# **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Try Agriculture Samples with Tastes and Education (TASTE) Incentive Grant Handbook**

California Department of Education

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## Introduction

The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Try Agriculture Samples with Tastes and Education (TASTE) Incentive grant augmentation provides school year (SY) 2025–26 FFVP awardees who elect to participate with additional federal funds to provide students at FFVP-awarded sites at least three additional taste-tests of local (within 150 miles from grantee) and certified organic and/or sustainably grown fruits and vegetables and to purchase nutrition-based and/or agricultural-based education materials.

## FFVP TASTE Incentive Requirements

The FFVP TASTE Incentive grant augmentation has the following two requirements and one optional activity:

1. Offer students at FFVP-awarded school sites at least three additional taste-tests of local (within 150 miles of grantee) and certified organic and/or sustainably grown fruits and vegetables (required).
2. Develop two new purchasing connections, per school food authority (SFA), with local, small to medium-sized farms, food hubs, cooperatives, or school farms within 150 miles of the school site that are certified organic and/or that use sustainable farming practices (required).
	* 1. To cultivate equity, give preference to supporting small and medium sized producers and those representing historically disadvantaged populations which include Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), women, and veterans where possible.
		2. Accommodation may be made for purchases located further than 150 miles away, with prior approval from the CDE.
3. Purchase nutrition and/or agricultural-based education materials for use in awarded sites. These materials may be used to support nutrition education activities required as a part of the FFVP (optional).

For more information on allowable and unallowable purchases, including nutrition and agricultural-based education materials, see the Expenses section of this handbook.

### Definitions

#### Local

For the purposes of the FFVP TASTE Incentive grant augmentation, local fruits and vegetables are defined as those grown within 150 miles of the grantee. Accommodation for purchases outside the 150-mile range may be made in consultation with the California Department of Education (CDE). All produce purchased with the FFVP TASTE Incentive augmentation must be California-grown and certified organic, or at a minimum grown using sustainable farming practices.

For pre-approval to use FFVP TASTE Incentive funding for produce grown farther than 150 miles from the grantee, contact the CDE by email at Farm2School@cde.ca.gov. No exceptions will be made to the California grown requirement.

#### Certified Organic

Certified organic food is food that is produced using sustainable agricultural production practices and that has received organic certification. Certified organic produce is produced without using most conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering, or ionizing radiation. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service website provides more information about organic produce, including inspection and certification information. To access the information, visit the USDA National Organic Program web page at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/national-organic-program>.

For the FFVP TASTE Incentive grant, producers may use sustainable farming practices and not be certified as organic.

#### Sustainably Grown Foods

Sustainably grown foods are those that are grown or raised using Climate-Smart Agriculture Practices, Climate-Smart Agriculture Production Systems, or Other Regenerative Strategies.

* Climate-smart agriculture practices include those defined by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Conservation Practice Standards and those identified by the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation via the Healthy Soils Program at <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/healthysoils/docs/CDFAHealthySoilsPractices.pdf>, the Alternative Manure Management Program at <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/AMMP/docs/ListofAMMPPractices.pdf>, the Dairy Digester Research and Development Program at <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/ddrdp/docs/List_of_DDRDP_Practices.pdf>, and the State Water Enhancement and Efficiency Program at <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/sweep/docs/SWEEP_CPS.pdf>, including but not limited to cover cropping, no or reduced till, hedgerow plantings, compost application, and prescribed grazing.
* Climate-smart agriculture production systems include certified organic or transitioning to certified organic.
* Other regenerative strategies include those that increase resilience to climate change, improve the health of communities and soil, protect water and air quality, increase biodiversity, and help store carbon in the soil.

## Funding Guidelines

### Financial Management

#### Funding Amount

For FFVP grantees participating in the FFVP TASTE Incentive augmentation, the award amount is estimated to be approximately 10 percent of the total FFVP funding allocated to each grantee for SY 2025–26. As such, total award amounts may vary. The exact amount of funding will be determined when the FFVP TASTE Incentive Grant Award Notification is available, at which time applicants will have an opportunity to accept or refuse the award.

#### Allocation Timeframe

Ninety percent of the funding will be awarded after the beginning of the funding period, July 1, 2025. The remaining ten percent will be awarded at the end of the FFVP TASTE Incentive grant after invoices have been submitted, reviewed, and approved.

