

Noncreditable Foods in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

School Year 2024-25 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025)

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), and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. The SSO follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For information on the meal pattern requirements and crediting foods for grades K-12, refer to the CSDE’s [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.



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Definition of Noncreditable Foods

Noncreditable foods are foods and beverages that do not count toward the five meal components (meats/meat alternates, grains, vegetables, fruits, and milk) required by the USDA's meal patterns for the school nutrition programs. Noncreditable foods include:

- foods and beverages in amounts that are too small to credit (i.e., less than the minimum creditable amount required by the NSLP and SBP meal patterns), such as 1 tablespoon of applesauce or 1/8 ounce of cheese; and
- foods and beverages that do not belong to the five meal components. Some examples include potato chips, pudding, ice cream, gelatin, cream cheese, bacon, condiments (e.g., syrup, jam, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and butter), and water.

The list on pages 4-5 includes additional examples of noncreditable foods for the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12. This list is not all-inclusive.

Allowable Noncreditable Foods

School food authorities (SFAs) may serve some noncreditable foods in addition to the meal components to add variety, help improve acceptability in the meal, and satisfy appetites. Examples include maple syrup on pancakes, salad dressing on tossed greens, and condiments such as ketchup or mustard on sandwiches and other entrees.

To ensure that school meals meet children's nutritional needs, the CSDE encourages SFAs to use discretion when serving noncreditable foods. Noncreditable foods typically contain few nutrients and are higher in added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium. Menu planners should read labels, be aware of the ingredients in foods, and limit the frequency and amount of less nutritious choices.

Noncreditable Foods Count Toward Weekly Dietary Specifications

Noncreditable foods offered as part of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 count toward the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for school meals. They cannot cause the lunch or breakfast menu to exceed the average weekly limits for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. 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.

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Meal Pattern Changes for School Year 2025-26

Effective July 1, 2025, the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), establishes new sugar limits for yogurt, breakfast cereals, and flavored milk, as indicated below.

- Yogurt: No more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (2 grams of added sugars per ounce).
- Breakfast cereals: No more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce.
- Flavored milk: No more than 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.
- Flavored milk sold as a competitive food in middle and high schools: No more than 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces.

These new sugar limits will change what types of yogurts, breakfast cereals, and milk are noncreditable foods.

Federal and State Laws for A La Carte Sales of Foods and Beverages

Some noncreditable foods (such as candy, soda, coffee, tea, and sports drinks) cannot be sold in the school nutrition programs due to federal and state requirements. Before selling any noncreditable foods and beverages to students, SFAs must make sure they comply with the applicable federal and state laws.

Some a la carte sales of foods and beverages are prohibited due to federal and state laws.

All foods available for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals (a la carte sales) must meet the [Connecticut Nutrition Standards \(CNS\)](#) or the USDA [Smart Snacks](#) nutrition standards. The CNS are required for public school districts that participate in the NSLP and choose to implement the healthy food option of [Healthy Food Certification \(HFC\)](#). The USDA Smart Snacks nutrition standards are required for non-HFC public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that participate in the NSLP.

All beverages available for sale to students as part of and separately from reimbursable meals in HFC and non-HFC public schools must comply with the state beverage requirements of [Section 10-221q](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) and the USDA Smart Snacks beverage standards. Beverages sold in private schools and RCCIs must comply with the USDA Smart Snacks beverage standards.

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In addition to these nutrition standards for foods and beverages, other federal and state laws determine what and when foods and beverages may be sold or given to students on school premises, and where the income must accrue. For more information, visit the CSDE's [Competitive Foods in Schools](#) webpage and [Beverage Requirements](#) webpage.

Examples of Noncreditable Foods

The foods and beverages below do not credit in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12. This list is not all-inclusive. For additional guidance, refer to the menu planning notes on page 6.

