

Crediting Juice 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). The SSO follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For information on the meal pattern requirements and crediting foods, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#) and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



Contents

Overview of Crediting Requirements.....	2
Allowable Types of Juice	3
Juice ingredients.....	3
Crediting Juice Concentrates	4
Crediting Juice Blends at Lunch and Breakfast.....	4
Crediting Frozen 100 Percent Juice Products.....	5
Crediting Apple Cider.....	5
Crediting Coconut Water.....	5
Crediting Juice in Canned Fruit.....	6
Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies	6
Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch	7
Juice limits for grades K-5 and 6-8 at lunch.....	7
Juice limits for grades 9-12 at lunch	8
Table 1. Weekly fruit juice limits at lunch for five-day week	8
Table 2. Weekly vegetable juice limits at lunch for five-day week.....	8
Table 3. Weekly fruit juice limits at lunch for seven-day week	9
Table 4. Weekly vegetable juice limits at lunch for seven-day week.....	9
Juice limit calculation for lunch	9
Example of calculating weekly fruit juice limit	10
Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast	11
Table 5. Weekly juice limits at breakfast for five-day week	11
Table 6. Weekly juice limits at breakfast for seven-day week	11
Juice limit calculation for breakfast.....	11
Required Signage for Lunch and Breakfast	12
Resources	12

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Overview of Crediting Requirements

Juice served in reimbursable meals and ASP snacks for grades K-12 must be full-strength (100 percent) fruit juice, vegetable juice, or a combination of fruit and vegetable juices. The NSLP and SBP meal pattern requirements for juice are different from the ASP meal pattern requirements for juice.

- **NSLP and SBP meal patterns:** Fruit juice credits toward the fruits component. Vegetable juice credits toward the vegetables component. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns require weekly juice limits (refer to “[Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch](#)” and “[Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast](#)” in this document).
- **ASP meal pattern:** Fruit juice and vegetable juice credit toward the vegetables/fruits component. The ASP meal pattern does not have a juice limit. However, the USDA recommends serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice. Juice cannot be served when milk is the only other meal component at snack.



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](#), requires that juice cannot exceed half of the fruits and vegetables offered in ASP snacks during the week.

School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that school menus meet the weekly juice limits for each grade group.

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Allowable Types of Juice

Any type of pasteurized full-strength (100 percent) juice credits in the school meal patterns. Juice may be fresh, frozen, or made from concentrate. The name of the full-strength fruit juice on the label must include one of the following terms: “juice,” “full-strength juice,” “100 percent juice,” “reconstituted juice,” or “juice from concentrate.” The statements “natural” and “organic” do not indicate that a juice is full strength. Products that credit as 100 percent juice include:

- 100 percent juice including fresh, frozen, and made from (refer to “[Crediting Juice Concentrates](#)” in this document);
- frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice (refer to “[Crediting Frozen Juice Products](#)” in this document);
- pureed fruits and vegetables in fruit/vegetable smoothies (refer to “[Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies](#)” in this document); and
- juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice (refer to “[Crediting Juice in Canned Fruit](#)” in this document).

Juice products that are less than full strength, or that contain juice concentrates that are not fully reconstituted, do not credit in the school meal patterns. Except for juice in smoothies, juice cannot credit when it is used as an ingredient in another food or beverage (refer to “[Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies](#)” in this document).

The USDA recommends serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice. Juice does not provide the same nutritional benefits as whole fruits and vegetables.

Juice ingredients

The ingredients in juice can vary among manufacturers and products. The Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) labeling regulations allow 100 percent juice to contain added ingredients and still be labeled “100% juice.” Some 100 percent juices contain added ingredients such as artificial flavors, artificial colors (e.g., red 40, blue 1, yellow 5 and 6, and titanium dioxide), preservatives (e.g., sodium potassium sorbate), flavor enhancers (e.g., ethyl maltol), and emulsifiers or thickeners (e.g., glycerol esters of wood rosin and xanthan gum). The CSDE encourages menu planners to read the product’s ingredients statement and choose 100 percent juices without these added ingredients.

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Crediting Juice Concentrates

Juice concentrates credit only when reconstituted with water to 100 percent full-strength juice and served in the form of juice. Juice concentrates do not credit when used as an ingredient in another food or beverage product, such as gelatin or sherbet made with juice concentrates.

