



The Link

YOUR QUARTERLY CONNECTION TO CACFP SUCCESS



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The Link Magazine
Editor-in-Chief



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HELLO FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Since 1995, Our Daily Bread CACFP has remained dedicated to promoting the nutritional well-being of children and adults. What began as a simple mission to serve healthy meals has evolved into a deeper commitment: ensuring every child has the nourishment they need to grow, learn, and thrive. Over the years, we've become more than a Child Adult Care Food Program—we are a trusted partner in building healthier futures for families and communities.

Our impact is only possible because of the strong relationships we share with educators, providers and industry partners across Tennessee and Kentucky. Your commitment to creating safe, nurturing, and educational spaces lays the foundation for everything we do. We are honored to support your work through training, resources, and consistent, high-quality nutrition services that help children reach their full potential.

As we look to the future, Our Daily Bread CACFP remains focused on expanding our reach and advancing our commitment to quality in child and adult nutrition. Our vision is clear: to be a driving force in providing access to healthy, affordable meals for all. We are actively exploring new opportunities to innovate, educate, and empower the educators and communities we serve.

Our approach continues to be holistic, addressing not only the nutritional needs of children, but also those of adults. Through nutrition education, community involvement, and sustained support, we strive to inspire lifelong habits that promote better health for everyone. Investing in wellness today means stronger, healthier communities tomorrow.

Together, we are building a future where every child and adult has access to the nutrition they deserve. We deeply appreciate your continued partnership and dedication. We thank you for your continued partnership, and we look forward to working hand in hand as we grow our reach and impact.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

Warm regards,
Phillip Hester



KNOXVILLE

2240 Sutherland Ave. Suite 107
Knoxville, TN 37919
Local | 865-938-6328
Fax | 865-938-6335

CLARKSVILLE

298 Clear Sky Ct. Suite E
Clarksville, TN 37043
Local | 865-238-6328
Fax | 931-920-3902

SAMPLE SUMMER MENU

6-11 MONTHS

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Infant Oatmeal Applesauce	<u>IFIF or BM</u> IF Infant Cereal Strawberries	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Infant Rice – Cereal Avocado	<u>IFIF or BM</u> IF Infant Cereal Strawberries	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Infant Oatmeal Peaches
Lunch	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Pinto Beans Apples	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Tuna Banana	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Infant Chicken Broccoli	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Infant Beef Squash	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Cheese Pears
Snack	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Animal – Crackers Sliced Grapes	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Graham – Crackers Oranges	<u>IFIF or BM</u> IF Infant Cereal Peaches	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Crackers Tomatoes	<u>IFIF or BM</u> Goldfish Applesauce

Infants may eat more or less during hot summer months. Watch for hunger fullness cues and offer formula or breast milk regularly to help keep babies hydrated.



DID YOU KNOW...

REMEMBER...
Always follow safe food temperature guidelines during warm weather.



SAMPLE SUMMER MENU 1-12 YEARS/ADULTS

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Breakfast

Rice Cakes

Rice Cakes
Applesauce
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Cheerios

(WG) Cheerios
Strawberries
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Avocado Toast

(WG) Toast
Avocado, Tomato
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Waffle & Yogurt

Yogurt
Waffle
Strawberries
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Oatmeal

(WG) Oatmeal
Peaches
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Lunch

Meatless Tacos

Pinto Beans
(WG) Tortilla Chips
Lettuce & Tomato
Apples
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Tuna Salad

Tuna
(WG) Bun
Lettuce, Tomato
Banana
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Stir Fry

Chicken
(WG) Rice
Broccoli
Strawberries
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Spaghetti

Ground Beef
(WG) Noodles
Squash
Fruit Cocktail
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Cheese Pizza

Cheese
Pizza Crust
Greens
Pears
1%/Skim/Whole -
Milk

Snack

Animal Parade

Water
Animal Crackers
100% Grape Juice

Graham Crackers

Water
Graham Crackers
Sliced Oranges

Fresh Fruit Cup

Water
(WG) Wheat Crackers
Fruit Cocktail

Chips & Salsa

Water
(WG) Tortilla Chips
Salsa

Popcorn

Water
(WG) Popcorn
Raisins

Seasonal Eating & Meal Conversations

Use summer meals and snacks to highlight fresh, seasonal produce.

- Introduce new fruits and vegetables in line with CACFP meal patterns
- Encourage children to describe taste, texture, and color
- Talk about where food comes from and how it grows

CACFP Connection: Meets requirements for offering a variety of fruits and vegetables, and supports nutrition education best practices.



