu for grades 9-12 that includes 1 cup of yogurt, 1 cup of fresh fruit, 1 cup of fresh vegetables, 2 oz eq of graham crackers, and 1 cup of milk. While this lunch menu meets the NSLP meal pattern, it cannot be offered as a daily choice because offering 2 oz eq of graham crackers each day exceeds the weekly limit of 2 oz eq.

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Grain-based Desserts Served as Extra Foods

Grain-based desserts served as extra menu items at breakfast and lunch count toward the minimum daily and weekly oz eq of the grains component and the weekly dietary specifications. Grain-based desserts cannot cause the breakfast or lunch menu to exceed the weekly dietary specifications for school meals. At lunch, grain-based desserts served as extra menu items also count toward the weekly limit of no more than 2 oz eq.

Identifying Grain-based Desserts

Only certain grain-based desserts are allowed at breakfast and lunch. The CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#), identifies creditable grain-based desserts in blue and red. Grain-based desserts in blue are allowed at breakfast and lunch. Grain-based desserts in red are allowed only at lunch and cannot exceed 2 oz eq per week.

The USDA does not define a specific amount of sugar or fat that classifies a grain food as a dessert. If a product is not listed on the CSDE's charts, SFAs may decide if a food is a grain-based dessert by considering the common perceptions of the food and how it is typically served. The questions below help SFAs determine if the product is a grain-based dessert.

- Is the food thought of or served as a dessert?
- Is it frosted, iced, or dessert-flavored, like chocolate, caramel, or butterscotch?
- Does it contain custard filling or candy?
- Is it in the shape of a cookie or packaged like a dessert?

A product is a grain-based dessert if it meets any of these criteria.

Product names may be misleading

SFAs should not rely on the product's name to determine if a food is grain-based dessert because cookies and similar grain-based desserts do not have a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standard of identity. This means that manufacturers may use terms in their product names or labels that might be misleading. Some examples include "breakfast rounds" for oatmeal raisin cookies, "breakfast bars" for cereal bars, and "super stars" for doughnut holes.

Regardless of the name on the label, these types of foods are still grain-based desserts. They must comply with the weekly limit for grain-based desserts at lunch (no more than 2 oz eq) and the crediting restrictions for grain-based desserts at breakfast (only certain types are allowed).

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Table 1 identifies the creditable grain-based desserts for breakfast and lunch. At lunch, grain-based desserts at lunch cannot exceed 2 oz eq per week.

Table 1. Creditable grain-based desserts for breakfast and lunch

Food item (must be WGR or enriched)	SBP	NSLP
Animal crackers	X	X
Breakfast bars, plain or with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate pieces, fruit purees, filling, and frosting	X	X
Brownies, frosted		
Brownies, plain		X
Cakes and cupcakes, plain or frosted		X
Cereal bars and grain-fruit bars	X	X
Cobbler/crisp topping in fruit cobblers and crisps		X
Coffee cakes, including cinnamon streusel quick breads	X	X
Cookies and bars, plain, frosted, or filled		X
Doughnuts, plain, frosted, or glazed	X	X
Graham crackers	X	X
Granola bars, all types	X	X
Marshmallow cereal treats		X
Pastries, plain or frosted, e.g., cinnamon rolls, sweet rolls, toaster pastries, fruit turnovers, sweet croissants (e.g., chocolate or almond filled), sweet scones (e.g., with fruit or chocolate)	X	X
Piecrust in dessert pies, e.g., fruit, chocolate, pecan		X
Sweet pita chips, e.g., cinnamon sugar		X

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Required Crediting Documentation

SFAs must be able to document that grain-based desserts meet the crediting requirements for the grains component. The guidance below summarizes the required documentation for commercial products and foods made from scratch. Documentation must be based on the food yields and crediting information in the USDA's [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs](#) (FBG).

Documentation for commercial grain-based desserts

A PFS from the manufacturer is required if the product's ingredients statement and packaging do not provide sufficient information to determine if the grain-based dessert meets the crediting criteria. The grain-based dessert cannot credit in reimbursable meals if the manufacturer will not supply a PFS or the PFS does not provide the appropriate documentation.

The USDA requires that SFAs must verify the PFS for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the product in reimbursable meals. For guidance on when a PFS is required and the information it must include, refer to the CSDE's resource, [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

For more information on PFS forms, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and the USDA's resources, [USDA Memo SP 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, SFSP 02-2025: Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements](#) and [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#).

Additional guidance is available on the CSDE's [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training on the requirements for PFS forms is available in Module 8: Meal Pattern Documentation for Crediting Commercial Processed Products, of the CSDE's training program, [What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Documentation for grain-based desserts made from scratch

SFAs must have standardized recipes on file that document the crediting information for all grain-based desserts made from scratch, including foods made on site by the SFA and foods prepared by vendors. Standardized recipes credit as the grains component based on the grams of creditable grains per serving. If the standardized recipe indicates the weight of the prepared (cooked) serving, menu planners may use the required weight (groups B-G) for the applicable grain group in the CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#).

For more information on standardized recipes, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs](#) and visit the "Standardized Recipes" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Storing documentation

SFAs must maintain all crediting documentation on file in accordance with the records retention requirements for the school nutrition programs (refer to the CSDE's [Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#)). This documentation must be current and will be reviewed by the CSDE during the [Administrative Review](#) of the school nutrition programs.



Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Resources

Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Meal Patterns for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Program (CSDE webpage):

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

Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Crediting Whole Grains in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

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

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

Grains Component (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs/grains>

Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Product Formulation Statements (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/product-formulation-statements>

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

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

Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE Training Program):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials>

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

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

For more information, visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) 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/nslp/crediting/credit_grain_based_desserts_grades_k-12_nslp_sbp.pdf.

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