Juice made from concentrate is reconstituted with a volume of water that is several times the amount of the juice concentrate. A typical reconstitution ratio might be three parts water to one part concentrate, but this ratio may vary for different juice products. Commercial juice products made from concentrate will list “water” as the first ingredient followed by the type of juice concentrate, for example, “water, orange juice concentrate” and “filtered water, grape juice concentrate.” Juice made from concentrate that is labeled “100 percent juice” credits when SFAs follow the manufacturer’s specific instructions for reconstituting.

Crediting Juice Blends at Lunch and Breakfast

Juice blends must be a combination of full-strength (100 percent) fruit juices, full-strength vegetable juices, or full-strength fruit and vegetable juices. Crediting depends on the information provided in the manufacturer’s product formulation statement (PFS). If the PFS indicates the amount of each type of juice in the blend, the SFA may credit each type accordingly. For example, if the PFS indicates that the product contains $\frac{1}{8}$ cup of fruit juice and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup of sweet potato juice, the product credits as $\frac{1}{8}$ cup of the fruit component and $\frac{1}{8}$ cup of the red/orange vegetable subgroup. The minimum creditable amount of juice is $\frac{1}{8}$ cup.

Without a PFS (or if the PFS does not provide the specific crediting information for each type of juice), juice blends credit based on the first juice ingredient. If the first juice ingredient is fruit juice, the product credits as the fruits component. If the first juice ingredient is vegetable juice, the product credits as the “additional” vegetables requirement and cannot contribute to the vegetable subgroups. The ingredients statement below shows an example of a vegetable and fruit juice blend.

Ingredients: **Reconstituted vegetable juice blend** (water and concentrated juices of sweet potatoes, purple carrots, carrots), reconstituted fruit juices (water and concentrated juices of apples, white grapes, cranberries, blackberries), contains less than 2% of: natural flavoring, citric acid, lemon juice.

The first ingredient is a reconstituted vegetable juice blend. Without a PFS, this product credits as “additional” vegetables and cannot contribute to the vegetable subgroups. For information on the vegetable subgroups, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program](#).

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Crediting Frozen 100 Percent Juice Products

Frozen 100 percent fruit juice products (such as frozen juice pops) credit toward the fruits component based on the fluid volume prior to freezing. SFAs must request a product formulation statement (PFS) from the manufacturer to document this information. Frozen fruit juice counts toward the weekly juice limit (refer to “[Juice Limit](#)” in this document).



For 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 PFS form, [Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Vegetables and Fruits in School Meal Programs](#). Additional guidance is available in the “Crediting Commercial Processed Products” section of the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Training on the requirements for CN labels and 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](#).

Crediting Apple Cider

Apple cider must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice to credit toward the fruits component. Pasteurized juice has been heat-treated to kill harmful bacteria. Menu planners must check labels, as some brands of apple cider are not pasteurized. SFAs cannot serve apple cider or any other type of juice that is not pasteurized. Apple cider counts toward the weekly juice limit (refer to “[Juice Limit](#)” in this document). For more information, refer to “[Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch](#)” and “[Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast](#)” in this document.

Crediting Coconut Water

Fruit juices labeled as 100 percent juice, including coconut water, credit toward the fruits component based on the volume served. Coconut water must meet the same requirements as juice and counts toward the juice limit. For more information, refer to “[Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch](#)” and “[Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast](#)” in this document.

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Crediting Juice in Canned Fruit

A serving of canned fruit may include the 100 percent juice in which the fruit is packed but cannot include water or syrup. For example, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned peaches with juice credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component. However, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned peaches with syrup does not credit as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component because the serving does not contain $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit. The menu planner can only credit the amount of peaches without the syrup.



The juice from canned fruit counts toward the weekly NSLP and SBP juice limit if the menu planner credits the juice toward the fruits component. For example, if a serving of canned peaches in juice credit as the fruits component at lunch, the amount of juice in the serving counts toward the weekly juice limit for the fruits component. Juice from canned fruit does not count toward the juice limit if the juice is planned as an extra noncreditable food. An example is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned fruit portioned in a $5\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce container with the juice added after measuring the full $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup serving of fruit.

Drained canned fruit and canned fruit in water or light syrup do not count toward the juice limit.

Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies

Pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies credit only as juice in school meals and ASP snacks. Crediting is based on the volume (cups) of pureed fruits and vegetables per serving. For example, a smoothie that contains $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of pureed strawberries credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit juice. Pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies count toward the juice limit. For more information, refer to [“Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch”](#) and [“Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast”](#) in this document.



Concentrated fruit puree and concentrated juice are added sugars. They do not credit as juice unless they are reconstituted to full-strength fruit puree or full-strength juice.

