

## The School Lunch Tray: December 3, 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

- Unpaid School Meal Debt Due December 12, 2025

### Need to Know

- Planning for Local Foods 
- Resource Roundup: USDA Policy for Food Donations from the Child Nutrition Programs

### Good to Know

- Southington Public Schools Teams Up with Local Food Pantry to Feed Students



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

### Unpaid School Meal Debt Survey Due December 12, 2025

The CSDE is collecting data regarding the amount of school meal debt remitted by school food authorities (SFAs) during school year 2024-25. SFAs that have not yet submitted a response are requested to complete this brief, two-question [Unpaid School Meal Debt](#) survey by December 12, 2025.

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## Need to Know

### Planning for Local Foods



Winter is planning season for farmers. This is also a critical time for school food authorities (SFAs) to think about spring and fall menus and communicate local food needs to farmers early enough for crop planning. The three action steps below can help SFAs make the most of this planning season.

1. Plan local procurement items for the 2026 school year. Consider opportunities to incorporate more local foods into menu offerings. Build on past local food purchases and align with district goals for the school meal program.
2. Connect with a farmer. Farmers are planning their growing season and doing crop planning now. Check in with established farmer relationships and work on developing new ones. For more information, watch UConn Extension's short video, [Connecting with a Local Farm](#).
3. Consider a forward contract. This tool establishes an agreement between a SFA and a farm or farm hub to purchase local products. Reach out to the district's [Regional Farm to School Coordinator](#) for a forward contract template and best practices for using this approach.

The district's local [Regional Farm to School Coordinator](#) is available for support with these steps.

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### Resource Roundup: USDA Policy for Food Donations from the Child Nutrition Programs

As a reminder, guidance on the USDA's policy related to food donations is provided in [USDA Memo SP 11-2012](#), [CACFP 05-2012](#), and [SFSP 07-2012](#): Guidance on the Food Donation Program in Child Nutrition Programs.

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### Good to Know

#### Southington Public Schools Teams Up with Local Food Pantry to Feed Students

In response to the federal government shutdown and the potential lapse in SNAP benefits, Nicole Maxellon, Director of Food Services for Southington Public Schools, exemplified the leadership routinely demonstrated by Connecticut's school nutrition professionals by initiating an organized effort to support food-insecure children. Southington School District and Bread for Life, the community's local food pantry, coordinated a district-wide food drive to provide assistance to students during the Thanksgiving recess. The partnership successfully collected sufficient provisions to assemble and distribute 100 backpacks of food to families in need. The CSDE formally acknowledges and expresses its appreciation for the Southington partners' exemplary service and their commitment to supporting students beyond the cafeteria setting.

The CSDE is grateful that school districts across the state routinely engage in similar efforts to support children and families outside of the cafeteria. Districts are encouraged to submit related stories and photographs to highlight and celebrate the incredible work being carried out by school food service programs statewide.



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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\\_12\\_03\\_2025.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2025/slt_12_03_2025.pdf).

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