

The School Lunch Tray: April 22, 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

- Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest Ends April 30, 2026 📅
- Registration for the 2026 CT Farm to School Conference on May 13, 2026 📅
- Registration for the 2026 WSCC Academy on May 20, 2026

Need to Know

- Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) On-site Monitoring Form

Good to Know

- USDA Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Farm to School Grants Awarded
- National Dairy Council Webinar: Practical Strategies to Lower Sugar in School Breakfasts, May 6, 2026
- New England Dairy's Bulk Milk Interest Survey: Due April 30, 2026
- Webinars for Summer EBT and Rural, Non-Congregate Programs
- Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) Webinar: Unlocking the Power of CEP: How Strategic Grouping Can Transform Your School Meal Program
- Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) Report: Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: The Reach of Summer Meals
- Recorded FRAC Webinar: The Summer Nutrition Landscape: Setting the Scene for Summer 2026

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Action Items

Spring 2026 CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates Contest Ends April 30, 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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Registration for the 2026 CT Farm to School Conference on May 13, 2026



Join the CSDE for a day of learning, connection, and inspiration—all centered around Farm to School. Generate ideas, make plans, and learn from peers how they are deepening their efforts through cafeteria, classroom, and community. Workshops are designed for a range of school roles, including foodservice directors, business managers, educators, and cafeteria managers.

This event counts toward professional standards requirements. Morning refreshments and lunch are included with the \$25 registration fee.

- **Date and time:** Wednesday, May 13, 2026, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- **Location:** Environmental learning Centers of CT, 501 Wolcott Rd, Bristol, CT 06010
- **Registration:** Register by May 1, 2026 at [2026 CT Farm to School Conference Registration](#)

Registration for the 2026 WSCC Academy on May 20, 2026

Registration is now available for the University of Connecticut Rudd Center's 2026 WSCC Academy, a day of free professional development. Connecticut schools can send either a district or school level team. Teams are encouraged to include representation from both wellness and climate teams for a day of meaningful integration and planning.

- **Date and time:** May 20, 2026, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- **Location:** UConn Hartford
- **Registration:** [2026 WSCC Academy Registration](#)

For more information, refer to the attached flyer.

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Need to Know

Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) On-site Monitoring Form

The CSDE's [ASP On-site Monitoring Form](#) has been updated to include the signature of the reviewer and the signature of the person interviewed in Part 4: Required Signature and Dates. Please discard any previous forms and replace them with the revised version dated April 2026.

Good to Know

USDA Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Farm to School Grants Awarded

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service recently announced the first cohort of Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Farm to School Grants. The USDA received an all-time high number of applications and will award a total of nearly \$20 million in funding, kicking off the largest ever financial investment in the history of the grant program. This year's awards highlight the farm to school community's ongoing innovation and dedication to improving child health through stronger local food systems and connecting children with meaningful, hands-on agricultural experiences. For more information, visit the USDA's [Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program Awards](#) webpage and [Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program](#) webpage.

National Dairy Council Webinar: Practical Strategies to Lower Sugar in School Breakfasts, May 6, 2026

Join the National Dairy Council for this fun, idea-packed webinar featuring school chefs and nutrition experts. This webinar provides learn practical strategies to introduce lower-sugar breakfast items into school menus. It also demonstrates Smart Swaps recipes developed with the time, staffing, and equipment realities of school nutrition operations in mind.

- **Date and time:** Wednesday, May 6, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
 - **Registration:** [Practical Strategies to Lower Sugar in School Breakfasts](#)
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New England Dairy's Bulk Milk Interest Survey: Due April 30, 2026

New England Dairy is looking to better understand the number of school districts interested in serving bulk milk with meals. If there is enough interest, they will consider hosting a farm tour and bulk milk focus group at Oakridge Dairy in Ellington. SFAs may complete New England Dairy's [Bulk Milk Interest Survey](#) to share their thoughts and interest by April 30, 2026.

