

The School Lunch Tray: September 30, 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

- Reminder: Verification Starts Tomorrow, October 1 and Must be Completed by November 15, 2026
- Menu Planning and Utilizing the USDA Menu Worksheets for the Administrative Review (Part 4 of CSDE's Virtual Training – Getting Ready for Success: Preparing for the School Nutrition Program Administrative and Procurement Reviews), October 1, 2026
- CSDE Virtual Office Hour on October 6, 2026: How to Complete and Submit the Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance on October 6, 2026
- USDA Foods Update: Action Required by October 7, 2026
- Reminder: Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance due October 15, 2026
- 68 sites registered activities for CT Grown for CT Kids Week (October 5-9, 2026) 

Need to Know

- Five Days until CT Grown for CT Kids Week Starts 
- Advanced Placement (AP) Coordinators Accessing Students' Free and Reduced-priced Eligibility Information

Good to Know

- New Team Nutrition Resources for Promoting Real Food in Child Nutrition Programs
- Save the Date: Annual Common Ground Farm and Garden Conference, November 7, 2026
- Revised USDA Professional Standards Resources

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Action Items

Reminder: Verification Starts Tomorrow, October 1 and Must be Completed by November 15, 2026

The CSDE reminds school food authorities (SFAs) that the verification process begins October 1 and must be completed by November 15. The CSDE's verification webinar, *Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs*, is available on the CSDE's [Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. The verification forms are available in the "[Forms](#)" section of the CSDE's Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Three important documents that assist in the verification process include the CSDE's [Calendar for Completing Verification](#), [Important Points for Completing Verification](#), and the **required** [Verification Selection Worksheet](#). For more information regarding verification, refer to the USDA's [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).

Menu Planning and Utilizing the USDA Menu Worksheets for the Administrative Review (Part 4 of CSDE's Virtual Training – Getting Ready for Success: Preparing for the School Nutrition Program Administrative and Procurement Reviews), October 1, 2026

Part 4 of the *Getting Ready for Success: Preparing for the School Nutrition Program Administrative Review (AR) and Procurement Review (PR)* virtual training takes place October 1, 2026. This webinar focuses on Menu Planning and Utilizing the USDA Menu Worksheets for the AR.

Required Attendance

This virtual training session is **mandatory for SFAs scheduled for an AR during SY 2026-27**. The session is also open to all SFAs. New school nutrition program directors and menu planners are encouraged to attend.

Training Date

October 1, 2026, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Training Access Information

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/299040240667005?p=iLt5ckqa1XvsX1xSIQ>

Meeting ID: 299 040 240 667 005

Passcode: pz9PW6v8

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Dial in by phone

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[+1 860-840-2075](tel:+18608402075), [119445430#](tel:+119445430) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 119 445 430#

CSDE Virtual Office Hour on October 6, 2026: How to Complete and Submit the Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance on October 6, 2026

The CSDE will conduct a virtual Teams office hour on October 6, 2026, from 9:00-10:00 a.m. for SFAs with an excess operating balance (exceeds three months' average expenditures as indicated on the Financial Report). This session will answer questions on completing and submitting the Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance for School Nutrition Programs, which is due October 15, 2026. Use the Teams link below to access the office hour.

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/294364289648346?p=AQCiYC8lp7Z8hZs5Yd>

Meeting ID: 294 364 289 648 346

Passcode: 5Me9eV9K

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USDA Foods Update: Action Required by October 7, 2026

The USDA Foods deliveries below are cancelled. These products will not be available for reorder this school year.

1. Sweet Potatoes Crinkle, Frozen – Material Code 110721, Sales Order Number 5001036673 (100)
2. Corn, Whole Kernel, Canned, 6/10 – Material Code 100313, Sales Order Number 5001035291 (100)
3. Strawberry Slices, Unsweetened, 6/5 LB – Material Code 110860, Sales Order Numbers 5001036538 (100) and (200)
4. Strawberry Frozen Cups – 96/4.5 oz, Material Code 100256, Sales Order Numbers 5001038712 (100) (200) (300) and (400), and 5001046652 (100) and (200)

All entitlement associated with canceled trucks has been returned to the Recipient Agency's (RA) WBSCM account. Due to the unusually high number of cancellations this year, the Connecticut Food Distribution Program (FDP) is offering an opportunity to allocate any remaining entitlement funds to the RA's USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable account. To participate in moving unused entitlement into FFAVORS for use in the USDA Fresh DoD Program, please complete the steps below.

