

# Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

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), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. The SSO follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For information on the meal patterns for grades K-12, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and the “[ASP Meal Patterns](#)” section of the CSDE’s ASP webpage.



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## Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

### Crediting Grain-based Desserts

To credit as the grains component in the school nutrition programs, grain-based desserts must contain creditable grains (whole grain, enriched grains, bran, and germ), cannot exceed the limit for noncreditable grains, and must meet the specific meal pattern requirements for each school nutrition program. For guidance on crediting grains, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#), and [Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

Creditable grain-based desserts are allowed in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12. However, not all grain-based desserts credit at all meals. The NSLP, SBP, and ASP 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 lunch or breakfast menus to exceed the dietary specifications for school meals (weekly limits for calories, saturated fat, and sodium). The CSDE recommends offering nutrient-dense whole grains instead of grain-based desserts.

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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 (such as cheese and herb), and piecrusts in entrees such as quiche, meat pies, and chicken potpie.

### Limit for Grain-based Desserts at Lunch

The lunch meal pattern requires a weekly limit for grain-based desserts. The total amount of grain-based desserts offered at lunch cannot exceed 2 ounce equivalents (oz eq) 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 whole grain-rich (WGR) and enriched grain-based dessert menu items. For more information on the grains component, visit the “[Grains Component](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

### 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 calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

### Grain-based Desserts in ASP Snacks

The ASP meal pattern does not require a limit for grain-based desserts. The CSDE recommends limiting grain-based desserts to no more than twice per week. For guidance on the grains/breads component, refer to section 2 of the CSDE’s [Afterschool Snack Program Handbook](#) and visit the “[Grains/Breads Component](#)” section of the CSDE’s [ASP](#) webpage.

Effective with school year 2025-26 (beginning July 1, 2025), the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), aligns the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 with the CACFP snack meal pattern for children. Grain-based desserts cannot credit in ASP snacks.

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### Grain-based Desserts Served with Daily Alternate Lunch Choices

SFAs cannot offer grain-based desserts such as graham crackers or animal crackers as the grains component of a daily alternate lunch choice. An example is the following alternate lunch menu for grades 9-12: 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. The high school cannot offer this lunch as a daily choice because offering 2 oz eq of graham crackers each day exceeds the weekly limit of 2 oz eq.

### Grain-based Desserts Served as Extra Foods

Grain-based desserts served as extra menu items at lunch and breakfast count toward the minimum daily and weekly servings of the grains component and the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. At lunch, grain-based desserts also count toward the weekly limit of no more than 2 oz eq.

### Identifying Grain-based Desserts

The CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#), identifies creditable grain-based desserts in red with the footnote 1 or 2. A grain-based dessert with footnote 1 credits only at lunch. These foods count toward the weekly limit for grain-based desserts at lunch. A grain-based dessert with footnote 2 credits at either lunch or breakfast. The CSDE's resource, [Servings for Grains/Breads in the Afterschool Snack Program Meal Pattern for Grades K-12](#), identifies creditable grain-based desserts for the ASP in red.

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 grains ounce equivalent chart, SFAs may decide if a food is a grain-based dessert by considering the common perceptions of the food and how it's 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?

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 its label, these types of foods are still grain-based desserts. They

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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).

**Table 1. Do these grain-based desserts credit as the grains component?**

<b>Food item (must be WGR or enriched)</b>	<b>NSLP <sup>1,2</sup></b>	<b>SBP <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>ASP <sup>3</sup></b>
Animal crackers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Breakfast bars, plain or with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate pieces, fruit purees, filling, and frosting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brownies, frosted	No	No	No
Brownies, plain	Yes	No	Yes
Cakes and cupcakes, plain or frosted	Yes	No	Yes
Cereal bars, plain or with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate pieces, fruit purees, filling, and frosting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coffee cakes, cinnamon streusel quick breads	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cookies, plain or with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate pieces, fruit purees, filling, and frosting	Yes	No	Yes
Dessert pies, e.g., fruit, chocolate, pecan (piecrust)	Yes	No	Yes
Doughnuts, plain, frosted, or glazed	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fruit cobblers and crisps (cobbler/crisp topping)	Yes	No	Yes
Fruit turnovers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Graham crackers	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grain-fruit bars, e.g., cereal bars	Yes	Yes	Yes
Granola bars, plain or with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate pieces, fruit purees, filling, and frosting	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marshmallow cereal treats	Yes	No	Yes
Pastries, plain or frosted, e.g., cinnamon rolls, sweet rolls, toaster pastries, sweet croissants (e.g., chocolate or almond filled), sweet scones (e.g., with fruit or chocolate)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sweet pita chips, e.g., cinnamon sugar	Yes	No	Yes

<sup>1</sup> Grain-based desserts cannot cause lunch and breakfast menus to exceed the weekly dietary specifications for school meals (limits for calories, saturated fats, and sodium).

