

The School Lunch Tray: February 11, 2026

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. 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

- Instructions for Ordering USDA Foods for School Year 2026-27: Orders due March 11, 2026
- CT Fresh Ed: Compass due June 1, 2026 📺
- Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest – Start Taking Pictures Today 📺

Need to Know

- Reminder for Cafeterias in Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Districts: Non-entree Items in Second Student Meals and Sold A La Carte Must Meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards

Good to Know

- March is National Nutrition Month
- Dairy Grant Opportunity for School Meals Due March 6, 2026

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Action Items

Instructions for Ordering USDA Foods for School Year 2026-27: Orders due March 11, 2026

The Connecticut Food Distribution Program's (FDP) catalog for USDA Foods for school year (SY) 2026-27 opens on Friday, February 20, 2026, in Web Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM). The deadline to place orders in WBSCM is Wednesday, March 11, 2026. Recipient Agencies (RAs) that miss the ordering deadline will not receive USDA Foods. Please carefully review and follow the CSDE's [Instructions for Ordering USDA Foods for School Year 2026-27](#). This document and the [USDA Foods Ordering Worksheets for School Year 2026-27](#) and [instructions](#) are available in the "WBSCM" section of the [CSDE's FDP webpage](#). For questions, please contact the [FDP staff](#).

CT Fresh Ed: Compass due June 1, 2026



The CT Fresh Ed: Compass is due June 1, 2026. Visit the [Compass](#) section of the CSDE's CT Fresh Ed Compass webpage for guidance and resourced, including the CT Fresh Ed: Compass Training from February 5, 2026.

Reach out to your Regional Farm to School Coordinator for support with the CT Fresh Ed: Compass. The CSDE and Regional Farm to School Coordinators will be hosting monthly office hours for opportunities to ask questions and get real-time answers.

Save the Dates for Compass Office Hours

- February 23 – 2:00-3:00 p.m.
- March 23 – 2:00-3:00 p.m.
- April 20 – 2:00-3:00 p.m.
- May 4 – 2:00-3:00 p.m.
- May 18 – 2:00-3:00 p.m.

The link for the February 23 Office Hour is below. The additional links will be provided closer to each date.

Microsoft Teams meeting for February 23 Office Hour

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/26554009515031?p=33ktSreBNomZzYLCBb>

Meeting ID: 265 540 095 150 31

Passcode: yH6tQ2zn

[Need help?](#) | [System reference](#)

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Dial in by phone

[+1 475-282-1761](tel:+14752821761), [178898482#](tel:+178898482) United States, Bridgeport

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 178 898 482#

For organizers: [Meeting options](#) | [Reset dial-in PIN](#)



Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest – Start Taking Pictures Today

The CSDE invites school nutrition programs participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and early childhood education (ECE) providers to enter the CT Great Plates Contest. Submit a photo of a reimbursable lunch currently served to students that features at least one Connecticut-grown, minimally processed food, in addition to milk.

Award Details

- *K-12 Great Plate Awards* – For any K-12 school/district participating in the NSLP. Two categories are available for sponsors based on their experience purchasing CT-Grown ingredients:
 - Rooted: 2 or more years of purchasing of CT-Grown ingredients (for example, sponsors that regularly purchase local foods for their menus).
 - Sprouting: Less than 2 years of purchasing of CT-Grown ingredients (for example, sponsors that are new to school nutrition, new to purchasing local foods, or occasionally buy local but want to do more).
- *ECE Great Plate Award* – For early childhood education providers.

Winners will receive recognition in CSDE and Farm to School communications and an inflatable cow from New England Dairy. K-12 sponsors will also be celebrated at the annual Farm to School Conference.

Submission Details

Submissions are accepted from April 1 to April 30, 2026, but schools and ECEs can start taking pictures at any time. Photos of Valentine-themed lunch trays featuring locally sourced ingredients can be submitted once the contest begins.

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Need to Know

Reminder for Cafeterias in Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Districts: Non-entree Items in Second Student Meals and Sold A La Carte Must Meet Connecticut Nutrition Standards

School cafeterias in HFC districts must meet specific requirements for foods that are sold a la carte (separately from reimbursable meals). Entrees that meet the entree definition of the [Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) (CNS) are exempt from the CNS and may be sold a la carte during the NSLP or SBP meal service on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable meals. However, this entree exemption does **not** apply to any other foods that are part of the reimbursable meal that are also sold a la carte, such as fruits, vegetables, soups, breads, rice, and pasta.

Second student meals are a la carte purchases and are not reimbursable. All **non-entree** foods available for sale as part of second meals and a la carte must comply with the CNS. School food authorities must maintain the documentation below to indicate that these foods comply with the CNS.

- Non-entree commercial products must be listed on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#).
- Non-entree foods made from scratch must have: 1) a standardized recipe with the nutrition information per serving (including any accompaniments served with the food); and 2) the appropriate completed [CNS Worksheet](#) indicating that the standardized recipe's serving with its accompaniments complies with the CNS.

For detailed guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Requirements for Cafeteria Entrees Sold A La Carte in Schools Participating in Healthy Food Certification](#).

Good to Know

March is National Nutrition Month

National Nutrition Month® is an annual campaign established in 1973 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) invites everyone to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits. This year's theme is "Discover the Power of Nutrition." For more information, visit the AND's [National Nutrition Month®](#) webpage.

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Dairy Grant Opportunity for School Meals Due March 6, 2026

The Connecticut Milk Promotion Board and New England Dairy recently announced a funding opportunity from Connecticut Dairy Farmers to K–12 schools participating in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs in Connecticut to support food service needs related to expanding summer or school meal programs or serving new dairy menu items. Schools can apply for turn-key equipment packages or build their own grant. Visit New England Dairy's [School Grants](#) webpage for the application and more details. The application deadline is March 6, 2026.

Funding for this program is provided by the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board.

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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/2026/slt_02_11_2026.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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