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# Supporting Timely Completion of CACFP Enrollment & Income Eligibility Forms

Centers and family childcare providers sometimes face challenges getting families to return CACFP Income Eligibility Forms (IEFs) or enrollment paperwork. While these forms may feel routine, they are essential, and meals may only be claimed for CACFP reimbursement when the required forms are fully completed and on file.

When forms are not returned, providers are unable to claim meals for those children or use CACFP funds to support their meal service. In these situations, it may be helpful to clearly note in your records that the child is not enrolled in CACFP.

To help improve form completion rates, Maine childcare providers have shared the following successful strategies:

## Tips & Best Practices from Maine Providers

- Host an Open Enrollment Day. Schedule a specific day where staff are stationed at a table during drop-off and pick-up, and families complete required CACFP forms on-site. Advertising the Open Enrollment Day several weeks in advance gives parents ample notice and sets a clear expectation for participation.
- Schedule an in-person meeting with families to complete the IEF together. Taking time to explain how CACFP reimbursement helps offset food costs and supports affordable tuition can increase participation.
- Include the IEF in your annual enrollment packet. Some centers have adopted policies stating that care cannot begin—or continue—unless required CACFP forms are completed and submitted.
- Establish clear meal policies. If families choose not to participate in CACFP by not completing the form, some centers require those families to provide meals for their child.
- Communicate early and often. Gentle reminders, clear deadlines, and explanations of why the form is required for participation in the food program (not optional) can help families prioritize returning the paperwork.
- Make it easy. Offer multiple ways to return forms (paper, secure electronic submission, or on-site completion) and ensure staff are available to answer questions.

## A Helpful Reminder

If parents ultimately remain uninterested or decline to complete CACFP forms, their child's meals cannot be claimed for reimbursement, and CACFP funds may not be used to cover those meals.

Clear communication, consistent policies, and proactive support can make a meaningful difference in improving form return rates—helping ensure your program remains compliant while continuing to provide nutritious meals to the children in your care.

# Serious Deficiency in the CACFP

On January 8, 2026, FNS held a live webinar for State agencies administering the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) titled, “Serious Deficiency in the CACFP”. This webinar supported USDA Secretary Rollins’ commitment to clarify statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements and take swift action to minimize instances of fraud, waste, and program abuse.

The recording of this [webinar](#) is now available for viewers.

The serious deficiency process of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) was established to ensure compliance with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) regulations and guidance.

The serious deficiency process provides a systematic way for state agencies and sponsoring organizations to correct serious management problems, and when that effort fails, protect child nutrition program integrity through due process.

A State agency has the authority to determine when a violation rises to the level of a serious deficiency.

## Determining Serious Deficiencies

The severity of the problem.

The degree of responsibility attributable to the institution.

The institution’s history of participation in the Program.

The nature of the requirements that relate to the problem.

The degree to which the problem impacts Program integrity

The resolution will be either the correction of the problem and the issuance of a temporary deferment of the serious deficiency, or the institution’s termination and disqualification from the Program.

Resource materials: [https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/CACFP\\_Serious\\_Deficiency\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/CACFP_Serious_Deficiency_Handbook.pdf)

# Feeding Infants in the CACFP

## Infant Formula

Infants enrolled for care at participating CACFP institutions or facilities must be offered meal and snacks that comply with the CACFP infant meal pattern requirements ([7 CFR 226.20\(b\)](#)). Breastmilk or iron-fortified infant formula, or portions of both, must be served to infants birth through 11 months of age. An institution or facility must offer at least one type of iron-fortified infant formula. [CACFP Infant Meal Pattern | Food and Nutrition Service](#).

The following criteria may be used to determine if an infant formula is creditable in the CACFP:

1. Ensure that the formula is not an [FDA Exempt Infant Formula](#). An exempt infant formula is an infant formula labeled for use by infants who have inborn errors of metabolism or low birth weight, or who otherwise have unusual medical or dietary problems, as defined in 21 CFR 107.3. Formulas classified as Exempt Infant Formulas by the FDA may be served as part of a reimbursable meal if the substitution is due to a disability with a supporting signed medical statement. The medical statement must include the name of the infant formula to be avoided and explain how the infant formula affects the baby. Recommended substitutions of infant formula can also be included on the medical statement.
2. Look for “Infant Formula with Iron” or a similar statement on the front of the formula package. All iron-fortified infant formulas must have this type of statement on the package.
3. Use the Nutrition Facts label as a guide to ensure that the formula is iron-fortified. The nutritive values of each formula are listed on the product’s Nutrition Facts label. To be considered iron-fortified, an infant formula must have 1 mg of iron or more per 100 calories of formula when prepared in accordance with label directions.