Almond flour	Cranberry cocktail drink
Almond milk ¹	Cream, half and half
Bacon (pork)	Cream cheese
Bacon bits, regular or imitation	Dehydrated vegetables used for seasoning
Banana chips	Drinkable or squeezable yogurt and yogurt drinks ⁵
Bread products that are not whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched ²	Eggnog
Breakfast cereals (ready-to-eat and cooked) that are not whole grain, whole grain-rich, enriched, or fortified ³	Egg whites without the yolk
Butter	Frozen yogurt
Candy	Fruit drink, fruit beverage, powdered fruit drink mix
Candy-coated popcorn	Fruit leathers (100 percent fruit)
Cashew milk ¹	Fruit punch (not 100 percent juice)
Chili sauce	Fruit snacks, e.g., fruit roll-ups, wrinkles, and twists
Chocolate milk-based drinks, e.g., Yoo-Hoo	Gelatin, regular and sugar free
Coconut flour	Grain products that are not whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched ²
Coconut milk	Home-canned products, e.g., vegetables and fruits
Coffee (regular, decaffeinated, and iced)	Honey
Commercial processed products without a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS), e.g., entrees, smoothies, and breaded vegetables ⁴	Hot chocolate
Commercial smoothies that contain dietary or herbal supplements	Ice cream and ice cream novelties
Condiments, e.g., ketchup, mustard, relish, barbecue sauce	Ice milk
	Iced coffee
	Iced tea
	Imitation cheese
	Jam and jelly

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Ketchup
Lemonade
Limeade
Liquid egg substitutes
Maple syrup
Margarine
Marshmallows
Mayonnaise
Milk, reduced fat (2%) and whole
Mustard
Nectar drinks
Nondairy milk substitutes that do not meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes ¹
Nutrition supplement beverages, e.g., Abbott's Pediasure
Oat milk that does not meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes ¹
Pickle relish
Popsicles (not 100 percent juice)
Potato chips
Powdered milk beverages, e.g., Nestle's NIDO
Probiotic dairy drinks
Pudding
Pudding pops
Rice milk ¹
Salad dressings
Salt pork
Scrapple
Sherbet
Soda, regular and diet
Soups, commercial cream of vegetable, e.g., cream of broccoli, cream of mushroom, and cream of celery
Soups, commercial non-vegetable, e.g., beef barley, beef noodle, turkey or chicken noodle, and turkey or chicken rice
Sour cream
Soy milk that does not meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes ¹
Sports drinks, regular and diet
Spreadable fruit
Syrup
Tea, regular, herbal, and iced
Tofu with less than 5 grams of protein in 2.2 ounces (weight) or ¼ cup (volume) ⁶
Water ⁷
Yogurt products, e.g., drinkable or squeezable yogurt, frozen yogurt, yogurt bars, and yogurt-covered fruits and nuts

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Menu Planning Notes

- ¹ Milk substitutes for children without a disability must meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes (refer to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Milk Substitutes for Children without Disabilities in School Nutrition Programs](#)).
- ² For guidance on identifying creditable grains, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Crediting Whole Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#), [Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#).
- ³ For guidance on creditable cereals, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- ⁴ Commercial products without a CN label or PFS cannot credit in school meals. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Using Child Nutrition \(CN\) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs](#), [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#); and the USDA's [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#). Additional guidance is available in the "Crediting Commercial Processed Products" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods 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](#).
- ⁵ For guidance on crediting yogurt, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Yogurt in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- ⁶ For guidance on crediting tofu, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- ⁷ SFAs must make drinking water available to children at no charge where meals are served during the meal service, including the ASP. However, SFAs cannot promote or offer water or any other beverage as an alternative selection to fluid milk throughout the food service area. For more information, refer to [USDA Memo SP 49-2016 and CACFP 18-2016: Resources for Making Potable Water Available in Schools and Child Care Facilities](#) and [USDA Memo SP 19-2018: Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs](#). Training on the water requirement is available in Module 14: Water Availability during Meal Service 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

Allowable Milk Substitutes for Children without Disabilities in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Competitive Foods in Schools (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/competitive-foods>

Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE webpage):

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

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_commercial_mma_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 Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

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

Crediting Summary Charts for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

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

Healthy Food Certification (CSDE webpage):

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

List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages (CSDE webpage):

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

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

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

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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>

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

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 19-2018: Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs.

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/memos/om2018/sp19-2018s.pdf>

USDA Memo SP 49-2016 and CACFP 18-2016: Resources for Making Potable Water Available in Schools and Child Care Facilities:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/resources-making-potable-water-available-schools-and-child-care-facilities-0>

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs (CDSE):

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

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>

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For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#) and visit the CSDE's [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/noncreditable_foods_snp_grades_k-12.pdf.

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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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