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Webinars for Summer EBT and Rural, Non-Congregate Programs

The School Nutrition Foundation (SNF) has partnered with No Kid Hungry to provide two webinars designed to help SFAs show up for kids and families when school is out. From connecting families with Summer EBT benefits to building support for rural summer meal programs, these sessions are built around real challenges and strategies that are actually working.

Preparing for Summer EBT: Tools and Strategies for School Nutrition Leaders, April 22, 2026

Summer EBT gives eligible families \$120 in additional grocery benefits during the summer months when school meals aren't available. Getting the word out to families before summer break starts matters, and this webinar is designed to help SFAs do exactly that.

Join No Kid Hungry and the School Nutrition Foundation for a session built on insights from recent SNF focus groups. This webinar provides a clearer picture of what families need to know and how schools can help connect them to these benefits.

- **Date and time:** Wednesday, April 22, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
- **Registration:** [Preparing for Summer EBT: Tools and Strategies for School Nutrition Leaders](#)

Amplifying Impact: Advocacy Strategies for Rural, Non-Congregate Programs, April 29, 2026

This session is for SFAs that work with or alongside rural summer meal programs. Hear directly from a summer meals sponsor and a state agency SFSP director as they share real strategies for building stakeholder support and making the case for rural non-congregate programs in your community. This session also provides a closer look at how the Mayor's Alliance to End Hunger is using local elected officials to expand access for rural children and families.

- **Date and time:** Wednesday, April 29, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
 - **Registration:** [Amplifying Impact: Advocacy Strategies for Rural, Non-Congregate Programs](#)
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Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) Webinar: Unlocking the Power of CEP: How Strategic Grouping Can Transform Your School Meal Program

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) has reshaped the landscape of school meals, bringing free breakfast and lunch to millions of students while easing administrative burdens for school nutrition teams. But with federal SNAP cuts on the horizon, districts face a critical challenge: how to sustain CEP and protect access to free meals without compromising financial stability. That is where strategic grouping comes in. By thoughtfully pairing schools, districts are boosting their Identified Student Percentage (ISP), maximizing federal reimbursements, and expanding the reach of nutritious school meals to as many children as possible.

Join FRAC and savvy school nutrition leaders for a dynamic session that breaks down CEP rules and regulations, demystifies strategic grouping, and spotlights a real district's journey to strengthening CEP through innovative grouping strategies. Participants will walk away with practical insights, actionable tools, and a clearer path to ensuring every student gets the meals they need to thrive.

- **Date and time:** Wednesday, April 23, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.
- **Registration:** [Unlocking the Power of CEP: How Strategic Grouping Can Transform Your School Meal Program](#)

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) Report: Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: The Reach of Summer Meals

On April 1, 2026, the FRAC released [Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: The Reach of Summer Meals](#). This report examines how well the Summer Meals Programs reached children in July 2024, nationally and in every state, compared to July 2023. For a summary, visit the [FRAC Chat](#) webpage.

Recorded FRAC Webinar: The Summer Nutrition Landscape: Setting the Scene for Summer 2026

Join FRAC for a look at the summer nutrition landscape as summer meal programs gear up for Summer 2026. [The Summer Nutrition Landscape: Setting the Scene for Summer 2026](#) webinar provides a picture of where summer nutrition programs stand today, highlights opportunities for growth, and explores best practices that help ensure every child has access to nutritious meals when school is out.

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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_22_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

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WSCC Academy

Join us for a day of **free** professional development for Connecticut school teams!



PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER:

Supporting the Whole Child to Fuel Development for Learning and Life



Gather 3-5 colleagues to dive into integrating school wellness and school climate efforts.

**District
Wellness
Committees**

**District Climate
Teams or
Coordinators**





**School
Wellness
Teams**

**School
Climate
Teams**

[Register HERE!](#)

- Register as a district or school level team
- We encourage you to invite members of both your wellness & climate teams
- See our [website](#) for suggested roles and additional information.

Details

-  **May 20, 2026**
-  **8:30 AM - 3:30 PM**
-  **UConn Hartford**
-  **Coffee and FREE working lunch provided.**

Questions?

Contact us at ctwscc@uconn.edu

ctwscc.org

UConn