Infant formulas that are not regulated by the FDA are not creditable in the CACFP. If a formula is purchased outside of the United States, it is likely that the formula is not regulated by the FDA. Infant formula that is imported into the U.S. as a result of the 2022 FDA Infant Formula Enforcement Discretion Policy may be served in the CACFP as detailed in [CACFP 01-2023](#).

Related sources concerning feeding infants and infant formula-

- [7 CFR 226.20\(b\)\(2\)](#)
- [CACFP 06-2025, Feeding Infants and Meal Pattern Requirements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program; Questions and Answers](#)
- [FDA Infant Formula](#)
- [Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program Guide](#)



# December Claim

## Submission

**March 3, 2026** is the last day to submit your **December 2025** claim

*We strongly encourage you to submit claims as early as possible and not wait until the last minute. Planning ahead allows time to address any questions or issues that may arise, especially considering the two-step claim approval process.*

# CACFP Open Office Hours

## **Need Help with CACFP? We're Here for You!**

Have questions about your CACFP budget, sponsor or provider agreements, provider sheets, or other program requirements? Join our monthly CACFP Office Hours from 2:00–3:00 p.m. on Microsoft Teams.

During this open session, CACFP staff will be available to answer your questions, provide technical assistance, and offer guidance to support your program's success.!

February 9, 2026


March 9, 2026

April 13, 2026

May 11, 2026

June 8, 2026

[Use this link to join the CACFP Open Office Hours](#)



# Celebrate National CACFP Week

## March 15-21, 2026

National CACFP Week is observed each year during the third week of March and is sponsored by the National CACFP Sponsors Association. This national education and awareness campaign highlights the important role the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) plays in fighting hunger and supporting healthy communities.

CACFP helps bring nutritious meals and snacks to children in child care centers, family child care homes, and afterschool programs, as well as to adults participating in adult day care programs—ensuring access to healthy food where it matters most.

The 2026 theme, “Stirring Up Goodness,” celebrates the positive impact of CACFP and the dedicated sponsors, providers, and staff who make it possible—one meal at a time.

Learn more and find ways to participate:

[https://info.cacfp.org/calendar/Details/national-cacfp-week-march-15-21-2026-1566770?  
sourceTypeld=Website](https://info.cacfp.org/calendar/Details/national-cacfp-week-march-15-21-2026-1566770?sourceTypeld=Website)



## February Harvest of the Month: Root Vegetables

February is the perfect time to celebrate root vegetables—nutritious, hearty foods that grow underground and are packed with flavor and important nutrients. Root vegetables such as carrots, beets, sweet potatoes, turnips, parsnips, and radishes are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber that support growing bodies and healthy digestion.

Root vegetables are versatile and easy to include in CACFP meals. Try roasting carrots or sweet potatoes for a naturally sweet side dish, adding shredded beets or carrots to salads, or mashing turnips for a comforting addition to lunch or supper. Many root vegetables can be served cooked or raw, making them a great option for a variety of age groups.

To make learning fun, invite children to explore root vegetables by washing them before cooking, identifying their colors and shapes, or talking about how they grow underground. These simple activities help build curiosity around food and encourage children to try new vegetables.

By featuring root vegetables this February, you're helping participants enjoy seasonal foods while supporting healthy, balanced meals in the CACFP.

# Cozy Recipes & Heart-Healthy Activities

February in Maine is the perfect time to lean into cozy meals, creative activities, and heart-healthy habits. With chilly days and Valentine's themes, this month offers many opportunities to make mealtimes and learning fun while supporting CACFP meal patterns.