SFAs must document the amount of pureed fruits and vegetables per serving with a standardized recipe for smoothies made from scratch. Commercial products require a PFS. For information on standardized recipes and PFS forms, visit the [“Crediting Foods Made from Scratch”](#) and [“Crediting Commercial Processed Products”](#) sections of the CSDE’s

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

[Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training on the requirements for standardized recipes and 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](#).

The CSDE's resource, [Crediting Smoothies in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#), summarizes the requirements for crediting smoothies in school meals and ASP snacks.

Weekly Juice Limit at Lunch

Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly amount (cups) of vegetables offered at lunch. Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly amount (cups) of fruits offered at lunch. For example, if a five-day lunch menu for grades K-5 offers 2½ cups of the fruits component during the week, the lunch menu may offer up to 1¼ cups of juice during the week. Menu planners must count all sources of 100 percent juice toward the weekly juice limit (refer to [“Allowable Types of Juice”](#) in this document).

Tables 1 and 2 show the weekly juice limits at lunch for a five-day week, based on the minimum servings of the fruits component and vegetables component in the NSLP meal pattern for a five-day week. Tables 3 and 4 show the weekly juice limits at lunch for a seven-day week, based on the minimum servings of the fruits component and vegetables component in the NSLP meal pattern for a seven-day week.

If SFAs serve larger amounts of fruits and vegetables, the weekly juice limit also increases. For example, if a SFA offers 3 cups of the fruits component to grades K-5 at lunch, the juice limit is 1½ cups.

Juice limits for grades K-5 and 6-8 at lunch

For five-day lunch menus, SFAs may offer a ½-cup portion of fruit juice twice per week and a ½-cup portion of vegetable juice three times per week. For seven-day lunch menus, SFAs may offer a ½-cup portion of fruit juice three times per week and a ½-cup portion of vegetable juice five times per week. Alternatively, SFAs may serve larger quantities of juice on one or two days if the weekly total complies with the juice limit. For example, a five-day lunch menu for grades 6-8 could offer 1 cup of fruit juice once per week instead of ½ cup of fruit juice twice per week.

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Juice limits for grades 9-12 at lunch

For five-day and seven-day lunch menus for grades 9-12, SFAs may offer $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit juice each day and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vegetable juice each day. However, SFAs must be careful not to exceed the weekly calorie limit of the dietary specifications when offering juice daily because juice contains more calories than whole fruits and vegetables. For example, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of grape juice contains 76 calories while $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fresh grapes contains 34 calories; and 1 cup of fresh sliced peaches contains 60 calories while 1 cup of canned sliced peaches in juice contains 109 calories.

For information on the dietary specifications, refer to section 6 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#) and visit the "Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards for School Meals)" section of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Table 1. Weekly fruit juice limits at lunch for five-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup juice servings
K-5	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups	2
6-8	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups	1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups	2
9-12	5 cups	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups	5

Table 2. Weekly vegetable juice limits at lunch for five-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup juice servings
K-5	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups	1 $\frac{7}{8}$ cups	3
6-8	3 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups	1 $\frac{7}{8}$ cups	3
9-12	5 cups	2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups	5

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Table 3. Weekly fruit juice limits at lunch for seven-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly ½-cup juice servings
K-5	3½ cups	1¾ cups	3
6-8	3½ cups	1¾ cups	3
9-12	7 cups	3½ cups	7

Table 4. Weekly vegetable juice limits at lunch for seven-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly ½-cup juice servings
K-5	5¼ cups	2 ⅝ cups	5
6-8	5¼ cups	2 ⅝ cups	5
9-12	7 cups	3½ cups	7

Juice limit calculation for lunch

The weekly juice limit is based on the amount of fruits or vegetables that students are allowed to select at a given meal, regardless of the number of options or variety of fruits or vegetables available. SFAs must calculate the lunch menu's compliance with the weekly juice limit separately for fruits and vegetables.

- **Fruits component:** Divide the total amount (cups) of 100 percent fruit juice that students may select at all lunches during the week by the total amount (cups) of fruits that students may select at all lunches during the week.
- **Vegetables component:** Divide the total amount (cups) of 100 percent vegetable juice that students may select at all lunches during the week by the total amount (cups) of vegetables that students may select at all lunches during the week.

The example below shows how to determine if a five-day lunch menu for grades 6-8 meets the weekly fruit juice limit.

