

The School Lunch Tray: March 25, 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

- Direct Certification and the Annual Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Notification Requirement for Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
- Save the Date: Second Annual Connecticut Farm to School Conference, May 13, 2026 
- UCONN Rudd Center Webinar: Connecticut's 2025 Triennial Assessments: Where We Are and Where to Go Next, March 30, 2026
- Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest – April 1 through April 30 

Need to Know

- Upcoming 2025-26 USDA SFA Survey Participation

Good to Know

- None

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Action Items

Direct Certification and the Annual Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Notification Requirement for Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

LEAs are reminded that the school level Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) data must be submitted no later than **April 10, 2026**. For more information regarding the specifics on reporting this data, refer to [Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\) Annual Notification Requirement for all Local Educational Agencies \(LEAs\) Participating in the National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\) and/or the School Breakfast Program \(SBP\) Due April 10, 2026](#) and the [School Lunch Tray from March 18, 2026](#).

School food authorities (SFAs) are required to enter the three data elements into the CNP System, specifically from April 1, 2026, for each school that operates the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP). The data must reflect all enrolled students directly certified in school year 2025-26, up to and including April 1, 2026. Therefore, make sure to check the direct certification web application on the afternoon of April 1 for the updated direct certification match. Please also note the important information below.

1. Check the direct certification web application's case management and resolve all cases **BEFORE March 30, 2026**. This will help to ensure that the students in case management are included in the April 1 match.
2. When obtaining the April 1 data for CEP reporting, use the "View All Certified Records" link on the Review Matched page to retrieve the most up-to-date information.
3. When preparing your data for CEP reporting, do not count students with the codes of FE or RE since these students are eligible via S-EBT benefits which involves an application. They are not considered directly certified. Also, do not count students with the code of RM (Reduced Medicaid) since these students are not directly certified for free meals.

As a reminder, this annual notification requirement does **not** apply to residential child care institutions (RCCIs) or sponsors of the Special Milk Program.

Questions may be directed to the SFA's [CSDE school nutrition team member](#).

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Save the Date: Second Annual Connecticut Farm to School Conference, May 13, 2026



The second annual Connecticut Farm to School Conference will be held on Wednesday, May 13, 2026, at the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut in Bristol, CT. Registration information will be coming soon.

UCONN Rudd Center Webinar: Connecticut's 2025 Triennial Assessments: Where We Are and Where to Go Next, March 30, 2026

In 2025, sponsors of the school nutrition programs completed a thorough evaluation of their local school wellness policies and practices to be compliant with the federal triennial assessment requirement. In this webinar, the Rudd Center team will present an overview of the scores on the WellSAT measures and highlight areas of strength and next steps.

Date and time: March 30, 2026, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/26471034804120?p=d9U1KE4ZLdTzaV31ZK>

Meeting ID: 264 710 348 041 20

Passcode: uR6qq64V

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Dial in by phone

[+1 860-840-2075, 681731210#](tel:+18608402075681731210) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 681 731 210#

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Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest – April 1 through April 30



The CSDE invites school nutrition programs participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and early childhood education (ECE) providers participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) 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.
 - Two or more years of purchasing of CT Grown ingredients. This category includes schools who regularly incorporate local foods on the menu.
 - Sprouting: Less than 2 years of purchasing of CT Grown ingredients. This category includes those who are new to school nutrition, new to purchasing local foods or only occasionally buy local but want to do more.
- **ECE Great Plate Award** – For early childhood education providers participating in the CACFP.

Submission Details

Submissions are accepted from April 1 to April 30, 2026. To submit a photo for the CT Fresh Great Plates contest, complete the [Great Plates Submission Form](#) and email the photo (and recipe, if applicable) to CSDEChildNutritionPrograms@ct.gov. Use the subject line “Great Plates Spring 2026 [name of school/district and title of photo].” For example, “Great Plates Spring 2026 ABC District Rainbow Veggie Power Bowl with Grilled Chicken.”

More information is available at [Great Plates Contest](#). For questions, email the district’s [Regional Coordinator](#) or jennifer.bove@ct.gov.

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Need to Know

Upcoming 2025-26 USDA SFA Survey Participation

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is conducting a web survey of all SFAs that operate the National School Lunch Program and needs your input. The survey seeks to collect critical information on current key challenges SFAs are facing, including those related to school food procurement and program administration.

This survey will be emailed to SFAs on Monday, March 30, 2026. Your participation is vital to providing FNS with information they need to support SFAs during this time. Please take advantage of this opportunity to share your experiences from this school year and communicate your community's specific issues directly to FNS.

The survey you receive should come from USDA-FNS-SFASurvey@gmailserver.com. Please add this email address to your approved senders list so you do not miss the email. When completing the survey, you will provide information about your SFA for school year 2025-26. The survey has a maximum of 30 questions and is estimated to take up to 20 minutes to complete. Please complete it as soon as possible.

For questions about this survey, please email the FNS survey team at CNSurveys@usda.gov.

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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_25_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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