

# The School Lunch Tray: February 18, 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

- Reminder: USDA Foods Catalog for School Year 2026-27 Opens Friday, February 20, 2026

## Need to Know

- Updated Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 for SY 2025-26
- New Food Yields Added to the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs
- USDA Memo SP 02-2026, CACFP 01-2026, SFSP 01-2026: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030 – Eat Real Food
- Reminder: State and Federal Requirements for Competitive Foods in Schools

## Good to Know

- Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) Recorded Webinar: Practical Menu Solutions for Reducing Added Sugars in School Meals
- ICN Webinar: Practical Menu Solutions for Reducing Sodium in School Meals, February 26, 2026
- Subscribe to ICN for Updates and Webinar Information
- Free Team Nutrition Resources for Schools

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## Action Items

### Reminder: USDA Foods Catalog for School Year 2026-27 Opens Friday, February 20, 2026

The Connecticut Food Distribution Program's (FDP) catalog for USDA Foods for school year (SY) 2026-27 opens Friday, February 20, 2026, in the Web Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) online system. Refer to the [February 11, 2026, School Lunch Tray](#) for ordering links and details. The deadline to place orders is **Wednesday, March 11, 2026**. For questions, please contact the [FDP staff](#).

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## Need to Know

### Updated Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 for SY 2025-26

The CSDE updated the [Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program](#) for SY 2025-26 (dated February 2026) to reflect the new requirements for milk in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) under the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025, effective January 14, 2026. These checklists assist school food authorities (SFAs) with planning meals to meet the NSLP meal patterns. They are available for five-day and seven-day weeks for the three required grade groups (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) and the optional grade group for K-8.

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### New Food Yields Added to the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs

The USDA has added new food yields to the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (FBG) Interactive Web-based Tool and the FBG Mobile App. The following foods are now available: bok choy, frozen dragon fruit (pitaya), ground elk, canned hearts of palm, fresh mussels, shredded romaine lettuce, canned jackfruit, and pouched jackfruit. For more information, visit the USDA's [FBG](#) website.

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## **USDA Memo SP 02-2026, CACFP 01-2026, SFSP 01-2026: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030 – Eat Real Food**

[USDA Memo SP 02-2026, CACFP 01-2026, SFSP 01-2026: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030 – Eat Real Food](#) provides information and guidance on the updated [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030](#) (Guidelines), which were released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and USDA on January 7, 2026. The Guidelines and the New Pyramid are available at <https://realfood.gov/>.

This memo is also available on the “[2026 USDA School Nutrition Memos](#)” section of the CSDE’s Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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## **Reminder: State and Federal Requirements for Competitive Foods in Schools**

Competitive foods include all foods and beverages available for sale to students on school premises separately from reimbursable meals served through the USDA’s Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). Under Section 10-215b-1 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, competitive foods also include certain foods and beverages that are given to students while CNPs are operating.

The three categories of federal and state laws for competitive foods include: 1) nutrition standards for foods and beverages; 2) restrictions for selling and giving foods and beverages to students; and 3) accrual of income from sales of foods and beverages to students. These laws impose different requirements. Where they differ, the stricter requirements apply.

The federal and state laws for competitive foods apply differently to public schools that choose the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) under C.G.S. Section 10-215f, non-HFC public schools, and private schools and residential child care institutions (RCCIs). Some requirements apply during the school day, while others apply at all times or while CNPs are operating.

For guidance and resources on how the federal and state laws impact HFC public schools, non-HFC public schools, and private schools/RCCIs, visit the CSDE’s [Competitive Foods in Schools](#) webpage. This webpage includes overview documents, summary charts of the state and federal laws for each type of school, and guidance on meeting the state and federal requirements for school cafeterias, culinary programs, fundraisers, school stores, and vending machines.

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## Good to Know

### **Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) Recorded Webinar: Practical Menu Solutions for Reducing Added Sugars in School Meals**

In this webinar from January 26, 2026, school nutrition professionals share practical menu solutions to reduce added sugars in school meals while maintaining participation, appeal, and operational efficiency. Drawing through first-hand experience, the speakers walk through how their teams identified common sources of added sugars, evaluated products, and made strategic menu adjustments aligned with USDA guidance. Speakers also discuss timelines for implementation, lessons learned, and how student engagement supported the program's successful changes.

- **Registration:** <https://ilearn.theicn.org/learn/courses/757/sml-practical-menu-solutions-for-reducing-added-sugars-in-school-meals-january-2026>

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### **ICN Webinar: Practical Menu Solutions for Reducing Sodium in School Meals, February 26, 2026**

School meal operators are working to reduce sodium while still serving meals that students enjoy and meeting USDA meal pattern requirements. In this webinar, Richland Bean Blossom Healthy Schools Nutrition Services will share how they made menu changes to lower sodium while keeping student participation strong. They will also share how long the changes took, what they learned along the way, and how student feedback and engagement helped make the changes successful. Join to hear the strategies they implemented to identify common sources of sodium, review product labels, and make menu changes to stay aligned with USDA guidance

- **Date and time:** February 26, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
- **Information and registration:** <https://theicn.docebosaas.com/learn/courses/762/sml-practical-menu-solutions-for-reducing-sodium-in-school-meals-february-26th-2026-3pm-est>

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## Subscribe to ICN for Updates and Webinar Information

SFAs may use the link below to subscribe to the ICN's newsletters and email distribution list. Subscribers will receive ICN updates and registration information for upcoming ICN webinars.

- <https://theicn.org/subscribe-2/>

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## Free Team Nutrition Resources for Schools

Schools may request free print copies of the Team Nutrition materials below, while supplies last.

- [Make Today a Try Day! Poster & Sticker Set](#)
- Offer versus Serve Posters: [Elementary](#) | [Middle](#) | [High School](#)
- Taste Testing Posters: [Be a Food Critic!](#) | [Taste-Test](#)
- Taste Testing Stickers: [I've Got Great Taste!](#) | [Official Taste Tester](#)
- [Today's Lunch Dry-Erase Poster](#)
- [Dig In! Poster Set](#) (supporting materials for farm to school)

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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\\_18\\_2026.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2026/slt_02_18_2026.pdf).



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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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