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Example of calculating weekly fruit juice limit

A five-day lunch menu for grades 6-8 offers 1 cup of fruit daily. This menu provides $\frac{1}{2}$ cup more than the minimum daily $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup requirement for the fruits component. Students can select up to two servings from a variety of $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup fruit choices including fresh fruit, drained canned fruit, and 100 percent fruit juice. The canned fruit is served drained and does not count toward the juice limit.



Cafeteria menus and signage instruct students to select two servings of fruit, or one serving of fruit and one serving of juice. Students cannot choose more than one serving ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) of juice because this would exceed the weekly juice limit.

1. **Calculate total weekly juice offerings:** Multiply the total daily amount (cups) of juice that students are allowed to select by the number of days in the week.

Students may select one $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup serving of fruit daily: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup multiplied by 5 days equals **$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups**.

2. **Calculate total weekly fruit offerings:** Multiply the total daily amount (cups) of fruit that students are allowed to select by the number of days in the week.

Students may select two $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup servings of fruit daily (1 cup total): 1 cup multiplied by 5 days equals **5 cups**.

3. **Calculate weekly percentage of juice offerings:** Divide A by B and multiply by 100.

$2\frac{1}{2}$ cups divided by 5 cups equals 0.5 multiplied by 100 equals **50 percent**.

This lunch menu meets the weekly juice limit because the amount of juice offered to students during the week ($2\frac{1}{2}$ cups) does not exceed 50 percent of the amount of fruits offered to students during the week (5 cups).

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Weekly Juice Limit at Breakfast

The SBP meal pattern does not require the vegetables component. However, SFAs may substitute vegetables (including vegetable juice) for the fruits component at any breakfast. Fruit juice together with vegetable juice (including fruit/vegetable juice blends) cannot exceed half of the total amount (cups) of fruits and vegetables offered at breakfast during the week.

Tables 5 and 6 show the maximum weekly contribution of juice at breakfast, based on the minimum serving of the fruits component in the SBP meal pattern for a five-day or seven-day week. SFAs may serve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of juice daily because the SBP meal pattern requires 1 cup of fruits daily for all grade groups. If SFAs serve larger amounts of fruits and vegetables, the weekly juice limit also increases.

Table 5. Weekly juice limits at breakfast for five-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup juice servings
K-5	5 cups	2½ cups	5
6-8	5 cups	2½ cups	5
9-12	5 cups	2½ cups	5

Table 6. Weekly juice limits at breakfast for seven-day week

Grades	Required weekly servings of fruits	Maximum weekly juice contribution (50 percent)	Maximum weekly $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup juice servings
K-5	7 cups	3½ cups	7
6-8	7 cups	3½ cups	7
9-12	7 cups	3½ cups	7

Juice limit calculation for breakfast

SFAs must calculate the breakfast menu's compliance with the weekly juice limit by dividing the total amount (cups) of fruit juice and vegetable juice that students may select at all breakfasts during the week by the total amount (cups) of fruits (and vegetables, if offered) that students may select at all breakfasts during the week. When calculating the total amount

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

of juice available at breakfast during the week, menu planners must include 100 percent juice (fresh, frozen, and made from concentrate), frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice, juice in canned fruit, and pureed fruits/vegetables in smoothies. Refer to “[Example of calculating weekly fruit juice limit](#)” for a sample calculation.

Required Signage for Lunch and Breakfast

Cafeteria menus and signage must clearly indicate the specific amount of fruits, vegetables, and juice that students may select with each meal. For example, the menu could state “choose one fruit and one juice” or “choose up to two servings of fruit (no more than one juice).” For guidance on signage, refer to the CSDE’s [Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#) and [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#).

Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/accepting_processed_product_documentation_snp.pdf

Crediting Commercial Processed Products (CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs#CommercialProducts>

Crediting Smoothies in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_smoothies_snp_grades_k-12.pdf

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Fruits Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs/documents#Fruits>

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>

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Vegetables and Fruits in School Meal Programs (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Veg_Subgroups_Fruits_Fillable_508.pdf

Upcoming Meal Pattern Changes (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs#Upcoming_Meal_Pattern_Changes

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for>

USDA Memo SP 40-2019, CACFP 17-2019, and SFSP 17-2019: Smoothies Offered in Child Nutrition Programs:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/smoothies-offered-child-nutrition-programs>

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

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

Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):

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

Vegetables Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

Vegetables/Fruits Component for Grades K-12 in the ASP ("Documents/Forms" section of the CSDE's Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/afterschool-snack-program/documents#VegetablesK12>

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>

Crediting Juice in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs

For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) 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_juice_snp_grades_k-12.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

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