

The School Lunch Tray: August 19, 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

- Save the Date: Information Session on Readiness in School Everyday (RISE) Funds
- Reminder: Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs Due September 15, 2026
- Eat Real Food USDA Posters Order Form: Orders due August 24, 2026
- Schools Participating in CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 5-9, are Eligible to Receive a Free Promotional Kit 

Need to Know

- Placement and Operation of Vending Machines in School Districts
- Steps for Starting or Expanding the School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Reducing the Risk of Choking in Young Children at Mealtimes
- Login Assistance for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Order Receipt System (FFAVORS)
- Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated August 10, 2026, and August 19, 2026

Good to Know

- Chef Ann Foundation 2027 Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship Open for Application: Due September 2, 2026
- Build Dairy Farm to School Cafeteria-Classroom Connections: Deadline September 1, 2026
- Celebrate National School Lunch Week (NSLW) 2026: October 12-16

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Action Items

Save the Date: Information Session on Readiness in School Everyday (RISE) Funds

The CSDE will conduct an information session on the school year 2026-27 RISE Funds on Thursday August 20, 2026, from 2:00-3:00 p.m. This information session will provide details on eligibility, participation in, and claiming and reimbursement of school breakfast and reduced-priced lunches with the RISE Funds.

The CSDE encourages sponsors to submit questions in advance using the [RISE funds questions](#) link.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/join/273664865114918?p=1ewyCl6Z5wgNTuYQ5Q>

Meeting ID: 273 664 865 114 918

Passcode: LH643ws7

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

Dial in by phone

[+1 860-840-2075,,890859395#](#) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 890 859 395#

Note: The CSDE operational memorandum and questions and answers document about the RISE funds are available in the [RISE Funds](#) section of the CSDE's Current School Year Operational Updates for School Nutrition Programs webpage. The deadline for applying is **August 24, 2026**.

Reminder: Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs Due September 15, 2026

To maintain the school food authority's (SFA) nonprofit status, the NSLP regulations require that the fund balance (net cash resources [NCR]) of the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) cannot exceed three months' average expenditures at any time. SFAs must document compliance with the NCR requirement by submitting the annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs in the [Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs \(CNP System\)](#) by **September 15, 2025**. The CSDE's [Instructions for Submitting the Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs](#) provides step-by-step guidance on how to complete this report.

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Eat Real Food USDA Posters Order Form: Orders due August 24, 2026

The USDA is offering "Eat Real Food" posters to all school food authorities (SFA) for their cafeterias. The USDA will mail the posters in bulk to each SFA for delivery to each school site. Alternatively, SFAs may provide addresses for each individual school, and the USDA will mail the posters directly to the school sites. To order these posters, please complete the [Eat Real Food USDA Posters Order Form](#) by August 24, 2026. To view or download the posters, visit the USDA's [Eat Real Food Toolkit: Posters and Graphics](#) website.

Schools Participating in CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 5-9, are Eligible to Receive a Free Promotional Kit



To track the number of schools participating in CT Grown For CT Kids Week, the CSDE is asking any participating SFA to fill out the [CT Grown for CT Kids Week Registration Form](#). Any school listed on a form submitted in August will receive a CT Grown for CT Kids Week promotional kit.

The [Regional Coordinators](#) are available to assist SFAs in planning their celebrations. Ideas for celebrations include:

- menuing local produce, meat or dairy during the week;
 - testing a new recipe that includes local items;
 - taste tests of CT Grown items;
 - morning announcements focusing on local items being served;
 - trivia, contests, or games around CT Grown items; and
 - hosting a farmer talk or visit. Note: Offer farmers a stipend for any school visits which require them to take time off from their busy workday.
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Need to Know

Placement and Operation of Vending Machines in School Districts

The CSDE sent the information below to all superintendents on August 14, 2026.

“The CSDE is providing the attached Program Instruction on behalf of the Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (ADS-BESB), regarding ADS-BESB’s statutory rights for the placement and operation of vending machines in schools. Additionally, the instruction outlines requirements and procedures for districts and includes updates from the prior instruction issued in 2022 – also attached. All questions and issues should be directed to Tracy.Morin@ct.gov, Vending Service Coordinator, ADS-BESB.”

