

The School Lunch Tray: March 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.

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Action Items

- Final Reminder: Deadline to Place USDA Foods Order for School Year 2026-27 is Today, March 11, 2026
- Reminder: Apply for CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program (New List of Approved Sponsors) 
- Reminder: Steps to Take Now for Submitting the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27, Due July 1, 2026
- Reminder: Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026 (Full Service) or August 30, 2026 (Vended)
- Mark the Calendar for Next Week: CT Farm to School Collaborative Monthly Meeting: Hydroponics as an Educational Tool, March 18, 2026 

Need to Know

- Now Available: CSDE's List of Area Eligible Schools and List of Site Eligible Schools for School Year 2025-26
- Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated March 10, 2026

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- Updated CSDE Training Program: Complying with Healthy Food Certification
- Data on HFC Participation for School Year 2025-26
- New Resource: CT Fresh Ed: Social Media Toolkit 

Good to Know

- Dairy Grant Opportunity for School Meals Deadline Extension to March 31, 2026

Action Items

Final Reminder: Deadline to Place USDA Foods Order for School Year 2026-27 is Today, March 11, 2026

The Connecticut Food Distribution Program's (FDP) catalog for USDA Foods for school year (SY) 2026-27 is currently open 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](#).

Reminder: Apply for CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program (New List of Approved Sponsors)



The CSDE's [List of CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Sponsors](#) indicates all approved sponsors of the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program as of March 6, 2026. For districts not on the list, please complete the application.

The CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program provides funding to eligible USDA Child Nutrition Program sponsors to support the purchase of locally and regionally sourced unprocessed and minimally processed foods, strengthening local agriculture while supporting nutritious meals statewide.

- **Application:** [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program SY 2025-2026 Application](#)

For more information, refer to [Operational Memorandum No. 2-26: CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#) and the resources below.

- [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Questions and Answers](#)

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- [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program School Year 2025-26 Allocations for Eligible School Food Authorities](#)

These resources are available in the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#) section of the CSDE's CT Fresh Ed website.

Reminder: Steps to Take Now for Submitting the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27, Due July 1, 2026

All public school sponsors of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must submit the 2026-27 HFC Statement and upload their final board-approved minutes by July 1, 2026. [Operational Memorandum No. 03-26: Requirements for Submitting the HFC Statement for School Year 2026-27](#) provides the required motion language and summarizes the **steps that districts must take now** to ensure the accurate and timely submission of the 2026-27 HFC Statement by the **July 1** deadline.

All BOEs **must** vote on whether to participate in the healthy food option of HFC.

- If the BOE votes “yes” to the healthy food option, a vote on whether to allow food exemptions is **required**. The BOE may choose to vote on whether to allow beverage exemptions.
- if the BOE votes “no” to the healthy food option, a vote on whether to allow food exemptions is **not** required. The BOE may choose to vote on whether to allow beverage exemptions.

The “[Annual HFC Application](#)” section of the CSDE's HFC webpage provides information on the required steps for submitting the annual HFC Statement. The CSDE's 21-minute video, [Completing the Application Process for HFC](#), provides detailed guidance on the HFC application process.

Note: Sponsors do not submit the HFC Statement and final BOE-approved minutes until requested by the CSDE. The CSDE's Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP System) will be open to submit the annual HFC Statement in April 2026.

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Reminder: Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026 (Full Service) or August 30, 2026 (Vended)

[Operational Memorandum No. 04-26 Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27](#) provides guidance on the requirements and deadlines for submitting interschool agreements to the CSDE. Sponsors that vend or satellite meals to another district are required to submit and receive approval of an annual interschool agreement to the CSDE. This form must be signed by the authorized representative for the providing sponsor and the recipient site

- Full-service Interschool Agreements for schools that choose the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) must be submitted to the CSDE by **July 1, 2026**.
- Recipient Site Vended Interschool Agreements must be submitted to the CSDE at least two weeks before the start of the school year and no later than **August 31, 2026**.

The interschool agreement forms are available under “I” on the CSDE’s [Forms for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Operational Memorandum No. 04-26 is available on the CSDE’s [School Nutrition Operational Memos 2026](#) webpage.