ADDRESSING THE FIBER GAP: GOING BEYOND WHOLE GRAINS TO BOOST FIBER

What is Fiber, and Why Is It so Important for Our Health?

Dietary fiber is a type of carbohydrate found exclusively in plants; fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds. There are two main types of fiber:

- Soluble fiber dissolves in water and forms a gel-like substance that helps lower cholesterol and regulate blood sugar.
- Insoluble fiber adds bulk to stool and keeps digestion regular.

Together, they nourish healthy gut bacteria, reduce constipation, stabilize energy, and support long-term heart and metabolic health. Fiber deficiency is linked with type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, bowel disease, and some cancers.

Fiber Deficiency in U.S. Children

The majority of the population is fiber deficient – up to 97% of people in the U.S. do not eat enough fiber.¹ The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends consuming 14g of fiber per 1000 calories, or 17–25g of fiber per day for children aged 0–4.² CACFP programs serve over 4.2 million children each day. Child care meal programs have an invaluable opportunity to help close the “fiber gap” and provide this critical, health-promoting nutrient to children nationwide.

Practical Ways to Boost Fiber in Child Care Program Meals

1. Use 100% Whole Grains

Whole grain-rich standards require that only 51% of grains be whole, meaning children miss out on fiber and other valuable nutrients. Using 100% whole grains is a simple but powerful step towards a fiber-packed meal.

Try:

- Quinoa as a base for salads or warm grain bowls
- Brown rice in stir-fries, burrito bowls, or as a side dish
- 100% whole grain pasta and noodles
- Oats in breakfast items, baked goods, and granola
- 100% whole grain sandwich breads, buns, pitas, and tortillas

2. Swap in Plant Proteins

Beans, peas, and lentils are nutritional powerhouses. They not only credit as meat/meat alternates but also provide 5–8 grams of fiber per half-cup serving and are significantly more cost-effective than animal proteins.

Try:

- Lentils instead of beef or turkey in pasta sauces
- Peas and edamame instead of chicken in fried rice
- Chickpea salad instead of tuna salad for sandwiches
- Beans instead of ground beef in tacos, burritos, and chili
- Black bean burgers instead of beef or chicken patties

Even swapping just half of the animal protein for beans, peas, or lentils will help increase fiber and cut costs. For the ultimate fiber menu boost, gradually increase the ratio of plant protein until it reaches 100%.

3. Swap the Snacks

Don't discount the power of snacks to boost fiber. Fiber-rich snacks can balance out meat-based lunches. Try offering hummus or bean dips with veggie sticks for a satisfying option, or roast vegetables to bring out their natural sweetness and flavor.

Instead of cheese and crackers, try apples and almond butter for a fiber-packed alternative. Other great choices for snacks include edamame, veggie pasta salad, and whole grain tortilla chips with guacamole.