1. Run the RA's **Entitlement Bonus Summary Report** in WBSCM for the current school year (2027).
2. Forward the report to **Allison Calhoun-White** at allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov and **Sybil Walton** at Walton@ctserc.org no later than **Wednesday, October 7, 2026**.
3. The Connecticut Food Distribution Program (FDP) will update all RAs when the dollars will be allocated to FFAVORS. This information will be provided in the School Lunch Tray. **Note:** The allocation will not happen immediately because entitlement is moved into FFAVORS quarterly. The target for loading all dollars into FFAVORS is early November.

RAs that are not currently participating in the USDA Fresh DoD Program but would like to enroll should contact the FDP for assistance with establishing a USDA Fresh DoD account.

For questions, please contact Allison Calhoun-White at allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov.

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Reminder: Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance due October 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 with an operating balance in excess of 3 months' average expenditures (exceeds three months' average expenditures as indicated on the Financial Report, Due Date September 15, 2026) must submit a [Plan to Reduce Excess Operating Balance for School Nutrition Programs](#) by October 15, 2026.

For any equipment or services with a unit cost of \$5,000 or greater that is not included on the [Capital Expenditure Approved List for School Food Authority Equipment Purchases](#), SFA's must submit a [Capital Expenditure Request Form](#) in the CNP system. For any expenditure that benefits other programs (such as cafeteria furniture, lunch aid and utilities), a [Cost Allocation Plan](#) must be submitted to the CSDE in the CNP System.

68 sites registered activities for CT Grown for CT Kids Week (October 5-9, 2026)



The excitement over CT grown for CT Kids Week is growing with school food authorities (SFAs) and early education centers (EECs) all over the state menuing local foods and planning activities to highlight the great work being done in Farm to School. The CSDE's resource, [Districts Participating in CT Grown for CT Kids Week 2026](#), indicates all the districts that registered activities for the week. Any SFAs or EECs planning to menu CT Grown food, host taste tests or celebrate with any other activity is encouraged to register this even at [CT Grown for CT Kids Week Registration](#). Help shine a light on local farms and the food service programs who support them.

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Need to Know

Five Days until CT Grown for CT Kids Week Starts



On October 5-9, hundreds of schools across Connecticut will be celebrating **Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh All Day Long** focusing attention on the local foods they serve at breakfast, lunch, and snacks and suppers. This is the perfect time to take pictures of the meals you are serving for the CT Fresh Ed: Great Plates contest coming in November. Remember to make sure the meals pictured contain all the components of a complete meal, including milk.

Schools are reminded to publicize the incredible CT Grown foods they are serving and the celebrations they are planning via menus, newsletters and social media. Districts without access to social media can email pictures and descriptions to execdir@snact.org and ctfts@googlegroups.com to be posted on the SNACT and CT Farm to School Collaborative social media accounts. For social media tips and tricks refer to the [CT Fresh Ed Social Media Toolkit](#), and tag local farmers and farm to school partners. To tag an account, type @ followed by their social media name. Important partners to tag are listed below.

Facebook Tag	Instagram Tag
CT Farm to School Collaborative	ctfarmtoschoolcollab
UConn Extension	uconnextension
School Nutrition Association of Connecticut (SNACT)	SNAofCT
Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)	educate.ct
Connecticut Department of Agriculture	ct.grown
New England Dairy	newenglanddairy



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Advanced Placement (AP) Coordinators Accessing Students' Free and Reduced-priced Eligibility Information

Last week, the CSDE Academic Office issued an announcement to all AP Coordinators that addresses the process for requesting free and reduced-priced eligibility information for applicable students. The relevant information for school nutrition programs is below. Please review and share with appropriate staff. Questions may be directed to your state CNP technical support person.