The documents referenced above include:

- Program Instruction (PI) BESB-SPI-26-01: Placement and Operation of Vending Machines in School Districts, issued August 11, 2026; and
- BESB-SPI-26-01 Attachment A: Placement and Operation of Vending Machines in Schools Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-303 and Section 10-215b-23 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies (R.C.S.A.), issued April 4, 2022.

Both documents are available under “[Placement of Vending Machines: ADS-BESB Right of First Refusal](#)” in the “Laws/Regulations” section of the CSDE’s Competitive Foods in Schools webpage.

Steps for Starting or Expanding the School Breakfast Program (SBP)

For information regarding starting or expanding the SBP, refer to the CSDE’s resources below.

- Starting the School Breakfast Program
- Expanding the School Breakfast Program

These resources are available in the “[Establish or Expand SBP](#)” section of the CSDE’s School Breakfast Program (SBP) webpage.

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Reducing the Risk of Choking in Young Children at Mealtimes

This is a reminder that children younger than age 4 are at the highest risk of choking while eating. SFAs should consider children's ages and developmental readiness when deciding what foods to offer in preschool menus and modify menus as appropriate. Avoid foods that are choking hazards (such as small marble-sized, sticky, or hard foods that are difficult to chew and easy to swallow whole). Prepare foods so they are easy for young children to chew and swallow (such as changing the shape, size, and texture of foods). For example, whole round or tube-shaped foods like hotdogs are a choking hazard and must be cut into short strips so they are easy for young children to chew and swallow.

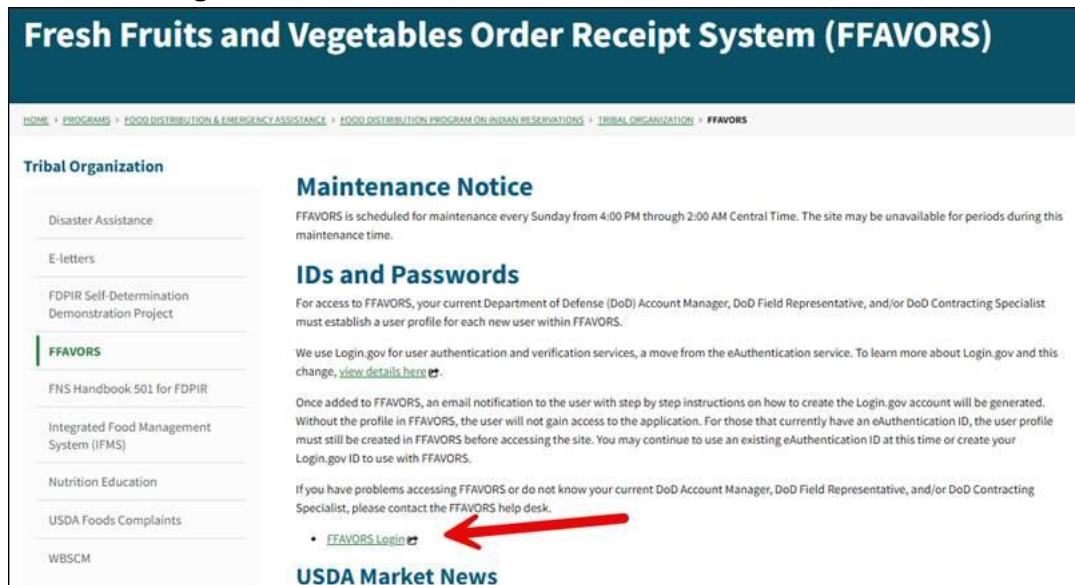
For guidance on reducing choking risk, refer to the USDA's resource, [Reducing the Risk of Choking in Young Children at Mealtimes](#), and visit the "[Choking Prevention](#)" section of the CSDE's [Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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Login Assistance for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Order Receipt System (FFAVORS)

With the USDA's recent change of the FFAVORS URL from FNS to FNA, some SFAs have experienced issues with accessing the website. The USDA FFAVORS Help Desk provided the steps below to assist with resolving these issues.