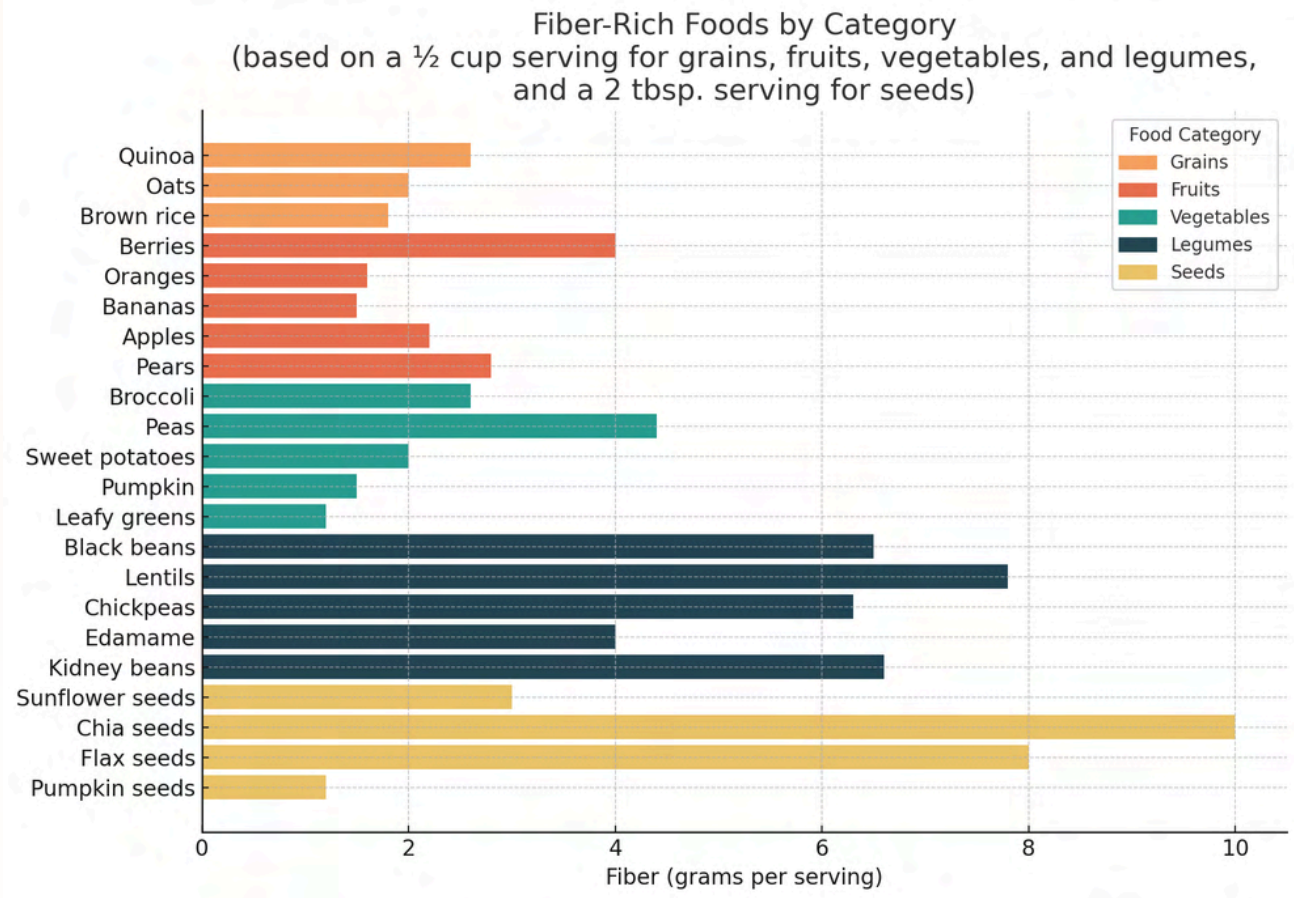


4. Make Fruit Easier to Eat

Fruits boost fiber and bring natural sweetness to meals. Whole apples and oranges can be time-consuming and challenging to eat for younger children, resulting in pounds of uneaten fruit being disposed of at the end of the meal. Serving pre-sliced options increases fiber consumption, reduces waste, and improves safety for younger children. Try offering sliced apples, orange wedges, cubed melon, kiwi halves, chopped grapes, or bite-sized fruits like berries.

5. Boost Fiber at Breakfast

Breakfast is a great opportunity to boost fiber in creative ways. Serve yogurt parfaits with whole grain granola, chia seeds, and berries. Try preparing oatmeal, overnight oats, or chia pudding ahead of time for a ready-to-eat, fiber-rich breakfast.



Plant-forward for Fiber

As fiber is only found in plant foods, fiber content is one of the best indicators of how plant-forward a menu is. Every time we add a fruit, vegetable, bean, lentil, nut, or whole grain to a meal, we're not just meeting vegetable or grain components, we're closing the fiber gap.

1. What we eat in America, NHANES 2015–2018. 2021. Accessed online at: www.ars.usda.gov/nea/bhnrc/fsrg
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025. 9th Edition.

BERRY BLAST SMOOTHIE

INGREDIENTS

- 6 cups low-fat or non-fat unflavored milk
- 2 (16 oz) packages mixed berries, frozen

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Add all ingredients to a blender. Mix on high until smooth.
2. Serve to each child immediately as a cold, refreshing smoothie.

SERVING & CREDITING

One Serving (1¼ cup) Provides:

- ½ cup fruit
- ¾ cup fluid milk

Serving Sizes

- 1-2 yrs. = 1 cup
- 3-5 yrs. = 1¼ cup
- 6-12 yrs. = 1½ cup
- Adults = 1½ cup

Yield: 6 Servings
Meal Type: Breakfast



SOUR CUCUMBER BITES

INGREDIENTS

- 2 limes, juiced
- ¼ tsp salt
- ⅛ tsp pepper
- 1 lb cucumbers, sliced

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, mix the lime juice, salt and pepper.
2. Add the cucumbers and toss until all slices are coated in the lime juice mixture.
3. Serve to each participant.

