

The School Lunch Tray: April 1, 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

- Join the CSDE for Table Talk Tomorrow, Thursday, April 2, 2026
- 2026-27 Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Grant Announcement: Applications due May 1, 2026. 
- Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest Starts April 1, 2026 
- CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS Reminder and New Snapshot Available 

Need to Know

- New CSDE Resource: CT Fresh Ed: Local and Regional Food Tracker 
- Recording Available for Triennial Assessment Webinar March 30, 2026

Good to Know

- Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Takes Steps to Improve Gluten Ingredient Disclosure in Foods

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Action Items

Join the CSDE for Table Talk Tomorrow, Thursday, April 2, 2026

Table Talk will be held on Thursday, April 2, 2026, from 2:00-3:00 p.m. Use the Teams link below to join. This session will review the CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS assessment tool and highlight the new CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS Snapshot/Summar, including how to access and use it effectively.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join on your computer, mobile app or room device

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 225 336 668 44

Passcode: muTuBy

[Download Teams](#) | [Join on the web](#)

Or call in (audio only)

[+1 860-840-2075,,920756855#](#) United States, Hartford

Phone Conference ID: 920 756 855#

[Find a local number](#) | [Reset PIN](#)

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2026-27 Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Grant Announcement: Applications due May 1, 2026.

The CSDE's [FFVP Grant Announcement](#) provides information regarding the 2026-27 FFVP grant opportunity. The FFVP provides funding to serve a variety of free fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to all children in participating schools. **This grant funded program is different from the USDA Foods DOD program.**

Deadline: The CSDE will accept completed applications online until close of business on **May 1, 2026**.

Eligibility: Schools must be elementary schools; defined as schools inclusive of any grade between kindergarten and sixth grade (e.g., Pre-K through grade 6, K-12, and grades 5-8) where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals to apply. The [List of Area Eligible Schools for the FFVP](#) and [List of Site Eligible Schools for the FFVP](#) are specific to the FFVP grant only, and assist SFAs in determining which schools are potentially eligible to participate in the FFVP.

Submission Process: Prior to completing the online application, applicants must review the USDA's [Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Handbook](#) prior to ensure their application meets the

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federal guidelines. The 2026-27 FFVP Applications must be completed and submitted via the Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs ([CNP System](#)); therefore, applicants must have an ID and Password to access the system, or must connect with a district staff associate with current access. The [Instructions for Submitting the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program \(FFVP\) Grant Application](#) describes how to enter and submit the completed application. Applicants must also complete and upload the [Application Certification](#) form.

Questions: For questions, please contact Jen Bove at Jennifer.bove@ct.gov or 860-807-2044. For information on the FFVP, visit the CSDE's [FFVP](#) webpage.

More information and training: The CSDE will hold a one-hour information session on the FFVP application process via TEAMS on **Friday, April 10 from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.** All interested applicants are strongly encouraged to attend. FFVP Office Hours will be offered on **Thursday, April 23, 2026, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.** for school food authorities (SFAs) that need assistance with their application or have questions about the program or process. Links to both TEAMS meetings are below.

FFVP Application Information Session on Microsoft Teams

Friday, April 10 from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/21203707519100?p=dRMEUMsf0PI9iY1o4I>

Meeting ID: 212 037 075 191 00

Passcode: 8hZ3uG9A

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

Dial in by phone

[+1 860-840-2075,724286988#](tel:+18608402075724286988) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 724 286 988#

FFVP Application Office Hours on Microsoft Teams

Thursday, 23, 2026, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/25250109596055?p=TRK7KWDSMeppG3beYJ>

Meeting ID: 252 501 095 960 55

Passcode: U3cd7rF9

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

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Phone conference ID: 216 196 308#

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Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest Starts April 1, 2026



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.
 - Rooted: 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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CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS Reminder and New Snapshot Available



The CSDE reminds SFAS that the **CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS assessment** is due by June 1. Sponsors who have not completed their submission should plan accordingly to ensure timely compliance. For resources, refer to [Operational Memorandum No. 2-26:T Fresh Ed: Compass](#).

The **CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS Snapshot/Summary** is now available for sponsors who have completed the COMPASS assessment. This new feature provides a streamlined overview of the district's responses and key insights to support program planning and continuous improvement efforts.

Join this week's Table Talk session on April 2, where the CSDE will review the CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS assessment tool and highlight how to access and effectively use the new CT Fresh Ed: COMPASS Snapshot/Summary.

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Need to Know

New CSDE Resource: CT Fresh Ed: Local and Regional Food Tracker



The CSDE's [CT Fresh Ed: Local and Regional Food Tracker](#) Excel spreadsheet assists SFAs in tracking local and regional purchases, monitoring invoices submitted for the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program \(BLP\)](#), managing forward contracts, and overall tracking of purchases for completing Sections 1 and 2 of the [CT Fresh Ed: Compass](#).

Recording Available for Triennial Assessment Webinar 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. On March 30, 2026, the Rudd Center team presented an overview of the scores on the WellSAT measures and highlighted areas of strength and next steps. This webinar, [Connecticut's 2025 Triennial Assessments: Where we are and where to go next](#), is available in the "[Triennial Assessments](#)" section of the CSDE's School Wellness Policies webpage.

Good to Know

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Takes Steps to Improve Gluten Ingredient Disclosure in Foods

The FDA is extending the comment period on a [Request for Information regarding labeling and preventing cross-contact of gluten in packaged food](#). Electronic or written comments must be submitted by April 22, 2026.

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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_04_01_2026.pdf.



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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

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