



DATE: September 30, 2026

MEMO CODE: SP 11-2026, CACFP 05-2026, SFSP 05-2026

SUBJECT: Simplified Geographic Preference Procurement in Child Nutrition Programs

TO: State Directors, Child Nutrition Programs, All States

On September 9, 2026, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) published the direct final rule (the rule) with comment period, *Simplified Geographic Preference Procurement in Child Nutrition Programs* ([91 FR 57245](#)), effective November 9, 2026. Geographic preference is an option first authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill to encourage institutions operating Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) to purchase unprocessed locally grown and locally raised agricultural products.

The rule does not change policy or implementation of the geographic preference option — it simply clarifies existing requirements to make the geographic preference option easier to understand and use across the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Special Milk Program for Children (SMP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), collectively known as the CNPs for the purposes of this memorandum.¹

¹ Although not referenced in this memorandum, the geographic preference option may still be applied to the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Seamless Summer Option, and the USDA Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (USDA DoD Fresh).

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

Purpose of the Rule

This rule supports [USDA's Harvest to Hallways Initiative](#) to improve school meals and strengthen the connection between American agriculture and America's children. FNA encourages CNP operators, including State agencies purchasing on their behalf, to purchase agricultural products for the CNPs that are unprocessed and locally grown, raised, and caught. The geographic preference option is a key tool for CNP operators to expand the market for America's farmers and producers while also serving nutritious, local foods in CNP meals.

FNA expects that clearer regulations will help CNP operators use the geographic preference option more frequently, resulting in increased procurement of local, unprocessed agricultural products in CNP meals and snacks. The rule clarifies the existing strategies available through the geographic preference option, including affirming that CNP operators have maximum flexibility to adopt their own definitions of "local" and that the regulations do not prescribe a Federal definition for the purpose of procuring local foods for CNPs. The changes are customer-focused and intended to simplify program regulations and make them easier to understand. Changes do not alter the meaning of the regulations nor their implementation.

Changes Made by the Rule

In summary, the rule:

- Replaces "procurement specification" with "product specification" to align with industry terminology.
- Replaces "selection criteria" with "defined scoring advantage" to align with FNA policy guidance.
- Affirms that CNP operators have the flexibility to prescribe the way that a defined scoring advantage is applied and the amount of preference given to a product that meets their definition of local.
- Reformats the regulatory text to make it easier to read and reference.

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- Incorporates implementation guidance to clearly describe how geographic preference strategies may be applied during the procurement process as a local product specification, a defined scoring advantage during bid evaluation, or a mix of both strategies.
- Clarifies that CNP operators may use, but are not limited to, the phrases “local,” “locally grown,” “locally raised,” and “locally caught” in their solicitations.
- Removes the undefined term “minimally processed” since all allowable food handling and preservation techniques are specified in the definition of “unprocessed agricultural products.”
- For SBP, SMP, CACFP, and SFSP, revises regulations to refer to NSLP geographic preference option regulations for consistency.

Geographic Preference Option Overview

FNA’s geographic preference option regulations at 7 CFR parts [210.21\(g\)](#), [215.14a\(e\)](#), [220.16\(f\)](#), [225.17\(e\)](#), and [226.22\(c\)](#) provide flexibilities that CNP operators may use to purchase unprocessed foods that are locally grown, raised, or caught.

The geographic preference option allows CNP operators to:

- Use a “local product specification” that identifies the local area from which the unprocessed agricultural product must originate for a bid to be considered responsive; and/or
- Use a “defined scoring advantage,” a preference that gives additional credits or points for unprocessed agricultural products from a specified local area during bid evaluations. CNP operators have the discretion to determine the method for applying a defined scoring advantage and to determine the amount of preference to give to products that meet their definition of local.

For more information on how to apply the geographic preference option to procure more local, unprocessed agricultural products for CNP meals and snacks, please see [SP 22-2024, CACFP 08-2024, SFSP 13-2024, Geographic Preference Expansion Related to the Final Rule titled, Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-](#)

[2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and [SP 24-2024, CACFP 10-2024, SFSP 14-2024, Geographic Preference Option Questions & Answers.](#)

FNA reminds State agencies to distribute this memorandum to CNP operators immediately. CNP operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agencies should direct questions to the appropriate FNA office.

Sincerely,

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Child Nutrition Programs
U.S. Department of Agriculture