SERVING & CREDITING

One Serving (½ cup) Provides:

- ½ cup vegetable

Serving Sizes

- 1-2 yrs. = ½ cup
- 3-5 yrs. = ½ cup
- 6-12 yrs. = ¾ cup
- Adults = 1 cup

Yield: 4 Servings
Meal Type: Snack



CARDINAL CORNER

U OF EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CENTER



Lots of news lately to keep up with in our Early Childhood world– let’s unpack it!

First, a new piece of legislation passed re child care regulations. Be sure to stay in touch with your Child Care Aware coaches as they are learning more about any changes that need to be communicated in a timely fashion. [Here’s](#) a great link to an article from a trusted source, Kentucky Youth Advocates that explains some of what the bill does.

Remember to familiarize yourself with the new CDA policies and procedures. If you have a CDA, when is your CDA Renewal date? The CDA Renewal process has been updated so be sure to check into it [here](#).

Here at the University of Louisville Early Childhood Research Center we are officially beginning our 2026–27 High School Cardinal CDA course in eight new Kentucky counties!

This will be our second year using the course. We are preparing graduates to come to you with solid educational foundations in the CDA while partnering with the Governor’s Apprenticeship Office of Early Childhood / Dept of Labor to ensure students have in depth experience and mentorship. It’s a WIN for everyone and most of all , for the children. Feel free to be in touch with us about this important work sponsored by a PNC grant! We appreciate that PNC values Early Childhood like we do.

In June, we will be hosting a Summer CDA Clinic at the center open to all community members. At the clinic you will be able to receive free guidance on starting a CDA, resuming progress on a CDA and CDA Renewal needs.

Additionally, Child Care Aware will be there to offer information about the Kentucky scholarship that can pay for your CDA processes. To be on the event mailing list, be sure to send an email to mhpull02@louisville.edu for dates, location and time.

What’s on your minds?

Here’s a fantastic question from our very own Ashley Little , I hear this one all the time from parents, so be sure you share with them also. What are some practical ways educators can encourage children to try new or less familiar healthy foods without creating pressure or power struggles at mealtime?

FIRST, a simple answer:

And a big note: I was a teacher for over forty years. I DID these things as a teacher, parent and grandparent. I am not advising you to do anything I myself never did.

- Put the foods out on table in bowls or on plates and let children choose to pick up, lick, smell, etc. NOTE: allowing children to taste and spit it back out is part of this! Of course, this is why they need their own bowl or plate.
- Put the foods out when it is NOT mealtime. Let children come over and explore them.
- Introduce the food to the children. It’s name, where it was grown. Use puppets to model tasting the food and reactions.
- Pair a new food with familiar flavors and foods.
- Start small – small bites, small servings.

- Engaging all ages in the meal prep process. This provides opportunities to touch, smell, and explore new foods. Improving familiarity and comfort with new foods can be an important step before tasting.
- We need to introduce foods this way MANY times over time as children's sensory systems adjust and grow.
- Insisting that children TRY a food can be the beginning of our struggles.
- Using food as a reward or offering a reward if children eat or try a food leads to struggles also.
- Can you get a family who food gardens to bring in things?
- Can you start a food garden at your school? This is one of the best ways to introduce children to food as they have grown it themselves.
- Start every meal with a song or simple little poem or fingerplay that expresses gratitude TOGETHER. Need some examples that don't pressure children into eating because they should feel grateful?

Send me an email and request in the subject line:
mhpull02@louisville.edu.

AND SEE BELOW FOR THE BASICS THAT WE MUST UNDERSTAND!

Let's do what I always do with any concern of this nature with young children and start at the beginning of the "When to Say When" process! (more on that another time)

1. Look at the historical view of this response in young children. Historically, and in many homes or facilities today, children are expected to eat what's on their plates. Infact, we also insert the expectation of GRATITUDE for what you have on your plate and often consider it a character flaw or the result of poor upbringing when a child rejects or does not seem to appreciate the food on their plate.
2. Currently, due to increased understanding of brain activity and sensory development, we know this is not

helpful. When we attempt to engage the child in these old practices, we often find ourselves in "power struggles" over food.