Dear AP Coordinator:

For 2027 Advanced Placement® (AP) testing, AP coordinators must order tests for students by November 13, 2026. This is the deadline to submit exam orders for all full-year and first-semester AP courses, and exam only sections. The late order fee applies for exams ordered after this date. A [fee](#) also applies for exams cancelled after this date. Please visit the [College Board's AP Central](#) for more information.

The process for obtaining fee waivers for eligible students for the College Board's Advanced Placement test has not changed. The CSDE and College Board will cover the entire cost of the 2027 AP exam fees for all students from low-income families who attend public school in Connecticut. The AP coordinators will indicate in the AP Registration and Ordering (APRO) site a student's low-income status. The CSDE will be directly billed for the cost of exams for students from low-income families as long as the AP coordinator indicates this in the APRO.

Since the AP, PSAT, and SAT are considered part of a CSDE State Educational Program, the AP, PSAT, and SAT coordinator can be given access to a student's income eligibility status.

Please note that once the AP, PSAT, or SAT coordinator/counselors request access to free, reduced-priced, paid meal (FRPM) eligibility data, they must complete the Disclosure Release Request for Free or Reduced Eligibility Status of Students in the School Nutrition Program to ensure they have an understanding of the USDA regulations and do not use this information for other purposes. The completed form must be reviewed and approved by the district or school's determining official (i.e., the person who processes FRPM applications). Once approved, the determining official can provide the coordinator/counselor with the FRPM eligibility status only, but not the source that determined the eligibility, for the applicable students.

The deadline for the AP coordinator to indicate in APRO students who are eligible for the fee waiver is April 30, 2027.

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Good to Know

New Team Nutrition Resources for Promoting Real Food in Child Nutrition Programs

USDA's Team Nutrition recently announced the release of nutrition education and training resources designed to help Child Nutrition Program operators promote the clear, common-sense message of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030*: Eat real food.

These resources focus on eating whole, nutrient-dense foods. These foods include protein foods, dairy, healthy fats, vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. These resources also highlight the importance of limiting the intake of highly processed foods, added sugars, and refined carbohydrates.

Resources for Schools

- [Real Food Guide to School Lunch for Families](#)
- [Real Food Guide to School Breakfast for Families](#)
- [Stronger With School Meals Activity Booklet](#)

Resources for Child Care Organizations

- Serving Vegetables in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) [Training Worksheet](#), [Recorded Webinar](#), and [Training Slides](#)
- Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children
 - [Healthy Meals with the Real Food Pyramid](#)
 - [Developing a Taste for Less Sodium](#)
 - [Limiting Added Sugars for Healthier Habits](#)
 - [Prioritize Protein Foods](#)

Knowledge Test

- [Eat Real Food Web Quiz!](#)
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Save the Date: Annual Common Ground Farm and Garden Conference, November 7, 2026

Save the date for a full day of hands-on workshops open to all. Come together to share knowledge, seeds, and ideas about growing, preparing, and enjoying food, as well as learning in outdoor spaces.

Workshops will explore urban farming, food justice, mushrooms, garden education, herbal medicine, cooking, a dedicated kids' track, and much more. Registration information will be available soon. For more information, visit Common Ground's [Farm and Garden Conference](#) website.

Revised USDA Professional Standards Resources

Team Nutrition recently revised three professional standards resources that support school nutrition professionals as they successfully operate the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Revisions include the most current Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) policy guidance, specifically hiring flexibilities for school nutrition directors in medium or large local educational agencies.

- [Flyer: Summary of the Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals](#)
- [Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals](#)
- [Professional Standards Training Reward Badges](#)

The USDA's professional standards resources are available on their [Professional Standards: Resources](#) webpage. As a reminder, the USDA's [Professional Standards Trainings and Tracker Tool \(PSTTT\)](#) helps school nutrition professionals search for relevant professional standards trainings and track their annually required training hours. Note: The USDA does not approve nor require specific training programs for school nutrition professionals.

While planning professional standards training for the school year, the USDA encourages school nutrition professionals to consider aligning with the [Harvest to Hallways](#) initiative to highlight meal quality improvements and community engagement.

For additional guidance, visit the CSDE's [Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals](#) 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_09_30_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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