

Virtual CACFP SUMMIT

**Aug. 19–20
& Aug. 26–27**



Because your work matters.

Four days of training built for the CACFP community.

Join us for our biggest online training event of the year. Four days of practical sessions, expert speakers and fresh ideas spread across two weeks so you can fit learning into your schedule.

From nutrition and program administration to operations, financial management and more, the CACFP Virtual Summit brings together the training and resources you need to do your work with confidence. You'll walk away with new tools, strategies and renewed purpose.

Earn up to 16 hours of CEUs.

Can't make it to the live sessions? Sessions will be available on demand through **September 17**.

Visit cacfp.org/summit to register today!

Who Should Attend?

- » Child Care Centers
- » Home Providers
- » State Agencies
- » Sponsoring Organizations
- » Head Start
- » Food Banks
- » Tribal Nations
- » Emergency Shelters
- » Anti-Hunger Advocates

\$199

Lowest rate available through May 19. Additional deadlines and registration information available online.

Agenda (All Times Eastern)

11:00 am - 11:30 am

Because Your Work Matters: Lead with Resilience and Courage

The work you do changes lives. Kick off the 2026 CACFP Virtual Summit by celebrating the impact of the CACFP and the people who make it possible. Hear a powerful story of resilience and courage from a speaker who has overcome personal hardships to lead with a meaningful, transformative purpose. You'll also hear from NCA's new President, who will share a vision for the future of the CACFP that relies on leaders like you. Together, these messages will remind us why our work matters and how the CACFP continues to feed futures and change lives.

- » Recognize the importance of CACFP leaders in improving access to healthy foods for children and adults in communities across the country.
- » Get inspired to embrace resilience and courage to guide your leadership in the CACFP.

Alexia Thex, MEd, National CACFP Association

Mike Brown, Jr., MS, CFRE, LeaderVibe

11:45 am - 12:45 pm

CACFP-Friendly Ways to Limit Added Sugars

Added sugar limits for yogurt and breakfast cereals are now part of CACFP requirements. This session will help participants understand the added sugar requirements and learn how to identify added sugars on the Nutrition Facts label and ingredient lists. We'll also explore practical ways to evaluate products and adapt menus so you can confidently meet CACFP requirements while continuing to serve appealing meals and snacks.

- » Learn how to use the Nutrition Facts label to identify added sugars in foods.
- » Evaluate breakfast cereals and yogurts to determine if products meet CACFP added sugar limits.
- » Adapt CACFP menus and product selections to meet added sugar limits while maintaining appealing meals and snacks.

Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

1:15 pm - 2:15 pm

Budget Boosters: Easy Swaps for Lower-Cost Menus

Menu planning does more than help you meet CACFP meal pattern requirements. It can also be one of your best tools for managing food costs. Learn practical strategies for creating CACFP menus that stretch food dollars while still serving nutritious, appealing meals. Find out how to review menus with a budget in mind, identify cost-effective ingredient swaps and discover purchasing strategies that help keep your program both compliant and cost-conscious.

- » Identify strategies for reviewing CACFP menus to improve cost efficiency while maintaining meal pattern compliance.
- » Recognize budget-friendly ingredient swaps that maintain nutritious and creditable components.
- » Apply menu planning and purchasing strategies using a sample two-week cycle menu to adapt meals based on budget, availability and program needs.

Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

2:30 pm - 3:30 pm

Working Smarter in the CACFP: Free Technology and AI Tools to Reclaim Time

CACFP work is complex, time-sensitive and resource-limited, but technology doesn't have to make it harder or more expensive. Explore how program operators can use free technology tools and responsible AI to reduce administrative burden, improve workflows and reclaim time, without losing human judgment or program integrity. Participants will see real-world examples of how tools can support compliance, monitoring, provider communication, training and policy development. This session is practical, honest and grounded in CACFP reality — designed for CACFP operators who want help, not hype.

- » Identify practical ways that AI can support CACFP operations.
- » Explore free and low-cost technology tools that improve efficiency, reduce paperwork and support program management.
- » Apply real-world examples of CACFP operations using AI and digital tools.

Kate Abernathy, MS, RDN, LDN, CMP, CCNP, Providers Choice



Thursday, August 20

Agenda (All Times Eastern)

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

Neurodiversity and Feeding Challenges in Early Years Settings

Many young children in early childhood settings have neurodevelopmental differences that significantly affect how they experience eating. From sensory hypersensitivity and texture avoidance to behavioral rigidity and communication differences, these challenges can make mealtimes difficult for children, families and staff. This session explores the neurodevelopmental roots of feeding difficulties, including the often-overlooked intersection of food insecurity and neurodivergence, and equips early years professionals with practical strategies to create supportive, inclusive mealtime environments.