3. So, what is our new understanding that might help? First, let's start with WHO can help. In general, some things to keep in mind- children currently are experiencing far more food sensitivities, allergies and autism has food relationships we must consider. This involves pediatricians who are knowledgeable about this issue. If you have a young child who consistently has meal time frustrations, it would be essential to begin there to rule out dietary restriction needs.

4. Occupational therapists can now give us incredible resources and help! Thank goodness. I recommend the OT Toolbox if you don't already follow them. They have tips and knowledge for most every topic you can imagine in young children's lives.

5. Additionally, it would be important to understand the child's relationship to taste , not just as a preference but to TEXTURE of foods. Often it is that which the child rejects. Some young children want predictable textures and tastes in foods and are resistant to new ones due to sensory issues. We also now better understand the TYPES of foods best for young children with these concerns. That is worth considering also.

6. In general, power struggles over food introduction only serve to increase anxiety and emotional dysregulation for both the child and us. It is best to follow protocols for these types of interactions with young children that you would use to increase trust, emotional regulation and ease.

More on this issue will come.... A great and important topic! Next issue we will talk about "Family Backpacks" as a way to introduce foods!

[Here's a great article about "Feeding Therapy" that an Occupational Therapist wrote on the OT Toolbox website!](#)

Cardinal Corner Spotlight!

[Check out the OT Toolbox website!](#)



tools for
TEACHERS

THE
OT
TOOLBOX

Delights and Surprises!

Here's a delight and a surprise to close our time together! For the past two weeks I was able to provide some training for teachers at Green Tree Academy, our Louisville Islamic School preschool. For the first time, FOOD was part of the training as teachers prepared special Arabic treats and coffee /tea and served it in traditional dishware. I came to understand just how lovely it is when food is provided with such care and as a way to WELCOME someone who does teacher workshops. Isn't it beautiful? And the homemade treats were sooo good!!!



I am so grateful to Our Daily Bread for providing this space for us! Their work is so important and nurturing for each other, our children, and their families. I am honored to be here with you. I look forward to hearing from you!



**MICHELE HEMENWAY PULLEN | PROJECT SPECIALIST | EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

READY, SET, KINDERGARTEN!

Summer in the classroom has its own kind of energy.

The days feel a little different. Routines may loosen up a bit. Children are excited, tired, sticky, busy, and somehow always asking if it is water day yet.

But even in the middle of all that summer fun, our little learners are still growing. And for the ones heading to kindergarten soon, this is such a sweet season to help them feel a little more ready for that next big step.

Now, when we say kindergarten readiness, we are not talking about turning your classroom into a summer boot camp. Nobody needs a stack of worksheets, a timer, and stressed out four-year-olds trying to master sight words before snack.

Kindergarten readiness is so much more than knowing letters and numbers. It is helping children build confidence, independence, curiosity, and the ability to keep trying when something feels hard.

And honestly, so much of that is already happening in your classroom every day. When a child learns to open their own snack, that is readiness.

When they practice putting their shoes on, even if they are on the wrong feet, that is readiness. When they wait for a turn, clean up their center, ask for help, or use their words instead of melting into the carpet, that is readiness too. These little moments matter.

Summer is a great time to lean into those simple skills. Let children try things for themselves before jumping in too quickly. Yes, it may take longer. Yes, the backpack zipper may become a full dramatic event. But every time a child gets to say, "I did it," they are building the confidence they will need in kindergarten.



You can also build learning into what you are already doing. Count crackers at snack. Sort blocks by color. Look for shapes around the room. Ask which tower is taller. Read the silly book again, with the voices, because they asked for it and because repetition is how little brains grow.

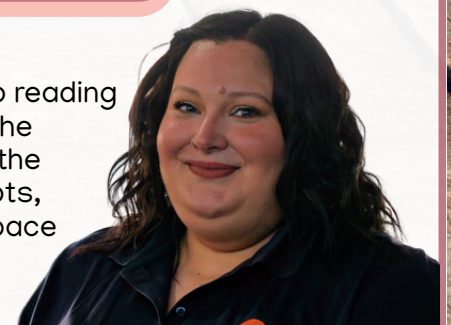
Let them talk. Let them tell long stories that start with a dog, somehow involve a birthday cake, and end with a dinosaur. Ask questions, add new words, sing songs, rhyme names, label things together, read their artwork captions out loud. These are the kinds of language moments that help prepare children for reading and writing later on.

Let them play. Play is not wasted time. Play is where children learn how to solve problems, share ideas, handle disappointment, negotiate, imagine, and work with others. A group of children building a block tower is doing more than stacking blocks. They are planning, testing, communicating, and probably arguing over who gets the long rectangle one. That is real learning.