1. Clear browser cache and close all browser windows.
2. Access the USDA FFAVORS homepage at <https://www.fna.usda.gov/usda-foods/ffavors>. Bookmark/favorite this link for easy access.
3. Under the **IDs and Passwords** section, click the "FFAVORS Login" link. This brings the user to the **Login** screen.

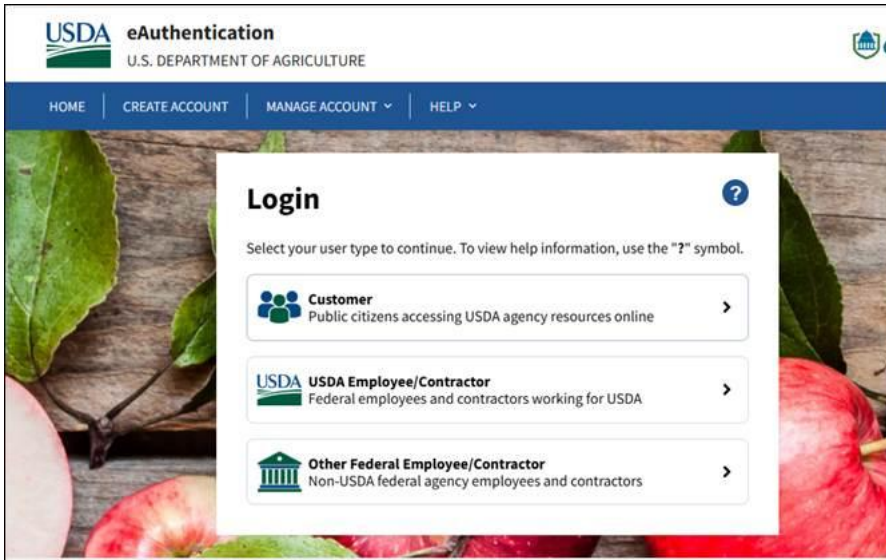


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4. If the **USDA Federal Login** screen below appears, click the “Change user type” link. Otherwise, continue to Step 5.

The image shows the USDA Federal Login screen. At the top left is the USDA logo. The title "USDA Federal Login" is in the top center, with a help icon (?) on the top right. Below the title is a link "Need an account?". A line of text asks "Not a USDA Federal Employee/Contractor?" followed by a blue link "Change user type" which is pointed to by a red arrow. Below this is the instruction "Select an option to continue". There are four login options, each in a box with a right-pointing arrow: "PIV/CAC" (Enter PIV/CAC PIN), "USDA MobileLinc" (Use government mobile device for login), "USDA Work Account" (Employees and contractors use Microsoft login), and "PIV Exemption" (Log in with your eAuth User ID and Password).

5. On the **Login** screen, select “Customer” (first option).

The image shows the USDA eAuthentication Login screen. The top header includes the USDA logo, "eAuthentication", and "U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE". A navigation bar has links for "HOME", "CREATE ACCOUNT", "MANAGE ACCOUNT", and "HELP". The main content area has a background image of apples and a "Login" box. The box has a title "Login" and a help icon (?). Below the title is the instruction "Select your user type to continue. To view help information, use the '?' symbol." There are three user type options, each in a box with a right-pointing arrow: "Customer" (Public citizens accessing USDA agency resources online), "USDA Employee/Contractor" (Federal employees and contractors working for USDA), and "Other Federal Employee/Contractor" (Non-USDA federal agency employees and contractors).

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6. The **Customer Login** screen has two options for authentication. Select Login.gov (first option).



Customer Login ?