<sup>2</sup> Grain-based desserts at lunch cannot exceed 2 oz eq per week.

<sup>3</sup> Recommended limit of no more than twice per week in the ASP.

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### Crediting Documentation for Commercial Grain-based Desserts

SFAs must be able to document that commercial grain-based desserts meet the crediting requirements of the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns. A PFS from the manufacturer is required if the product's ingredients statement and packaging do not provide sufficient information to determine if it meets the crediting criteria for the school nutrition programs. 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](#).

SFAs must verify the accuracy of the PFS before including the commercial grain-based dessert in reimbursable meals and ASP snacks. Crediting documentation must be maintained on file. The CSDE will review this information during the Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs.

If the manufacturer will not supply a PFS or the PFS does not provide the appropriate documentation, the grain-based dessert cannot credit as the grains component in the meal patterns for 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 [Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Grains in Child Nutrition Programs](#) and [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#). The steps for how to evaluate a grain product's PFS are available in the CSDE's resource, [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#).



Training on the requirements for PFS forms is available in Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation of the CSDE's training program, [What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#).

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## Resources

Afterschool Snack Program Handbook (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/asp\\_handbook.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/asp_handbook.pdf)

Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents 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/grain\\_calculation\\_snp\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/grain_calculation_snp_grades_k-12.pdf)

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

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit\\_enriched\\_grains\\_snp.pdf](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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_whole_grains_snp.pdf)

Exhibit A Grains Tool to the Rescue (USDA Webinar):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/exhibit-grains-tool-rescue>

Exhibit A: Grain Requirements for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://foodbuyingguide.fns.usda.gov/Content/TablesFBG/ExhibitA.pdf>

Food Buying Guide Exhibit A Grains Tool (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-interactive-web-based-tool>

Grain Ounce Equivalents 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/grain\\_oz\\_eq\\_snp\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/grain_oz_eq_snp_grades_k-12.pdf)

Grains Component for Grades K-12 (“Documents/Forms” section of CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

Grains/Breads Component for Grades K-12 in the ASP (“Documents/Forms” section of the CSDE’s Afterschool Snack Program webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/afterschool-snack-program/documents#GrainsBreadsK12>

Grains/Breads Servings for Grades K-12 in the Afterschool Snack Program (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/grains\\_breads\\_servings\\_asp\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/grains_breads_servings_asp_grades_k-12.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/wgr\\_requirement\\_snp\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/wgr_requirement_snp_grades_k-12.pdf)

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How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/how\\_to\\_use\\_ounce\\_equivalents\\_chart.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/how_to_use_ounce_equivalents_chart.pdf)

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs>

Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guide-for-school-meals>

Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Grains in Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

[https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS\\_Grains\\_Oz\\_Eq\\_Fillable\\_508.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Grains_Oz_Eq_Fillable_508.pdf)

Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Grains in Child Nutrition Programs – Completed Sample (USDA):

[https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS\\_Example\\_Grains\\_Oz\\_Eq.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Example_Grains_Oz_Eq.pdf)

Resources for the School Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/resources\\_school\\_meal\\_patterns\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/resources_school_meal_patterns_grades_k-12.pdf)

Servings for Grains/Breads in the Afterschool Snack Program Meal Pattern for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/grains\\_breads\\_servings\\_asp\\_grades\\_k-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/asp/grains_breads_servings_asp_grades_k-12.pdf)

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

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/product\\_formulation\\_statements.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/product_formulation_statements.pdf)

What's in a Meal Module 11: Grains Component (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

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

What's in a Meal Module 12: Whole Grain-rich Requirement (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

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



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What's in a Meal Module 13: Grains Ounce Equivalents (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

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

What's in a Meal Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

<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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/when_commercial_grain_products_require_pfs_snp.pdf)

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For more information, visit the “Grains Component” section of the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) or [Crediting Foods in Preschool Menus](#) webpages 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\\_snp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_grain_based_desserts_grades_k-12_snp.pdf).

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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