Fine motor skills can be part of summer fun too. Bring out the playdough, crayons, tongs, tweezers, beads, puzzles, scissors, and water toys. Those little hand muscles need practice before children are asked to write, cut, zip, button, and manage all the tiny kindergarten tasks that feel much bigger when you are five.

You are not just getting through the summer. You are helping them get ready for what comes next.

So this summer, keep reading the books, counting the snacks, cheering for the crooked shoe attempts, and giving children space to try again.



ASHLEY LITTLE
Training Coordinator

THE BENEFITS OF PLAY-BASED LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Learning through play is children using their imagination, role-playing, and hands on exploration to learn about the world while having a fun time.

One of my favorite examples is the **pretend grocery store**. Participants take turns role-playing being the shopper, cashiers, and other roles. They learn about the value of money, and use their counting skills. They learn vocabulary and practice conversational skills. It's not only fun for the children, but is low cost for the educator as well.



Play-based learning approaches the whole child (physically and mentally) and helps develop critical life skills.

Taking turns and sharing becomes easier for children. **Why?**

Social and emotional skills develop! Play-based learning develops empathy, confidence, and helps children manage emotions.

Language development benefits greatly.

Children learn new vocabulary from other children and how to use that language in context. Let the children tell goofy stories, or pretend to be superheroes. Even more reserved children will get excited to speak their minds.

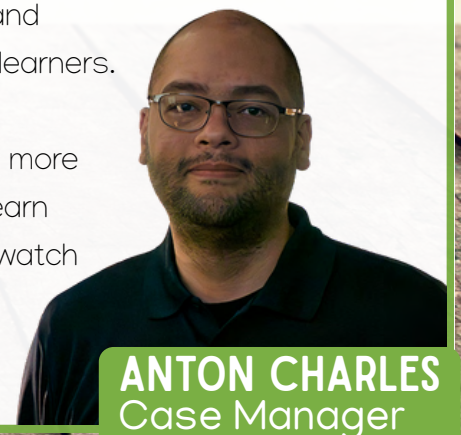


Can you build a bridge strong enough to hold this toy car? Giving the children a variety of materials, put them in groups and watch them focus and adapt to the challenge. Examples like this show that children can learn how to tackle challenges through play and learn how to be more **independent**.



Play is not a break from learning, it is learning. We're building thinkers, problem solvers, and confident lifelong learners.

Let's give children more opportunities to learn through play and watch what they're truly capable of.



ANTON CHARLES
Case Manager

SUMMER IN FULL BLOOM: NATURE-BASED LEARNING IN THE CACFP

Summer offers a natural extension of your learning environment—right outside your door. For both family daycare home providers and child care centers participating in CACFP, the season creates meaningful opportunities to connect nutrition, physical activity, and education through nature-based learning.

By intentionally using outdoor time, providers can support CACFP meal pattern goals, nutrition education, and wellness best practices while keeping children engaged and curious.

Why It Matters

Outdoor learning helps children:

- Stay active
- Try new foods
- Build curiosity and social skills

These experiences support CACFP requirements for nutrition education and daily physical activity in a fun, hands-on way.

Easy Ways to Connect Nature and CACFP

Grow & Learn

- Plant simple fruits, vegetables, or herbs in a garden or containers.
- **CACFP Connection:** Encourages children to try fruits and vegetables served in reimbursable meals.

Talk About Food

- Use meals and snacks to discuss colors, textures, and where food comes from.
- **CACFP Connection:** Supports nutrition education and meal pattern variety.

Outdoor Play

- Plan active games, walks, or scavenger hunts for all ages.
- **CACFP Connection:** Meets wellness recommendations for daily physical activity.

Promote Water

- Offer water often, especially during outdoor play.
- **CACFP Connection:** Reinforces healthy beverage habits.

Simple Activity Ideas

- Nature scavenger hunts
- Outdoor art with leaves and sticks
- Picnic-style CACFP meals
- Gardening and tasting fresh foods



Nature-based learning doesn't require much space or equipment. By taking activities outdoors, CACFP providers can support children's growth while strengthening healthy habits all summer long.



TAKESHA MIDDLETON
TN Centers Program Manager

LET'S GET GROWING!

If you are thinking about adding a garden to your daycare center or daycare home, summer is the best time to do that! Gardening with children can be so rewarding. Not only will they have tons of fun but getting your kids interested and engaged in a garden is the best way to increase their willingness to try new foods!