- » Describe how sensory hypersensitivity, texture avoidance, behavioral rigidity and communication differences present as feeding challenges in early childhood settings.
- » Apply strategies for building predictable routines and mealtime environments that reduce sensory overwhelm and support neurodivergent children in group care.
- » Recognize the intersection of food insecurity and neurodivergence, and identify ways to partner with families in a trauma-informed, responsive way.

Natalia Stasenko, MS, RD, Easy Bites

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm

Growing a Stronger Family Child Care Business with CACFP

The CACFP is more than a meal program; it's a powerful tool for growing a successful family child care business. Explore common misconceptions about the CACFP and understand how it can be a tool for structure, consistency and professionalism. At the same time, sponsors will gain insight into how to better support providers in making these shifts, helping move programs beyond compliance and toward long-term success. Together, we'll unpack common misconceptions, reframe the role of the CACFP and highlight how it can be used to support long-term success in family child care businesses.

- » Understand how CACFP participation supports financial stability and sustainability for family child care homes.
- » Identify mindset shifts that position the CACFP as a strategic business tool for providers.
- » Recognize ways sponsors can support providers in using the CACFP to strengthen credibility with families and funders.

Alethea Etinoff, CCNP, The Business of Early Childhood Education

1:45 pm – 2:45 pm

Who is Providing for Child Care Providers? An Updated Look at Provider Well-Being

Child care providers are essential pillars of our communities, yet they continue to face profound economic hardships, workforce challenges and emotional distress. Drawing on longitudinal data from the RAPID survey project, this session offers an updated picture of child care provider well-being from 2021 through 2025. Attendees will hear the latest findings on providers' experiences with food insecurity, financial hardship, staffing challenges and emotional distress — and what these trends mean for the future of the child care workforce. Providers' own voices, gathered through open-ended survey responses, will be centered throughout, grounding the data in lived experience. Implications for how programs like the CACFP can better support providers will be discussed.

- » Describe current trends in child care providers' economic hardships and food insecurity.
- » Identify key workforce challenges.
- » Discuss actionable strategies and program-level opportunities to better support the well-being and stability of child care providers.

Sihong Liu, MS, PhD, Stanford Center on Early Childhood

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

CACFP Policy in Action: Priorities & What's Ahead

Join the NCA Policy team for the latest legislative updates, regulatory changes, research insights and advocacy efforts. Don't miss the opportunity to get the facts, ask questions and stay on top of the CACFP landscape.

- » Hear about key issues in the CACFP and legislation currently in Congress.
- » Learn about NCA policy priorities that will help improve, modernize and streamline the CACFP.

Alexia Thex, MEd, National CACFP Association

McKenzie Brunner, MGPS, National CACFP Association

3:45 pm – 4:15 pm

Ask Us Anything: Week 1 Deep Dive & Live Q&A

You've made it through Week 1; now let's talk about it! Join us for a live, interactive Ask Us Anything session where we break down key takeaways, revisit important topics and answer your biggest questions from the week. Whether you're looking for clarification, real-world application or deeper insight, this is your chance to connect directly with experts and get the most out of what you've learned so far. Come ready with questions - you won't want to miss this!

- » Identify and reinforce key concepts and strategies presented during Week 1 sessions.
- » Apply insights from Week 1 content to real-world scenarios through guided discussion and expert Q&A.

Brittany Uribe, National CACFP Association

Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

McKenzie Brunner, MGPS, National CACFP Association

Agenda (All Times Eastern)

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

The Most Misunderstood CACFP Foods – What’s Creditable?

Think you know which foods are creditable in CACFP? Let’s find out! In this fast-paced, interactive session, participants will test their knowledge and uncover the truth about some of the most misunderstood foods in the program. From yogurts and granola bars to plant-based milks, tortillas, smoothies, whole grains, pumpkin, rhubarb and avocado, we’ll break down what counts—and what doesn’t—toward the CACFP meal pattern.

- » Identify common CACFP foods that are frequently misunderstood.
- » Determine whether specific foods meet CACFP meal pattern requirements.
- » Apply CACFP crediting guidance to real-world food examples.

Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm

Insights from the Field: Monitoring & Oversight

Monitoring and oversight are at the core of a strong CACFP operation but managing it all can be challenging. This panel brings together experienced voices from the field to share what it really takes to stay organized, maintain integrity and keep your program running smoothly.

From common pitfalls to practical strategies, you’ll hear real-world insights on how to stay on top of requirements, strengthen your systems and approach compliance with confidence. Staying organized and consistent helps your program operate with integrity and impact.

- » Identify practical strategies for maintaining organization and meeting CACFP oversight and compliance requirements.
- » Recognize common compliance challenges and how to proactively address them.
- » Understand how strong oversight practices support program integrity and long-term success.

Alexia Thex, MEd, National CACFP Association

1:45 pm – 2:45 pm

Turning Global Trends into CACFP-Friendly Meals

Global flavors are a huge hit on menus but figuring out how to bring those flavors to CACFP meals can feel tricky. This session draws on the National Restaurant Association’s trends, focusing on Indian- and Moroccan-inspired spice blends. These flavors are easy to adjust, use spices you may already have on hand, and fit seamlessly within CACFP meal pattern requirements.

Join this live cooking demonstration featuring tandoori-style chicken and a Moroccan-style chicken tagine, paired with brown rice, chickpeas, and dried fruit. You will also learn easy ways to adapt recipes to be more plant-forward, including vegetable-based swaps and protein alternatives, along with simple batch cooking strategies and professional seasoning techniques to elevate everyday menus.

- » Build confidence using global flavors and spices in CACFP-compliant meals.
- » Apply scalable recipes and seasoning strategies that are flavorful, flexible and kid-approved.
- » Incorporate cultural variety into menus while maintaining nutrition standards and operational ease.

Chef Lindsey Schoenfeld, MS, RDN, To Taste

Chef Vahista Ussery, MS, MBA, RDN, To Taste

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Positive Plates: Encouraging Kids at Mealtime

Mealtime is an opportunity to support children as they explore new foods and build healthy eating habits. Learn how the way we talk about food can influence children’s willingness to try new things. Discuss strategies for encouraging children without pressure, what to do when a child refuses a food and how positive mealtime conversations can support curious eaters.

- » Identify strategies for using positive language and conversations about food to encourage children to try new foods.
- » Apply supportive mealtime practices when children are hesitant or refuse to try foods.

Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association



Thursday,
August 27

Virtual
CACFP
SUMMIT

Agenda (All Times Eastern)

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

USDA CACFP Policy Update

Hear from USDA as they present an overview of policy guidance and provide a state-of-the-program update for the CACFP. This session is your opportunity to get information straight from the source and hear the federal perspective on the program's direction.

USDA Food and Nutrition Service

12:15 pm – 1:15 pm

Corrective Action Confidence: Steps for Success

You've heard the term "corrective action," but how does it impact you? Whether you're a sponsor writing a Corrective Action Plan or a provider responding to one, learn how to clearly identify issues, outline effective solutions and communicate your plan effectively. Walk through the key steps of building a strong Corrective Action Plan and gain practical tips to ensure successful implementation and follow-through.

- » Identify the key components of an effective Corrective Action Plan and when they are required in CACFP.
- » Develop clear, actionable steps to address findings and prevent recurring issues.
- » Apply strategies to communicate and implement corrective actions effectively between sponsors and providers.

Cherese Myree, CFE, MH Miles Company, CPA, PC

Arnette Cowan, MS, RD, MH Miles Company, CPA, PC

1:45 pm – 2:45 pm

Strong Programs Start with Well-Being: The Power of Individual Wellness and Collective Influence

Strong, sustainable programs are built on the well-being of the people who power them. Yet, wellness is often framed as an individual responsibility rather than a shared cultural priority. In this session, participants will explore the 8 Dimensions of Wellness as a practical framework for strengthening both personal well-being and program culture. For each dimension, we will examine actionable strategies that support individual wellness and identify ways those in sponsor, leadership, or support roles can reinforce healthy environments. Participants will also explore how workforce wellness drives high-quality outcomes for the children, adults and communities served through the CACFP.

Shonika A. Kwarteng, MBA, RD, LD, Office of Head Start National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Summit Wrap Up: Ask Us Anything

Before you go, let's bring everything together. We'll reflect on key themes from the CACFP Virtual Summit, answer your final questions and highlight the insights that matter most. If there's something you're still unsure about or just want to hear more on, this is the time to ask. You'll leave with more clarity, confidence and a better sense of what to do next.

