

# THE OUTLOOK

A Monthly Newsletter for School Nutrition Programs



The ISBE Nutrition Department is teaming up with No Kid Hungry to present a 2026 Illinois SUN Meals To-Go Webinar Series.

This series will provide the tools and resources to build a successful SUN Meals To-Go program to feed children in your community this summer. You can choose to attend one or more of the following sessions:

- **Feb. 19:** SUN Meals To-Go 101 ([View the recording](#); pass code: @5QLI=QN)
- **March 5:** Building an Annual SMTG Plan
- **March 12:** Ensuring Program Financial Feasibility
- **March 19:** Menu Planning & Access to USDA Foods
- **March 26:** Outreach & Communications Plans
- **April 9:** SFSP Sponsor Application Process
- **April 16:** Documentation Requirement
- **April 30:** Office Hours

All webinars are scheduled to start at 2 p.m. Registration is underway; [just click here to sign up for the Zoom webinars.](#)

## What's New for Summer Meals

- [ISBE Seeks Sponsors to Expand Access to Summer Meals Programs Statewide](#)
- [USDA Releases 2026 Reimbursement Rates for SFSP](#)
- [Get the SFSP Facts: Who Can Be a Sponsor, Types of Sites, and More!](#)

SUN Meals To-Go is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that helps rural communities reach more children with nutritious meals during summer.

The SUN Meals To-Go Program can be implemented by approved program sponsors under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in designated rural areas.

Meals can be distributed through pick-up or delivery to homes.

Visit the ISBE Summer Food Service Program webpage for more information, including the [SUN Meals To-Go Fact Sheet.](#)

# NEWS BITES

## LOCAL FOODS FOR SCHOOLS

The procurement of **local Illinois ground beef** was delayed but ISBE does have an Invitation for Bid posted to purchase frozen raw Illinois raised and processed ground beef. Once the IFB closes, all bids will be reviewed, and we hope to award one or more contracts for local ground beef that schools in the National School Lunch Program can order and have delivered to their school. Once contracts are awarded, we will provide schools with information on how to order the procured local ground beef, which will be delivered during School Year 2026-27. We thank you for your patience and are excited about this first statewide purchase of Illinois ground beef!

## SAVE THE DATES!

The **2026 ISBE School Nutrition Training** is scheduled for June 24-25 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Springfield. Watch for details on the [SNP Training and Professional Standards webpage](#) under the “Our In-Person Trainings” section.

## UPCOMING WEBINAR

The next **ISBE School Nutrition Programs Update** webinar is set for 2-3 p.m. March 4. The ISBE Nutrition Department will cover important reminders and hot topics. Attendees can submit questions during the presentation for a question-and-answer session at the end of the webinar. [Registration is underway online; click here.](#)

# PROCUREMENT



# CORNER

**DID YOU KNOW?** When using federal Child Nutrition Program funds for contracts, understanding the various types of solicitations is a crucial first step. Each solicitation type has different goals, requirements, and evaluation criteria, and knowing how to approach each one can position your school for success. Here are the types of solicitations that a school may utilize.

**Request for Quote (RFQ):** also commonly referred to as an Informal Bid.

**Purpose:** Price-focused procurement for clearly defined products or services when the annual aggregate value is less than the [Simplified Acquisition Threshold](#). RFQs are often straightforward. The SFA knows what they want, and the qualifications are evaluated through yes/no responses to get the best price.

### Invitation to Bid (IFB)

**Purpose:** A price-focused procurement, but with more specific service or product requirements when the annual aggregate value exceeds the [Simplified Acquisition Threshold](#). IFBs take things a step further. These are more detailed solicitations where qualifications must be met before pricing is evaluated. There are no negotiations, and the contract must be awarded to the lowest, responsible, and responsive bidder.

### Request for Information (RFI)

**Purpose:** Market research to gather general information about market trends and available technologies. RFIs are not procurement tools but intelligence-gathering exercises.

**Request for Proposal (RFP) Purpose:** Complex procurements requiring a detailed technical solution when the annual aggregate value exceeds the [Simplified Acquisition Threshold](#). RFPs are the most involved and time-consuming. They often place more weight on your technical approach, project team, and past performance than on price alone. The solicitation is typically focused on solving a problem or achieving a goal. Also allows for negotiations and creative vendor responses.

**Add** reviewing the ISBE [Financial Management webpage](#) for more information on procurement to your March checklist.

## Deadline Reminder

The FSMC/Vended Meal Contract renewal deadline is May 15. More information is in the [February issue of The Outlook](#) (Page 3).