#### Period of Performance

The FFVP TASTE Incentive grant performance period is July 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026.

#### Spending Timeframes

Funds can be applied to allowable purchases made only during the period of performance.Invoices for purchases made before July 1, 2025, or after March 31, 2026, will **not** be accepted.

Funds cannot be used for purchases made outside of the grant performance period. The CDE encourages all grantees to begin using their FFVP TASTE Incentive funding at the start of their SY, if possible.

Over the course of the FFVP TASTE Incentive grant period, grantees are expected to spend 75–100 percent of their total award. If there are documented concerns that grantees are underspending, this may detract from a grantee’s good standing status and may result in an SFA being disallowed from receiving future FFVP TASTE Incentive funding, if available. This practice ensures that FFVP funding is granted to schools that will utilize them.

#### Tracking Funds

Grantees must refrain from obligating or expending funds until the funds have been received and deposited into the grantee’s account. Grantees must deposit the FFVP TASTE Incentive funding into the agency’s nonprofit food service account (cafeteria fund). The FFVP TASTE Incentive funds should be **accounted for and tracked separately** using the new standardized account code structure (SACS) resource code provided below:

* SACS Resource Code: 5810
* SACS Object Code: 8290

With the number of funding streams currently available, FFVP TASTE Incentive grantees must ensure complete and accurate documentation of expenditures to avoid using two funding streams to pay for a single expense.

The FFVP TASTE Incentive funding is separate from all other funding sources, including, but not limited to: Local Foods for Schools, School Food Best Practices, Supply Chain Assistance, and the FFVP.

#### Returning Unused Funds

Within 30 days of billing notice, grantees must return all unexpended funds and as well as any funds that were notused as intended.

#### Supplantation

The FFVP TASTE Incentive funds must be used to supplement (by increasing or expanding), but not duplicate or replace existing local, organic or sustainably grown food procurement.

The taste tests provided as a part of this grant may not be used to fulfill those required by the FFVP grant.

### Grantee Training

Grantees are expected to complete one required FFVP TASTE Incentive training during the 2025–26 SY. Where possible, training will be coordinated with the FFVP grantee training.

### Monitoring and Reporting

Grantees are expected to submit invoices and mid-year and final reports using the template(s) provided by the CDE. Records validating appropriate purchases for produce and nutrition and/or agriculture-based education will include:

#### Produce Purchase Documentation

* Date purchased
* Name of vendor or business
* Dollar value expended
* Food purchased (fruit, vegetable, other [see Allowable Taste Test Foods section])
* Number of miles produce is grown from grantee location
* Certified organic or sustainably grown
* Whether producer represents a historically disadvantaged population

#### Nutrition and Agriculture-Based Education Documentation

* Date purchased
* Name of business or vendor
* Dollar value expended
* Materials purchased
* Usage plan

#### Reporting

Grantees will be required to submit mid-year and final reports and records of actual expenditures twice during the performance period:

* The mid-year submission is due **Monday, November 30, 2025**.
* The final submission is due **Thursday, April 30, 2026**.

### Observational Reviews

Three FFVP TASTE Incentive grantees will be selected for a virtual observational review to be scheduled during the grant performance period and at the convenience of the grantee. Grantees will be asked to showcase their FFVP TASTE Incentive activities and to discuss any successes and challenges with the grant requirements. If a grantee is selected, they are required to participate in the virtual review.

## FFVP TASTE Incentive Eligibility

### Grant Eligibility

The FFVP TASTE Incentive grant augmentation is only available to SY 2025–26 FFVP grantees. The award criteria for the FFVP TASTE Incentive requires that the SFA must be selected as a grantee for, and participate in, the SY 2025–26 FFVP and has opted in to the FFVP TASTE Incentive funding.

If the applicant is not awarded the FFVP grant or if they were awarded the FFVP grant but did not opt in to the TASTE Incentive grant, they are not eligible for the FFVP TASTE Incentive funding. Further, if an awardee discontinues participation in the FFVP at any time, they are no longer eligible for the FFVP TASTE Incentive.