Mark the Calendar for Next Week: CT Farm to School Collaborative Monthly Meeting: Hydroponics as an Educational Tool, March 18, 2026



The CT Farm to School Collaborative’s monthly meeting in March will host a panel on the topic of Hydroponics as an Educational Tool. More schools, nonprofits, and youth-based programs are interested in incorporating indoor hydroponic growing units as hands-on tools to educate about plants and food, year-round. This meeting features three individuals who are incorporating hydroponics in their classrooms, cafeterias, and clubs to further bridge the gap between what we eat and where it comes from.

- Date and time: Wednesday, March 18, 2026, from 3:30-4:30 p.m.
- Registration: [Zoom Link](#)
- Sign up for the Collaborative’s Google group on the [CT Farm to School Collaborative](#) website to add this meeting to a calendar (scroll down to the bottom of the webpage).

As a statewide convener for farm to school efforts, the CT Farm to School Collaborative connects partners, aggregates resources, and activates the community to ensure local food and agricultural education is accessible and inclusive for every student in Connecticut. Anyone who engages in the Collaborative is considered a member, and members drive the Collaborative’s initiatives, stories, and direction. Contact connecticutfarmtoschool@gmail.com with any questions.

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Need to Know

Now Available: CSDE's List of Area Eligible Schools and List of Site Eligible Schools for School Year 2025-26

The CSDE's [List of Area Eligible Schools](#) and [List of Site Eligible Schools](#) (February 2026) include schools with at least 50 percent of children eligible for free and reduced-price meals in the USDA's school nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). These lists can be used to determine school eligibility to participate in the Summer Food Service Program, Seamless Summer Option of the NSLP, Afterschool Snack Program, and Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. These lists are available on the CSDE's [Area Eligibility for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Links to the USDA [CACFP and SFSP Area Eligibility Mapper](#) and USDA [Dataset for FY 2026 CACFP SFSP Eligibility](#) are also available at the bottom of this webpage.

Area Eligibility for Summer Meals 2026: For questions about using either school or census data to determine the eligibility of a potential Summer Meal Program site, please contact the CSDE's [Summer Meals](#) staff.

Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated March 10, 2026

Updated lists of foods that comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS) and beverages that comply with the state beverage statute are now available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage.

- **New products** on the lists are indicated by pink highlighting on the manufacturer and product name.
- Items that have been **added or deleted** since the last update are listed on the CSDE's [Summary of Updates to Approved Food and Beverages](#). **Note:** This summary includes only the changes since the last update; it is not a complete listing of all allowable products. For the complete list, visit the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage.

Before selling commercial foods and beverages to students, Healthy Food Certification (HFC) schools must check that they are listed. For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, [How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#), and visit the "[Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance](#)" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage.

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Updated CSDE Training Program: Complying with Healthy Food Certification

An updated version of the CSDE's [Complying with Healthy Food Certification](#) training program is available. This training program is a series of recorded modules that provide guidance on how to meet the requirements for Healthy Food Certification (HFC) under Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes and the related state and federal laws for competitive foods in schools.

- Module 1: Introduction to Training and HFC
- Module 2: HFC Requirements
- Module 3: Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS)
- Module 4: Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance
- Module 5: Laws for Foods and Beverages in HFC Schools
- Module 6: Fundraisers

This training program is intended for the district's designated HFC contact person and individuals who coordinate sales of competitive foods to students on school premises.

Data on HFC Participation for School Year 2025-26

HFC is in its twentieth year of implementation with school year 2025-26. The data below summarizes HFC participation for this current school year.

- 183 school districts/schools (96.8 percent of eligible districts/schools)
- 2 new districts/schools
- 100 percent recertification rate from school year 2024-25 to school year 2025-26

The CSDE's document, [Healthy Food Certification Participation for School Year 2025-26](#), includes a list of participating districts and schools. A [color-coded map](#) of the towns implementing HFC is also available. For more information, visit the CSDE's [Healthy Food Certification \(HFC\)](#) webpage.

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New Resource: CT Fresh Ed: Social Media Toolkit



Social media is an important and effective tool for promoting Farm to School initiatives and building engagement among school staff and the broader community. The [CT Fresh Ed: Social Media Toolkit](#) provides valuable guidance on how to strategically use social media platforms to highlight and maximize the impact of Farm to School efforts.

Good to Know

Dairy Grant Opportunity for School Meals Deadline Extension to March 31, 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.

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_03_11_2026.pdf.



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