[Need an account?](#)
Not a Customer? [Change user type](#)

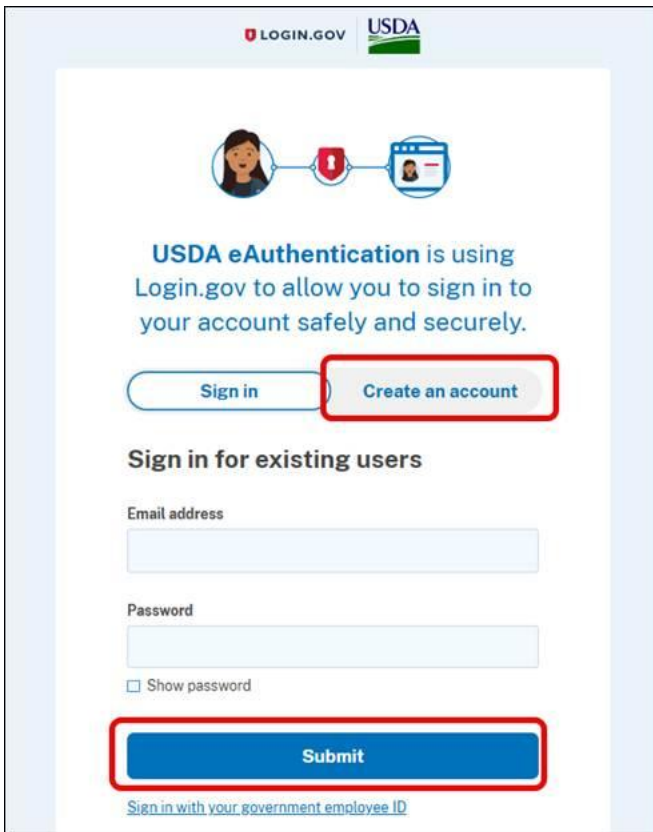
Select an option to continue

Login.gov
Enter Login.gov Email Address and Password >

eAuth User ID
Enter User ID and Password >

7. Enter the user's Login.gov email address and password and click the "Submit" button to log into FFAVORS. The user will then be required to provide a second form of authentication (e.g., telephone code, text message code, backup code, etc.). This second form of authentication was set up during the user's Login.gov account creation process.

Note: Individuals who previously used an eAuth User ID and password to log into FFAVORS will need to create a Login.gov account. Click the "Create an account" button to begin the Login.gov user account creation process.



LOGIN.GOV USDA

USDA eAuthentication is using Login.gov to allow you to sign in to your account safely and securely.

[Sign in](#) [Create an account](#)

Sign in for existing users

Email address

Password

☐ Show password

[Sign in with your government employee ID](#)

Submit

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Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated August 10, 2026, and August 19, 2026

Since the previous update released on August 10, 2026, many additional products have been approved. Lists with these more recent approvals are dated August 19, 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 all changes from August 10 and 19; 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.

Healthy Food Certification (HFC) schools must check that commercial foods and beverages are listed before they are sold to students. 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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Good to Know

Chef Ann Foundation 2027 Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship Open for Application: Due September 2, 2026

The Chef Ann Foundation's applications for the [2027 Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship](#) are open through September 2, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. PT. The Fellowship is a fully funded 13-month program for school food professionals who are passionate about advancing scratch-cooked, healthy, and equitable school meals. The Fellowship also includes hands-on training, travel to connect with fellow school food professionals across the country, and a \$5,000 stipend to support a project in your district.

Build Dairy Farm to School Cafeteria-Classroom Connections: Deadline September 1, 2026

Join classrooms across Connecticut in adopting a calf from Laurelbrook Farm with Adopt a Cow. School nutrition professionals who register will receive a calf photo, adoption certificate, and year-round updates to share in the cafeteria, plus a bonus cafeteria kit with posters, stickers, cooler magnets, and more. After registering, participants can [order additional cafeteria kits](#) for other schools in the district. This program is funded by the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board and New England Dairy.

Celebrate National School Lunch Week (NSLW) 2026: October 12-16

Plan now to celebrate this year's NSLW theme, Cafeteria Circus: Where Healthy Choices Take Center Stage. For more information and resources, visit the School Nutrition Association's [National School Lunch Week](#) webpage.

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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_08_19_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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