



THE  
**OUTLOOK**  
A Monthly Newsletter for School Nutrition Programs

# GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

## NSLP Equipment Assistance Grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) awards funding to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to provide equipment assistance, via competitive grants, to eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs). These grants are intended to support the capacity of SFAs that operate the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) by enabling them to meet school food service equipment needs.

A total of \$1,051,731 is available for this funding opportunity. All Illinois SFAs that participate in NSLP are eligible to apply. An SFA is the governing body that is responsible for the administration of one or more

schools and has the legal authority to operate NSLP therein.

SFAs may request up to \$50,000 to replace, renovate, or purchase new school food service equipment that is needed for NSLP/SBP operations, and which enables them to serve healthier program meals; improve food safety; and/or support expansion or establishment of the SBP.

SFAs may submit project proposals until 4 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 18, 2023. For full details, see the Notice of Funding Opportunity/Request for Proposals and information on how to apply on the [NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant webpage](#).



Illinois State Board of Education Nutrition Department staff will present an informational webinar on the new School Breakfast Program Expansion Grant from 10-11 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5.

[Registration is under way on the ISBE website.](#)

Illinois is one of only three states awarded the grant opportunity by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ISBE will be seeking applications early next year from School Food Authorities for sub-grants to initiate or expand the [School Breakfast Program](#).

For questions, email Abbey Johnson at [abjohnso@isbe.net](mailto:abjohnso@isbe.net).

## NEWS BITES

### COMMODITY EXPO & FOOD SHOW

The Illinois State Board of Education Nutrition Department is teaming up with the Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and the School Food Nutrition Directors Association to present the **Commodity Expo and Food Show** on Jan. 31 in Maryland Heights, Mo. [Registration is underway online.](#)



### LOCAL PROCUREMENT

The Illinois Farm to School Network is planning a **Farm to School Local Procurement Day** event. It is set for 9 a.m. to noon Dec. 7 at Beyond Green Partners in Chicago.

This three-hour event will provide participants with helpful information on local procurement, concepts to change how you view your food service kitchen, and share the Beyond Green Partners program to begin scratch cooking at your own pace while incorporating local foods creating kid-friendly, healthy menus. [Register online.](#) Email [admin@sevendgenerationsahead.org](mailto:admin@sevendgenerationsahead.org) if you have any questions.

### UPCOMING EVENT

**National School Breakfast Week** is set for March 4-8. The [School Nutrition Association](#) has many resources for schools to start planning something special.

You can also visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Team Nutrition [School Breakfast Materials webpage](#) for inspiration.

# Verification Summary Report Deadline Dec. 15

The deadline to submit the Verification Summary Report (VSR) is Dec. 15. The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires all School Nutrition Program sponsors who received and approved Household Eligibility Applications between July 1 and Oct. 1, 2023, to conduct Verification for School Year 2023-24.

For Verification, School Food Authorities (SFAs) are required to verify income for a small percentage of households approved for free or reduced-price meals each school year. Sponsors then report their results by submitting the VSR.

**PLEASE NOTE:** District-wide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) sponsors do not collect HEAs so they do not need to do Verification. RCCIs that do not have any day students also do not need to complete the Verification process.

If you have not started already, you are running out of time to complete

the Verification process before the federal deadline. If you have not started, we stress that you begin right away. **Sponsors who do not complete the required Verification are subject to claim withholdings.**

All sponsors are expected to be familiar with the [School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook](#), which includes a [section on Verification](#).

For assistance please review our recorded instructions.

- [School Year 2023-2024 Verification Process and Verification Summary Report](#)
- [Steps 2-5 for the VSR](#)

PDFs of the slides for these instructions are posted at <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Based-Child-Nutrition-Documents.aspx>, where you can also find resources, forms, and sample letters for the Verification process.

## FDP Annual Order Period

The School Year 2024-25 Food Distribution Program Annual Order Period begins Jan. 8, 2024. Orders may be placed in the Illinois Commodity System (ICS). The three spending options include, USDA Foods, DOD Fresh, and diversion to processors.

The diversion to processors option will close in ICS the week of March 4-8, so that ISBE can compile truck loads. It will re-open March 11-15 for final changes. The order period will close March 15, and all diversion to processor requests must be sub-

mitted by March 15.

Please refer to the [ICS Instructions](#) for step by step instructions on placing an order. Refer to the ["How to Place an Annual Order"](#) recorded training at for additional guidance.

For those interested in the diversion to processor spending option, check out the [Diversion to Processor Fact Sheet](#) and the [USDA Foods Show webpage](#) for resources and information related to processing.

Email [fdp@isbe.net](mailto:fdp@isbe.net) with questions.

# LFS Open Enrollment Closes Soon!

School Food Authorities (SFAs) that are interested in utilizing Local Food for Schools (LFS) funds to purchase local unprocessed or minimally processed foods with LFS funds but have not yet signed up should do so by Feb. 29, 2024.

Currently, SFAs that want to sign up for LFS funds can do so by simply [completing the LFS Agreement in WINS](#). For those that complete the LFS Agreement prior to Feb. 29, [their allotment of LFS funds](#) will be held.

As of March 1, 2024, any SFAs that have not signed up for LFS may have their allotment of funds reallocated to

another SFA that is actively participating in LFS. The LFS Agreement in WINS will be inactivated as of March 1, 2024.