Introduction to Gardening:

Circle time is a great way to introduce gardening themes.

- Discuss the concepts of gardening:
 - planting seeds
 - watering
 - how the sun helps a plant to grow
- Incorporate pictures of the lifecycle of a plant and have the kids draw their own.



Hands-On Learning

For many people, hands-on learning helps them understand a concept or idea better. Now that your children have a good understanding of how everything works, you can begin adding real experiences for them.

Experiment 1: Window Beans

Placing beans in a wet cotton ball in a plastic bag is always a great way to get started! Your kids will be amazed to see how quickly the bean opens and begins to grow each day with just water and sunlight.



Another great hands-on experience is the sweet potato experiment.

Experiment 2: Sweet Potato

Slips



Though it does take a little longer than the bean activity, this experiment really takes off quickly.

Step 1: Poke sweet potato with toothpicks (x4) all around middle of potato.

Step 2: Place sweet potato into cup filled halfway with water so that half of potato is in water.

Step 3: Ensure potato remains submerged halfway into water throughout the experiment. If water evaporates, add more water. Potatoes should begin to grow roots and stems. After stems or slips grow for several weeks, these can be broken off and used as starters in soil.

Get Growing!

Now that they are excited for gardening, the last step is to venture outside and let them go wild with planting!

- Provide pots filled with soil and plant several seeds on a warm day outside.
- Create a helping chart that allows the children to take on responsibilities for taking care of the plants (watering, weeding, harvesting).
- Create grow charts to keep up with exciting changes in the plants they are growing!
- Use child friendly tools such as watering cans, gloves and shovels/ trowels for more excitement.
- Take progress pictures of your children with their plants.
- Let your children show off their garden by giving it as a gift to a parent or friend!



KELLY CHILDERS
Field Representative

WHY JOIN THE CACFP?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federally funded program sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides financial reimbursements to certified/licensed daycare centers or homes and registered/alternate-approved (Non-license) daycare home providers, for serving nutritious meals and snacks to children in their care.



Receive reimbursement for meals and snacks.

- Financial support for a portion of food costs.
- Afford more nutritious foods for those in your care.
- Make child care more affordable for the families you serve.



Provide healthy and affordable meals & snacks

- Access to meals and snacks that meet the USDA guidelines.
- Reduce hunger and increase food security.
- Promote lifelong healthy eating habits.



Access to training and resources.

- Receive professional training and technical assistance on how to be successful.
- Learn valuable nutrition education.
- Network with other CACFP educators local and nationwide.



Make your child care stand out.

- Save parents time and money from having to prepare meals and snacks.
- Improve the overall quality of your program.
- Promote that meals are served based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Interested in joining the CACFP? Find a sponsor today!

FIND A CACFP SPONSOR



Looking for quick tips, fresh ideas, and real talk about managing early education? Tune in to our [Early Educator Podcast](#), where we cover everything from growing your business to overcoming obstacles.

Whether you're on your lunch break or commuting, it's the perfect way to stay inspired and connected!

KENTUCKY EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

HOME EDUCATOR: SHAWNA WARD

30+ Years with the CACFP

For more than 35 years, Shawna Ward has cared for children at her in-home daycare. What started with watching her two little cousins, soon grew into lifelong career in child care.

“I’m not just a childcare provider, I’m a part of their story.”

“I’m proud of the contribution I bring to the lives of these children,” Shawna shared. “I celebrate their milestones, help build their confidence, and share in the moments that shape who they become.”

Ms. Shawna says one of the things she loves the most about the CACFP is the people.

“They always go out of their way to help you,” she said. “They truly want providers to succeed and make sure we receive everything we’re entitled to. They’ve become very dear friends to me.



One favorite meal at Pooh’s Corner Daycare is fish sticks, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, fruit, and crescent rolls.

“The children love it,” Shawna laughed. “Some even tell their parents that other fishsticks don’t taste like Ms. Shawna’s!”

When asked about advice she has for providers thinking about joining the CACFP, Ms. Shawna says, “Do it now! Don’t wait!” She emphasizes that the CACFP prevents her parents from having to pay a higher rate for childcare due to the covered food cost.



Through her kindness, dedication, and love for children, Ms. Shawna continues to make a lasting impact on the families she serves every day.



REBECCA RIFE
Field Representative

TENNESSEE EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

EDUCATOR: LENISE PARKER

Advocating To Ensure Voices Are Heard

For Lenise Parker, advocating for child care has never been about recognition or awards—it’s about making sure providers and families have a voice.