## Expenses

### Allowable Expenses

FFVP TASTE Incentive funds may only be used for:

* Costs associated with the purchase of fresh, whole or sliced fruits and vegetables that are local (within 150 miles of the grantee), certified organic and/or sustainably grown, and intended for student taste tests in the FFVP-awarded sites
* Nutrition and/or agricultural-based education materials

FFVP TASTE Incentive purchases and activities must be reasonable, necessary and conducted above and beyond the FFVP-funded activities; however, nutrition and agricultural-based education materials may also be used to support and enhance the FFVP.

The CDE’s procurement team has resources and information available to support grantees with procurement. These can be accessed on the Procurement in Child Nutrition Programs web page at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/pr/> or by email at NSDProcurementReview@cde.ca.gov.

#### Allowable Taste Test Items

FFVP TASTE Incentive funds may be used to purchase the following to support student taste tests at FFVP-awarded schools:

* Signage to identify or promote local farm(s) and the featured produce item
* Student feedback materials (e.g., signage, voting dots, preference surveys, and pencils)
* Stickers (e.g., “I tried something new” stickers)
* Reusable tablecloths
* Paper or recyclable cups for serving
* Napkins or paper towels for serving
* Toothpicks

#### Allowable Taste Test Foods

The **allowable** purchases for fruits and vegetables for the taste tests conducted with FFVP TASTE Incentive funding are similar to the allowable purchases for the FFVP, with the additional requirement that FFVP TASTE Incentive purchases must be local (within 150 miles or less) and certified organic and/or sustainably grown.

The following list includes the types of fruits and vegetables that can be purchased with FFVP TASTE Incentive funding and that follow the FFVP grant guidelines. Most of the items listed are also addressed in the “USDA FFVP: Handbook for Schools,” accessed at <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/handbook.pdf>.

* Whole or sliced fresh fruits and vegetables are allowable.
* Condiments are allowable. Lemons, limes, or chili powder can be used as condiments to be served with fruit and vegetables
* Vegetable dips are allowed if they are low-fat yogurt-based or are low-fat or fat-free (nonfat).
	+ Dip serving sizes cannot exceed 1-2 tablespoons.
	+ Low-fat or non-fat hummus, peanut butter, and sun butter may only be served with vegetables once a month due to the high fat content.
* Fresh vegetables that are cooked must be limited to once per week and served only as part of a nutritional education lesson.

#### Ensuring Local or Regional and Certified Organic or Sustainably Grown Purchases

FFVP TASTE Incentive funds must be used to purchase local or regional (within 150 miles of the grantee) food and certified organic or sustainably grown fruits and vegetables for use in taste tests in school sites awarded the 2025–2026 FFVP grant. These taste tests are in addition to those required by the FFVP and do not replace them.

For the purposes of this grant, local and regional fruits and vegetables are defined as where the total distance between where the item is grown and the end consumer is at most 150 miles; the origin of the product must **always** be California. Justification requests for purchases outside the 150-mile range must be submitted to the CDE for approval prior to the purchase. No exceptions will be issued for the California-grown criteria; all produce purchased with the FFVP TASTE Incentive funds must be California grown using sustainable farming practices and/or certified organic.

#### Target Purchases from Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Producers and Small Businesses

To cultivate equity, give preference to supporting small to medium sized farmers, and producers representing historically disadvantaged populations, including BIPOC, women, and veterans, where possible.

#### Unallowable Taste Test Foods

The unallowable purchases for fruits and vegetables for the taste tests with the FFVP TASTE Incentive funding are similar to the unallowable purchases for the FFVP, with the addition that produce that is not certified organic and/or grown using sustainable farming practices is not allowable.The following lists include the types of fruits and vegetables that cannot be purchased with FFVP TASTE Incentive funding or the FFVP funds:

* Processed or preserved fruits and vegetables (i.e., canned, frozen, vacuum-packed, or dried)
* Fruit leather or jellied fruit
* Dips for fruit or cottage cheese
* Fruit or vegetable juice
* Smoothies
* Trail mixes or nuts
* Fruit/vegetable pizza
* Fruit that has been injected with flavorings
* Carbonated fruit
* Produce grown without the use of sustainable farming practices
* Produce grown over 150 miles from the grantee site, unless otherwise pre-approved by the CDE
* Produce not grown within California

