

The School Lunch Tray: November 5, 2025

Dear School Sponsors of Child Nutrition Programs:

The School Lunch Tray contains the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) weekly email notifications for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) school nutrition programs. This week's topics are listed below.

Action Items

- Final Reminder: CSDE Virtual Procurement 101 Training (November 12 and 13, 2025): Register by November 9, 2025
- Reminder to Thank Farmers Who Contributed During Farm to School Month 🍅

Need to Know

- Operational Memorandum No. 01-26: Schedule for Submitting Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) Monthly Claims for Reimbursement in Fiscal Year 2026
- Announcement of CT Fresh Ed Great Plates Contest Fall 2025 Winners 🍅
- Resource Roundup: Resources and Guidance on Food Allergies

Good to Know

- Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition (CICN) Webinar: Training Staff for Scratch Cooking in Schools, November 6, 2025
- Recap of School to Farm Field Trips in October 🍅



Please review and share with appropriate staff members. For previous versions of the School Lunch Tray, visit the CSDE's [School Lunch Tray and Table Talk](#) webpage.

Action Items

Final Reminder: CSDE Virtual Procurement 101 Training (November 12 and 13, 2025): Register by November 9, 2025

The CSDE's virtual two-day Procurement 101 Training provides a comprehensive overview of the procurement requirements for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Section 7 CFR 210.21(h) of the NSLP regulations requires that all school personnel with procurement responsibilities associated with the Child Nutrition Programs must attend annual procurement training. Attendance at both sessions is required to complete the training. Registration is required.

- **Required attendance:** All school personnel with procurement responsibilities associated with the Child Nutrition Programs
- **Dates and times:** November 12 and 13, 2025, from 12:30 – 3:30 p.m. each day
- **Registration:** Register by November 9, 2025, at [CSDE Procurement 101 Training Registration Link](#) or use the QR code below.



- **Questions:** Contact Andy Paul andrew.paul@ct.gov or Monica Pacheco monica.pacheco@ct.gov.
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Reminder to Thank Farmers Who Contributed During Farm to School Month



During CT Grown for CT Kids Week and throughout Farm to School Month in October, farmers across Connecticut demonstrated exceptional dedication by contributing their time, energy, and resources to support school communities. These farmers delivered fresh, locally grown products to schools and engaged directly with students—both on school grounds and at their own farms.

Given that October falls during a busy time of year for our agricultural community, the CSDE recognizes that a farmer's time is among their most limited and valuable resources. The CSDE encourages all school food authorities and educational partners to take a moment to express appreciation to the local farmers who participated in Farm to School activities or events.

A simple email of thanks is always meaningful. Additional gestures of thanks may include:

- a short video featuring students and staff expressing gratitude;
- handwritten notes or cards from students delivered to the farm;
- a formal letter of appreciation from school or district administration;
- a social media post acknowledging the farmer's contribution; or
- a photograph of students displaying signs of gratitude.

These thoughtful actions help convey the deep appreciation our schools and communities hold for the farmers who make Farm to School efforts possible across Connecticut.

Need to Know

Operational Memorandum No. 01-26: Schedule for Submitting Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) Monthly Claims for Reimbursement in Fiscal Year 2026

[Operational Memorandum No. 01-26](#) outlines important information regarding the monthly claim submission process and claim due dates for fiscal year 2026 (October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2026). Please review and share with all staff members involved with preparing and submitting claims, e.g., claim preparers and claim submitters. This memo is available on the CSDE's [School Nutrition Memos 2026](#) section of the CSDE's Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs webpage and the "[Claims for School Nutrition Programs](#)" section of the CSDE's Claim Submission Schedule for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Announcement of CT Fresh Ed Great Plates Contest Fall 2025 Winners



The CSDE extends its sincere appreciation to all schools that participated in the CT Fresh Ed Great Plates Contest. Submissions showcased beautifully presented meals featuring Connecticut-grown products, making judging both enjoyable and highly competitive. The CT Great Plates Committee congratulates the winners.

Winners will receive an inflatable cow from New England Dairy and an award certificate from the CSDE. First-place winners in both categories will also receive complimentary admission to the CSDE Spring Farm to School Conference.

Sprouting Category (participating in Farm to School for 2 years or less)

- Winner = Newington Public Schools Loaded Baked Potato with Kale Quinoa Salad



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- Runner up = Klingberg Family Centers Cubano Sandwich with Grilled Squash and Apple Nachos



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Rooting Category (participating in Farm to School for more than 2 years)

- Winner = New Milford Asian Dumplings with Local Stir Fry Vegetables and Watermelon Pizza



- Runner up = Mansfield Middle School Homemade Chicken Teriyaki with Stir Fried Vegetables



Honorable Mention – Best Photo

- East Hampton High School Carnitas Street Tacos with Mango Red Pepper Salsa



The CT Fresh Ed Great Plates Contest will be held again in early winter and late spring. Districts are encouraged to continue capturing photographs of trays showcasing nutritious meals featuring Connecticut-grown foods. Additional information will be provided in upcoming issues of The School Lunch Tray.

Resource Roundup: Resources and Guidance on Food Allergies

Resources and guidance on food allergies are available in the “[Food Allergies](#)” section of the CSDE’s Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage. Topics include general guidance, label reading, labeling laws, and training resources.

Good to Know

Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition (CICN) Webinar: Training Staff for Scratch Cooking in Schools, November 6, 2025

Scratch cooking requires intentional training and support for school nutrition staff. In this webinar, school nutrition professionals will share their real-world experiences and strategies for training staff in scratch cooking. Speakers will highlight practical approaches, such as hands-on culinary training, effective ways to build staff confidence in culinary techniques, and how they provide ongoing development opportunities that support successful scratch cooking in schools.

- **Date and time:** Thursday, November 6, 2025, 3:00- 4:00 p.m.
- **Information and Registration:** [CICN: Training Staff for Scratch Cooking in Schools \(November 6th 2025 3pm EST\) - ICN iLearn](#)

Recap of School to Farm Field Trips in October



In October, Regional Farm to School Coordinators and the UConn Extension team wrapped up the inaugural round of School to Farm Field Trips. These five interactive and educational visits to Connecticut farms provided school nutrition professionals an opportunity to see and hear directly from farmers selling to schools and start their plans for future purchasing. Themes and topics included seasonality, advance planning for schools and farms, planting and availability timelines, communication, and flexibility. Farms and schools alike showed gratitude for the effort and work that it takes to bring food from the field to the tray. Food service directors that missed a tour can reach out to their [Regional Farm to School Coordinator](#) to hear takeaways and tips. Stay tuned for future School to Farm Field Trips.

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Field trip participants in discussion with Farmer Susan Mitchell inside a greenhouse at Cloverleigh Farm



Farmers Jill and Will O'Meara of Hungry Reaper show attendees a variety of squash in a high tunnel



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Participants in a barn watching a presentation about ordering farm produce from Laurel Glen



Participants touring fields led Farmer Victoria Rogowski with Laurel Glen Farm



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Pete Mitchell of Stone Acres showing School Nutrition Directors a bin of recently harvested greens



Farmer Willi Dellacamera of Ceccarelli addressing field trip participants in a gravel driveway ahead as part of a walking tour



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For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's [School Lunch Tray and Table Talk](#) 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/slt/2025/slt_11_05_2025.pdf.

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