



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of Child Nutrition Programs

FROM: Shannon K. Yearwood, Bureau Chief *Shannon K. Yearwood*
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs

DATE: January 14, 2026

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum No. 2-26
CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is pleased to announce the launch of the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program. Effective July 1, 2025, Section 10-215m of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) directs the CSDE to administer the Connecticut Local Food for Schools Incentive Program, renamed the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program. The Buy Local Program provides funding to sponsors in good standing of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. The CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program funding will be used to support the purchase of locally and regionally sourced unprocessed and minimally processed foods used in eligible meal programs.

The CSDE will implement the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program in three waves. The first wave will open to sponsors of the NSLP and SBP. The second wave will expand to include the CACFP, followed by a final wave supporting the SSO and SFSP. The CSDE will notify sponsors of the CACFP, SFSP, and SSO when their application to participate in the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program is available.

The CSDE is now accepting applications from school food authorities (SFAs) interested in participating as school nutrition sponsors in the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program.

Under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program, sponsors of USDA Child Nutrition Programs will be reimbursed, within available appropriations, for the following:

- 50 percent of expenditures on unprocessed and minimally processed foods sourced in Connecticut; and,
- 33 percent of expenditures on unprocessed and minimally processed foods sourced from regional states, including New York.

For example, a SFA that purchases \$2,000 of eligible foods sourced in Connecticut to be used in the USDA school nutrition programs may request a payment under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program of \$1,000; whereas a SFA that making that same purchase for the school nutrition programs for regionally sourced eligible foods may request a payment of \$667.

Payment requests under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program may include a combination of eligible local and regional products.

The CSDE strongly encourages all sponsors of the USDA school nutrition programs in Connecticut to take part in the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program during this initial wave to maximize the funding available to each sponsor's schools. [Regional Farm to School Coordinators](#) are available to assist sponsors with local food purchasing, menu planning, and incorporating local products into their Child Nutrition Program meal services.

Application for Sponsors of the NSLP and SBP

School nutrition sponsors must complete the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program application](#) to participate for school year (SY) 2025-26. Only participating sponsors will be eligible to submit reimbursement requests for eligible food items. The CSDE will provide participating sponsors with:

- confirmation of participation;
- payment schedule;
- payment request form and instructions; and
- data collection form.

Completing all required data collection activities associated with these funds is a condition of participation.

Definitions

The definitions below apply to purchases under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program.

- Locally sourced foods: Produce and other farm products that have a traceable point of origin within Connecticut that are grown or produced at, or sold by, a local farm and includes, but is not limited to value-added dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed foods.
- Value-added dairy: The USDA defines value-added dairy as products from milk that have increased value through changing their physical form (like milk to cheese/yogurt/ice cream/ butter).
- Regionally sourced foods: Produce and other farm products that have a traceable point of origin within New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine that are grown or produced at, or sold by, a regional farm and includes, but is not limited to value-added dairy, fish, pork, beef, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed foods.
- Minimally processed foods: Only those agricultural products that retain their inherent character. The effects of the following food handling and preservation techniques shall not be considered as changing an agricultural product into a product of a different kind or

character: cooling; refrigerating; freezing; size adjustment made by peeling, slicing, dicing, cutting, chopping, shucking, and grinding; forming ground products into patties without any additives or fillers; drying or dehydration; washing; packaging (such as placing eggs in cartons), vacuum packing and bagging (such as placing vegetables in bags or combining two or more types of vegetables or fruits in a single package); the addition of ascorbic acid or other preservatives to prevent oxidation of produce; butchering livestock and poultry; cleaning fish; or the pasteurization of milk.

- Local farms: Farm, farmer's cooperative, food hub or wholesale distributor located in Connecticut.
- Regional farms: Farm, farmer's cooperative, food hub or wholesale distributor located in New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine.

Available Funds for Sponsors of the NSLP and SBP

The available funding for NSLP and SBP sponsors under the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program is \$1,068,000 for SY 2025-26. This funding will be provided through fulfilling payment requests for eligible food items to participating school nutrition sponsors. Allocations for SY 2026-27 funds for NSLP and SBP sponsors consider unspent funds from SY 2025-26 and the SFA's usage of SY 2025-26 funds.

Note: Available funds and CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program applications for sponsors of the CACFP, SFSP and SSO will be released at a future date.

Questions may be directed to your CSDE [school nutrition team member](#).

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Important: This is a numbered Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) operational memorandum that contains important program information. Please read carefully and retain for future reference. All CSDE operational memoranda are posted on the CSDE's [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.