# Sign Up for the CEP Webinar

ISBE Nutrition Department staff will present a webinar on the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) from 9:30-11 a.m. March 26.

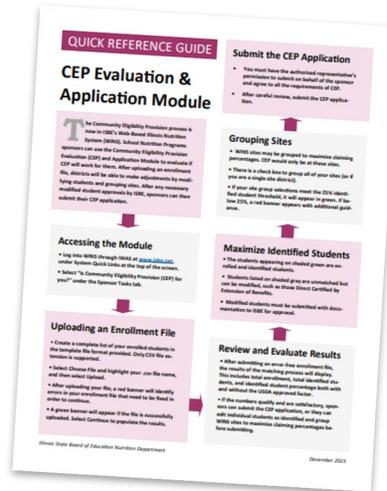
The presentation will provide an overview of the CEP requirements as well as the online CEP Evaluation and Application Module. [Registration is underway online; click here to sign up.](#)

The CEP application for SY 26-27 is set to open on April 1 and will close on June 30.

CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications.

CEP schools use an approved percentage for meal claiming purposes. This approved percentage is determined based on the number of identified students enrolled in the school. A local education agency (LEA) may participate in CEP for some or all schools.

Whether you are considering starting CEP for the first time or need a refresher, we encourage you to join us for this webinar.



CEP schools/districts are approved for four-year cycles, although they can re-apply early. We encourage CEP sponsors to evaluate identified students numbers annually. The U.S. Department of Agriculture allows you to withdrawal the current group and reestablish the four-year cycle with the new claiming percentages.

Identified Students are directly certified for free meals on the basis of their participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy

Families (TANF), income eligible FREE Medicaid, foster children, and the extension of benefits to students within the same household. They also include Homeless as certified by homeless coordinator listing, Runaway as certified by runaway coordinator listing, Migrant Youth as certified by the migrant coordinator listing, and Head Start as Certified by the Head Start coordinator listing.

Visit [www.isbe.net/cep](http://www.isbe.net/cep) for more information about CEP and resources, including evaluation worksheets, a [Quick Reference Guide on the CEP Evaluation & Application Module](#) (Pictured), and more.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM ROUNDUP

# Annual Order Period Closes March 6

The Food Distribution Program **School Year 2026-27 Annual Order Period** closes March 6. The three spending options include [USDA Foods](#), [DOD Fresh](#), and [Diversion to Processors](#).

The Diversion to Processors option closed in the Illinois Commodity System (ICS) from Feb. 23-27 so that ISBE could compile truck loads. It is re-opened March 2-6 for final changes. (You can [view the ICS Instructions online](#).)

All Diversion to Processor requests are due by March 6.

In case you missed it, a recording of our recent Food Distribution Program

Training is available under "School Food Authority Resources" section on the [Food Distribution Program webpage](#).

Please email [fdp@isbe.net](mailto:fdp@isbe.net) or call (217) 782-2491 with questions.

**DOD FUNDS AVAILABLE:** The state has additional SY 2025-26 DOD funds available now for school districts participating in the Food Distribution Program. You may request funds, by following the procedures below:

1. Please spend your allotted DOD funds before requesting additional funds.

2. Email Paula Williams at [pawillia@isbe.net](mailto:pawillia@isbe.net) to request additional funds.

3. Additional funds will be added in increments of 20% of your SY 26 Beginning PAL Balance. For example, if your Beginning PAL Balance was \$20,000, we will add \$4,000.

4. If you use all additional funds, you can request more at that time, following this same process.

5. Questions may be directed to Paula Williams at [pawillia@isbe.net](mailto:pawillia@isbe.net).



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## Announcements, Events, & Deadlines

- **March 2-6** – [National School Breakfast Week](#)
- **March 3** – Soup It Forward Day (Try [Creamy Broccoli Potato Soup!](#))
- **March 4** – [ISBE School Nutrition Programs Update](#)
- **March 6** – [ABCs of School Nutrition Training in Effingham](#)
- **March 6** – [Food Distribution Program Annual Order Period Closes](#)
- **March 10** – [Serve It Safely Food Handler Training](#)
- **March 17** – St. Patrick's Day
- **March 15-21** – [National CACFP Week](#)
- **March 19** – National Poultry Day (Try [Chicken or Turkey Pot Pie!](#))
- **March 26** – [SY 26-27 CEP for Illinois Schools](#) webinar
- **March 26** – National Spinach Day (Try [Harvest Spinach and Apple Chicken Salad!](#))
- **April 1** – [ISBE School Nutrition Programs Update](#)

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

## Nondiscrimination Statement

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Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

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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