- » Summarize key themes and takeaways from across Summit sessions.
- » Participate in a guided Q&A to reinforce learning through shared experiences and expert input.

Brittany Uribe, National CACFP Association

Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

Bonus! On-Demand Session

Great Grains! Taking the Guess Work Out of What's Creditable

Serving whole grain-rich grains once per day, when grains are served, in ounce equivalents is a requirement in the CACFP. Explore various types of whole grains like amaranth, sorghum, and millet to expand your menu planning options. Learn how to determine ounce equivalency, how to identify whole grains, how to modify meals using these great grains, and how to prepare these for CACFP creditable recipes.

Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD, National CACFP Association

Bonus! On-Demand Session

CACFP Professional Certification Overview

Interested in learning more about how to earn the CACFP Management Professional or the CACFP Child Nutrition Professional designation? Join NCA board members to hear why the program was started, what the qualifications are and next steps to getting the certification complete.

Jennifer Basey, MEd, National CACFP Association



CEUs will be available for the CACFP Virtual Summit and apply towards NCA's CACFP **Professional Certification Program**.

Meet Our Speakers



Kate Abernathy, MS, RDN, LD, CMP, CCNP

Chief Executive Officer, Providers Choice

Kate's work focuses on expanding participation in CACFP healthy meals and snacks to children across Minnesota. Providers Choice sponsors over 2,500 homes and over 100 centers. Kate's in-depth

nutrition expertise and leadership support providers with managing special diets. She also creates resources to simplify the CACFP and overall program support to child care providers. She has a BA from the College of Saint Benedict and an MS from Eastern Michigan University.



Jennifer Basey, MEd

Certification Coordinator, National CACFP Association

Jennifer has served in many roles for NCA including membership, website, conference, sales and education. Jennifer graduated from Texas A&M with a BA in business administration, then went on

to obtain her Master of Education from Texas State University. Jennifer spent ten years in the education field as an elementary teacher and later on became an instructional coach, working directly with teachers.



Mike Brown, Jr., MS, CFRE

President & CEO, LeaderVibe

Through personal adversity, professional growth, and the unexpected turns that defined his path, Mike discovered that leadership is often forged not in certainty, but in surrender and trust.

After the loss of his wife Laura, his partner of

twenty-five years, life required a re-routing that was both painful and transformative. Out of grief came healing, out of loss came clarity, and out of faith came new beginnings. Mike later remarried, blending families and building a new chapter rooted in love, resilience and purpose. Mike holds his MS from Capella University.



McKenzie Brunner, MGPS

Senior Policy and Outreach Specialist, National CACFP Association

McKenzie is responsible for tracking nutrition policy trends and legislation and serving as a subject matter expert for CACFP. She also develops nonprofit partnerships and promotes collaboration

among CACFP providers. McKenzie received her MGPS from the University of Texas at Austin. With a background in international development and foreign policy, McKenzie is passionate about increasing food security through promoting equitable policy and cross-sector collaboration.



Arnette Cowan, MS, RD

Compliance Training and Curriculum Development Specialist, MH Miles Company, CPA, PC

With more than 25 years of Child Nutrition Program experience, Arnette is a compliance training and curriculum development specialist with MH Miles

Company where she develops and facilitates training curriculum and resources for Child Nutrition Programs for government agencies and private entities.



Alethea Etinoff, CCNP

Founder/CEO, The Business of Early Childhood Education

Alethea has over 10 years of experience in child care. She trademarked The Business of Early Childhood Education to create a safe space where all early childhood educators could agree to

disagree. Alethea holds an AA in Business Administration from Prince George's Community College.



Shonika A. Kwarteng, MBA, RD, LD

EDC Training and Technical Assistance (TA) Associate, National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety

Shonika provides training and technical assistance and develops content on topics, including maternal and child nutrition, breastfeeding, physical activity

and USDA Child Nutrition programs. She has a strong background in Head Start program administration and leadership, infant and toddler feeding, working with children with special dietary needs, and early childhood education and family support. Shonika earned her BS in Nutrition and Food Science from Auburn University.



Sihong Liu, MS, PhD

Social Science Research Scholar, Stanford Center on Early Childhood, Stanford University

Dr. Liu's research focuses on understanding how early life stress shape child and adolescent development trajectories with specific emphasis

on the interactions of multi-level social contexts, child behaviors and neurobiological processes. Using this knowledge, she aims to inform innovative practical strategies through intervention and policymaking to support children and their families. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia.