### Allowable Nutrition and Agricultural-Based Education

#### Connecting with Farms and Farmers for Education

Funding can be used for students at the awarded sites to host:

* Field trip to farm(s)
* Field trip to orchard(s)
* Guest speakers for nutrition education and/or agricultural-based education (e.g., Farmer visits school site(s), Nutritionist visits school site(s))

#### Nutrition Education Materials

Funding can be used for purchasing or printing:

* Activity sheets
* Banners
* Curricula
* Fact sheets
* Flyers
* Fruit or vegetable costumes
* Fruit or vegetable informational sheets
* Posters
* Signs
* Stickers

Cafeteria funds cannot be used for nutrition education materials without approval from the CDE. Also, and as a reminder, the FFVP grant funding cannot be used to purchase nutrition-based or agricultural-based education materials. For more information, visit the CDE FFVP web page at <https://staging.cde.ca.gov/LS/nu/sn/caffvp.asp>, and select the Guidelines tab. For more on this topic, review the CDE Management Bulletin Assessing Proposed Nutrition Education Costs at <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/mbsnp052016.asp>.

If an FFVP TASTE Incentive grantee is unsure if a purchase can be made, the CDE F2S team at Farm2School@cde.ca.gov can provide guidance.

### Unallowable Nutrition or Agricultural-Based Education

Funding cannot be used for sites that were **not** awarded the FFVP TASTE Incentive. This includes materials or activities, such as field trips, guest speakers, educational materials etc.

### Additional Unallowable FFVP TASTE Incentive Expenses

The following items are also not allowable FFVP TASTE Incentive expenses:

* Equipment, including permanent or electronic displays
* Uniforms
* Staff time spent on procurement
* Supplies not used for FFVP TASTE Incentive activities
* Reusable service ware
* Purchases beyond the amounts necessary for student taste-testing
* Activities at non-FFVP awarded elementary sites
* Activities that cannot be considered reasonable and necessary

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can the FFVP TASTE Incentive taste tests be provided at the same time as the FFVP taste tests?**

No, the FFVP TASTE Incentive student taste tests are in addition to the FFVP and must be provided completely separately from the FFVP snack. Offering the taste test on a separate day or during a different time than when the FFVP snack is offered is required. Grantees must maintain documentation of FFVP TASTE Incentive activities.

1. **Does the food purchased have to be organic?**

No, the FFVP TASTE Incentive allows for fruits and vegetables grown using sustainable farming practices that may not be certified organic. If a grantee encounters procurement challenges, CDE staff can be contacted for help at Farm2School@cde.ca.gov.

1. **Can I participate in the FFVP TASTE Incentive if I’m not an FFVP Grantee?**

No. The FFVP TASTE Incentive grant is only available to SY 2025–2026 FFVP grantees.

1. **Can I offer FFVP TASTE Incentive activities at sites in my district that weren’t awarded the FFVP?**

No. FFVP TASTE Incentive activities must be conducted at sites awarded the SY 2025–2026 FFVP.

1. **Can I use the FFVP TASTE Incentive nutrition education materials for other activities in addition to the FFVP TASTE Incentive funded activities?**

Yes. The nutrition education materials may be used to enhance the nutrition education offered at the FFVP-awarded sites.

1. **Do I have to use the funds to purchase nutrition and agricultural-based education materials?**

No. Grantees have the option to purchase nutrition and agricultural-based education materials, however this is **not** a requirement.

1. **How many new producer relationships do I need to develop if my SFA is awarded multiple sites?**

The purchasing relationships are developed at the SFA level, and not the site level. The FFVP TASTE Incentive requires that two new procurement relationships be developed per SFA.

## Contacts

### California Department of Education Farm to School (F2S) Contact Information

#### Farm to School (F2S)

For questions about the FFVP TASTE Incentive, contact the Nutrition Services Division (NSD) F2S Team by email at Farm2School@cde.ca.gov.

#### FFVP

For general questions about the FFVP, contact the CDE FFVP Team by email at FFVP@cde.ca.gov.

For questions about submitting monthly claims or equipment justification forms for the FFVP, contact the CDE FFVP by email at FFVPClaim@cde.ca.gov.

#### Procurement

For questions related to procurement and procurement resources, contact the CDE Procurement team by email at NSDProcurementReview@cde.ca.gov.

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