“Advocating for child care is not for any type of awards or accolades. I do this because we need a voice. We need to advocate for ourselves because no one else will do it for us.”

Ms. Lenise is a licensed in-home childcare educator in Lebanon and owner of MiMi’s, a home-based childcare program that has served families for six years. Originally from Louisiana, she also worked as a childcare provider there before relocating after Hurricane Katrina.

Motivated by the need for quality child care in her community, Ms. Lenise opened her program and today remains the only licensed home-based childcare provider in Wilson County. She describes her program as “small but mighty,” focused on creating a safe, loving, family-centered environment where children can thrive and parents feel supported.



Dedicated to continuous growth in early childhood education, Ms. Lenise holds an Associate Degree in Applied Science and a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential with a specialization in Family and Group Child Care. She is also endorsed through the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee, validating her specialized expertise in early relational health.



Advocating To Ensure Voices Are Heard

Beyond the classroom, Ms. Lenise is a passionate advocate for family child care providers across the state. She currently serves as Tennessee's State Representative for the National Association of Family Child Care and hosts a monthly leadership roundtable that offers peer support, shared learning, and professional development opportunities for educators



Her advocacy work has also made an impact on policy. Ms. Lenise helped organize Tennessee's first "Day Without Child Care" rally in 2025, an effort that led to ongoing conversations with Senator Oliver and contributed to the passage of the Tennessee Child Care Red Tape Reduction Act. She also helped host "A Day on the Hill: Fighting for Childcare," continuing her mission to elevate the voices of childcare providers throughout the state.



Ms. Lenise's leadership and dedication have earned statewide recognition, including the 2025 Rooted to Grow Award from the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee and the 2026 Women in Leadership Early Childhood Education Impact Award.

Whether advocating at the state level or caring for children in her home, Ms. Lenise remains committed to strengthening the future of early childhood education—one child, one family, and one voice at a time



SHEENA WILSON
Case Manager

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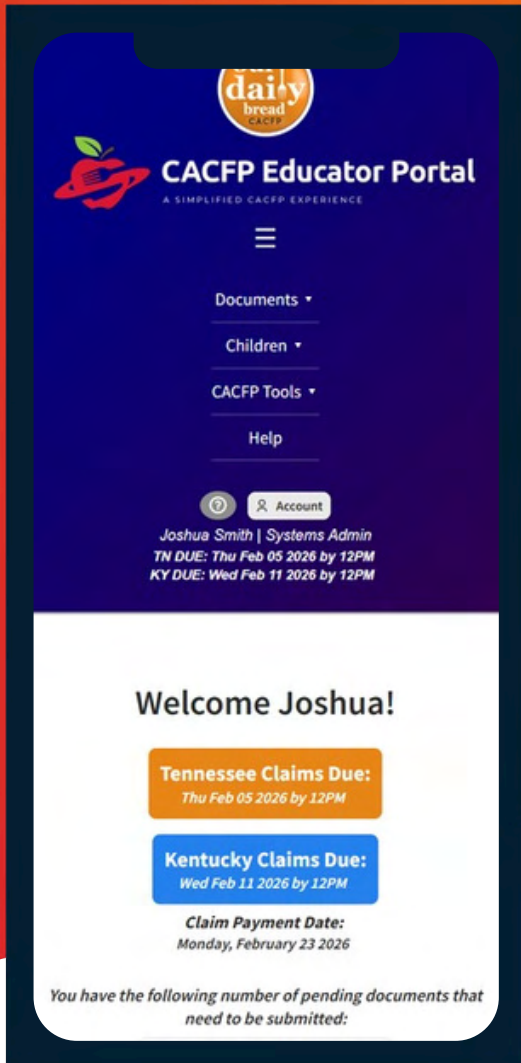
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USDA POLICY UPDATE



Final Ruling: Expanding Milk Options

USDA has expanded fluid milk options in CACFP. On June 8, 2026, the new rule allows whole and 2% milk to be served to children ages 2 and older, while maintaining existing requirements for 1-year-olds. Learn more about what this means for your program.

https://www.cacfp.org/2026/05/08/final-rule-expanding-fluid-milk-options-in-cnps/?mc_cid=0608c9fb66&mc_eid=659482eb54

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-050826>

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To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, [AD-3027](#), found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

The completed form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

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Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

Email: program.intake@usda.gov

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