Melinda Nguyen, MS, RDN, LD

Nutrition Education Specialist, National CACFP Association

Melinda shows her passion about nutrition education by developing creative ways to reinforce knowledge. She began her career in Massachusetts, getting her MS in Food and Nutrition from

Framingham State University. She has worked at Head Start, planning meals for toddlers, then moved to Texas to work for Whole Foods Market as a Recipe Data Specialist before taking on a role with the State agency, where she applied a nutrition-focused perspective to regulations and policies in the federal nutrition programs.



Chereese Myree, CFE
Vice President, MH Miles Company,
CPA, PC

Chereese is a certified fraud examiner who specializes in the USDA Food Programs and governmental compliance. She has over 15 years of experience in the fields of auditing, accounting, and consulting with specialized experience in governmental contract auditing and contract compliance. She testifies as an expert witness for the CACFP and SFSP and manages MHMC's review, consultant and training engagements across the United States. Chereese is a graduate of Clark University.



Alexia Thex, MEd
President, National CACFP Association

Alexia leads NCA's strategic direction, guiding advocacy efforts and organizational growth that advance the mission and interests of association members. Alexia draws on extensive experience in nonprofit management to deliver high-quality programming and nutrition education training, resources and events that support the success of CACFP stakeholders. Alexia is committed to expanding access to and modernizing the food program. Alexia holds a Master of Education from the University of Texas at Austin.



Isabel Ramos-Lebron, MS, RDN, LD
Senior Nutrition Education Specialist,
National CACFP Association

Isabel has a strong background and passion in working with low-income communities of various cultural backgrounds, while working on graduate research projects and working in the nonprofit, food banking environment for eight years. She believes that all children and adults should have access to balanced, nutritional foods to aid in childhood development and adult health in the long term. Isabel received her MS from Rutgers University.



Vahista Ussery, MS, MBA, RDN
Founder and Culinary Nutrition Expert,
To Taste

Vahista founded To Taste with her business partner Lindsey Schoenfeld in 2015. Ussery helps with on- and off-site school meal operational services including: menu planning, recipe engineering, video production and scratch and speed-scratch production. Ussery received her BA from Texas Christian University. While attending TCU, she also attended the Culinary School of Fort Worth and received her culinary arts program diploma. She then went on to receive an MS and an MBA from Texas Woman's University.



Lindsey Schoenfeld, MS, RDN
Founder and Culinary Nutrition Expert,
To Taste

Lindsey founded To Taste with her business partner, Vahista Ussery, in 2015. In addition to working with home cooks, To Taste also supports school foodservice staff, so they meet their nutrition goals. Lindsey provides on- and off-site school meal operational services, including menu planning, recipe engineering, video production and scratch and speed-scratch production. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Science from Texas A&M University and her Master of Science in Lifestyle Sciences, Health and Wellness Coaching.



Brittany Uribe
Senior Event Specialist, National CACFP
Association

Brittany plans and coordinates all webinars and virtual events for NCA, including those during the National Child Nutrition Conference. Brittany graduated from Florida State University with a BS in Family and Child Science. She began working for a CACFP sponsor in South Florida in 2013 and grew passionate about expanding CACFP training opportunities and educational resources.



Natalia Stasenکو, MS, RD
CEO, Easy Bites

Natalia is a pediatric dietitian who has worked directly with families, educators and health teams as a consulting dietitian for Head Start programs. She is the founder of Easy Bites, a digital platform designed to support families and professionals with evidence-based, responsive feeding tools and a Fellow of the Georgetown University Thrive Innovation Center, where her work has focused on scalable solutions to support families and educators in early childhood systems. Natalia holds an MS in Nutrition Education from Columbia University, where she now serves as a guest speaker.



Scholarships Available

**We're giving away up to
\$15,000 in scholarships!**

**Deadline for Application is
June 1, 2026 at 12:00 pm Eastern.
[Click here to apply.](#)**

Eastern

Central

Mountain

Pacific

Wednesday, Aug. 19

11:00 am - 11:30 am

Because Your Work Matters: Lead with Resilience and Courage

11:45 am - 12:45 pm

CACFP-Friendly Ways to Limit Added Sugars

1:15 pm - 2:15 pm

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Corrective Action Confidence: Steps for Success

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