## Cozy, CACFP-Friendly Recipe Ideas

- [Hearty Chicken & Vegetable Soup](#)

A comforting way to serve vegetables and protein on cold days. Pair with whole-grain bread and milk for a complete meal.

- [Baked Apple Cinnamon Oatmeal Cups](#)

Easy to prepare ahead and perfect for a cozy breakfast or snack.

- [Valentine Fruit Kabobs](#)

Use waffles, strawberries, and yogurt to create a colorful, heart-themed snack or breakfast that encourages fruit tasting.

- **Whole-Grain Mini Pizzas**

Use whole-grain English muffins topped with tomato sauce, low-fat cheese, and vegetables for a fun, build-your-own lunch.

## February Activities that Connect Food & Fun

- **Heart-Healthy Food Sort**

Let children sort pictures or plastic foods into fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins to learn about balanced meals.

- **Cooking with Colors**

Celebrate Valentine's Day by focusing on red and pink fruits and vegetables like apples, strawberries, beets, and tomatoes.

- **Snowy Day Taste Tests**

Introduce a new fruit or vegetable and encourage children to describe the taste, texture, and color.

- **Kindness Jar**

Each time children try a new food or help set the table, add a heart or snowflake to the jar to celebrate positive mealtime behaviors.

## Maine Winter Movement Ideas

- **Indoor Movement Breaks**

Try stretching, dancing, or pretending to shovel snow to keep bodies moving on cold days.

- **Winter Nature Talk**

Discuss how animals stay warm in winter and how warm foods help keep our bodies energized and healthy.

All recipes and snacks served must continue to meet CACFP meal pattern requirements. February is a great time to introduce new foods while modeling healthy habits and joyful mealtimes.

Warm meals, playful activities, and simple nutrition lessons help make February a month full of learning, connection, and fun—no matter how cold it gets outside!

# Read to ME Challenge – February 2026

The Maine Department of Education (DOE) invites Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Sponsors and their participating sites to join the 11th Annual Read to ME Challenge, a statewide literacy initiative held each February. The Read to ME Challenge encourages adults to read to and with children, helping foster a love of reading while supporting early literacy development.

The 2026 Challenge kicks off in early February and runs through Read Across America Day on March 2, 2026. Child care centers, family child care homes, and afterschool programs are encouraged to plan simple reading activities, invite guest readers, and share their participation using #ReadtoME.


As part of this initiative, the Maine CACFP State Agency, within the Maine DOE, would be happy to visit CACFP sites to read to children in February. This is a great opportunity to highlight the connection between nutrition, literacy, and school readiness. Interested in scheduling a CACFP reading visit?

Please email Alissa Mank at [alissa.m.mank@maine.gov](mailto:alissa.m.mank@maine.gov) to request a visit.

We encourage Sponsors to share this opportunity with their sites and help spread the joy of reading across Maine.




# Trainings & Webinars



## Simple Self-Care for Childcare Providers

Discover fun self-care rituals and mindfulness tips to recharge after tax season.



<https://www.kidkare.com/webinars/?wchannelid=uqahvbwct&wmediaid=tj8iv97mww>



**Free Webinar**

## Stirring Up Goodness

Resources for CACFP Week

Tuesday, February 10  
2:00 pm - 2:30 pm Eastern  
8:00 pm - 8:30 pm Eastern



NATIONAL CACFP ASSOCIATION cacfp.org

Tuesday, February 10, 2026 | 2:00 pm - 2:30 pm Eastern

You stir up goodness every day in the CACFP, now let's make sure your program shines during CACFP Week! Discover all the free CACFP Week resources available to help you celebrate with confidence. You'll see exactly how to use these tools to highlight your program, engage the community you serve and share the impact you make.

<https://info.cacfp.org/ap/Events/12Fyx83fgCVCB>

Whether this is your first CACFP Week or you've been celebrating for years, you'll leave feeling inspired, prepared and proud of the goodness you bring to the table.

Presented By: Lisa Mack, President & CEO,  
National CACFP Association

Free Webinar

# Discovering Goodness

Through Food Adventures

Monday, March 16

2:00 pm - 2:30 pm Eastern



cacfp.org

<https://info.cacfp.org/ap/Events/Register/12FyW76TgCVCB>