Any SFAs that decide they would like to participate in LFS after March 1, 2024, will need to reach out to ISBE staff at [localfoods@isbe.net](mailto:localfoods@isbe.net) to inquire if ISBE has any funds still available that they could apply for. If ISBE has the LFS funds available, we will continue to approve SFAs requests until the point in time in which all LFS funds have been allocated.

ISBE will make all reasonable attempts to accommodate requests for funds,

however after March 1, 2024, we are unable to guarantee approval of the funds.

The reasoning for this due date is to ensure that Illinois uses all of the LFS funds that our state was allotted. This will allow for our staff to better determine how much LFS funding Illinois has that can be reallocated to SFAs that will use the funding. We want to ensure that every cent of our Illinois LFS funds get utilized. For SFAs that use up all of their original LFS funds, please stay tuned for information on how to request additional funds in the new year!

## Use LFS Funds for SSO and After School Snack Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture released a new Q&A updating the meal programs that can serve local foods purchased with LFS funds.

Originally, LFS funds could be used for local unprocessed or minimally processed foods that are to be served in the National School Lunch (NSLP) and/or National School Breakfast Programs (SBP). A recent Q&A released now allows for local unprocessed or minimally processed foods that meet LFS requirements to be served in the NSLP, SBP, After School Snack Program and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

**Q28: For which Child Nutrition Programs may LFS funds be used to support the service of meals and snacks?**

**A28:** LFS funds are available only to SFAs operating the NSLP and/or SBP and may only be used by SFAs to purchase unprocessed or minimally processed, local domestic food products for those programs. This includes the

### Share Your LFS Success Story!

We are hearing about so many amazing things that schools are doing and we love seeing the claims come in and seeing the local food items that Illinois schools are serving! We are working on posting success stories to our [Farm to Child Nutrition Programs website](#) and would love to add more stories to our website.

Send us news articles and/or videos, social media posts, pictures and/or videos or even a simple email about how things are going. We would love to hear more about how things are going and we think what you are doing can help other schools out that are trying to learn the ins and outs of purchasing local foods and prepping and/or cooking local foods! Please reach out to us via email to share and/or invite us to come take a visit at [localfoods@isbe.net](mailto:localfoods@isbe.net).

NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and NSLP Afterschool Snacks, as these are components of the NSLP.

As such, if an SFA operating NSLP and/or SBP operates other Child Nutrition Programs (i.e. the Special Milk Program, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable

Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and/or the Child and Adult Care Food Program), LFS funds may not be used in conjunction with those programs (i.e. the SFA must limit the purchase and use of local, domestic food products to support only the NSLP/SBP meal service).

# Know the Requirements for School Districts

**P**ublic Act 096-0734 (amends Public Act 095-0155), amends Section 20 of the Childhood Hunger Relief Act (105 ILCS 126/20).

This amendment requires a school district to implement a summer breakfast and/or lunch program for the duration of the summer school program in all schools where 50 percent or more of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals AND that have a summer school program.

This amendment applies to all schools that meet the above criteria, including those schools not currently participating in any federal Child Nutrition Program. There is an opt-out clause in the legislation, but it must be completed by Jan. 15.

The Public Act along with Question and Answers are accessible on the ISBE Website. For more information about Summer Meals, visit ISBE's Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option webpages.

Staff from our Nutrition Department is available at (800) 545-7892 or (217) 782-2491 for technical assistance with reimbursement or program operations.

## Important Dates to Remember

**Jan. 15:** Deadline to submit written Opt-Out Request to your regional superintendent of schools.

**Feb. 15:** Deadline to develop and keep on file the district plan to conduct a summer lunch and/or breakfast program for each school where at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or



reduced-price school meals AND that have a summer school program.

Sign up for the Summer Food Service Program training if participating in the SFSP. For more information on SFSP, visit <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Summer-Food-Service-Program.aspx>.

**Prior to March 1:** Regional superintendent of schools must convene a public hearing to hear testimony from the school district and interested community members.

**March 1:** Deadline for regional superintendent to:

- Inform the school district, in writing, of his or her decision, along with the reasons why the exemption was granted or denied.
- Provide a listing to the Nutrition Department of all districts that applied to opt-out, along with the affected schools, whether the exemption was granted or denied, and the reasons for the action.

**Public Act 096-0734 requires all school districts in Illinois planning to operate an academic summer school or enrichment program in a building with 50 percent or more of the students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must operate a summer feeding program for at least the duration of the program.**



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## Events, Meetings, and Deadlines

- Dec. 4 – [ICN virtual training: “Financial Management for Managers”](#)
- Dec. 4 – [ISBE SNP Update](#)
- Dec. 5 – [School Breakfast Program Expansion Grant Webinar](#)
- Dec. 15 – [Verification Summary Report deadline](#)
- Dec. 18 – [NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant application deadline](#)
- Dec. 25 – ISBE offices closed for Christmas Day
- Jan. 15 – [Summer Food Service Mandate Opt-Out Petition Deadline](#)

*Please note this is not a complete list of Nutrition Department events, meetings, and deadlines. Visit us online at [www.isbe.net/nutrition](http://www.isbe.net/nutrition).*



## What's New?

- [FY 2024 Farm to School Grant Request for Applications is Open](#)
- Please Complete the [2023 Farm to School Census](#)
- [SFAs Tentatively Selected for SY 23-24 Administrative Reviews](#)

*Watch for announcements under What's New? at [www.isbe.net/nutrition](http://www.isbe.net/nutrition).*

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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/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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