March is National Nutrition Month

March is National Nutrition Month (NNM). "Put Your Best Fork Forward" is the theme for NNM 2017 which serves as a reminder that each one of us holds the tool to make healthier food choices. Making small changes during National Nutrition Month® and over time, helps improve health now and into the future. Please visit the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics "Eat Right" website at this link for more information.

National School Breakfast Week is March 6-10!
TDA has issued a challenge to all Texas students for 2017 - eat breakfast at school every day from March 6-10 during School Breakfast Week. When young Texans Take the Breakfast Challenge, they will feel the benefits of starting the school day with whole grains, healthy dairy, fruits, lean protein and other nutritious foods.

Elementary students can watch the participation chart displayed in the cafeteria grow to see how eating breakfast makes a difference for the entire school. Social media-savvy middle and high school students are encouraged to show they are up to the breakfast challenge by taking a selfie each day they go to the lunchroom for breakfast. The challenge brings students together in a collaborative effort to reach healthy goals and be winners in the classroom, on the playground and, ultimately, in life.

Grant Opportunity

**Expanding 3Es Nutrition Grant Program**

The deadline is fast approaching for the Expanding the 3Es Grant Program, which awards grants up to $10,000 per campus for nutrition education efforts for students. Public schools must submit applications by **February 28, 2017**.

The goal of the grant is to help schools increase awareness of the importance of good nutrition, especially for children, and to encourage children’s health and well-being through TDA’s 3E’s of Healthy Living - Education, Exercise and Eating Right. TDA is working with schools to promote better health and prevent obesity among children in this state, and this is just one effort to do so.

The Request for Application (RFA) and instruction documents are available on TDA’s [website](#). For additional questions or information please contact TDA’s Grants office at (512) 463-6695 or email [Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov](mailto:Grants@TexasAgriculture.gov).

MENU Module Update

**Upcoming Training**

It’s official! MENU Module will be available to CE’s statewide April 1, 2017. Please visit the MENU Module [website](#) for more information. Please keep in mind, the website is still "under construction."

A training section will be added to the website in late March where training materials will be available. The training materials are so comprehensive, CE’s that have previously used nutrient analysis software could launch on their own with minimal technical assistance.

Get organized to launch by completing the below two tasks:

- Watch this [video](#). While a bit long and a little dry, it provides insight into how MENU Module functions and what to expect when launching.
- Begin collecting and organizing your recipes for each menu cycle used throughout the year. One of the first steps in launching MENU Module is searching the database for your specific ingredients. TDA has created an excellent organization tool (available Spring 2017) to help identify the information you’ll need, but having the recipes easily accessible and organized will jump start your ability to launch!
Purchasing Goods and Services Using Cooperative Agreements, Agents and Third-Party Services

TDA has evaluated the updated guidance in the recently released USDA Memo SP 05-2017 to determine how the updated guidance impacts purchasing in Texas. Please note, this guidance contains significant changes to the previous guidance on procuring through cooperatives and agents. To ensure that both the ESCs and CEs have the most current guidance, TDA has created a supplementary guidance document which can be used until Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 17, Procurement is updated. That document is attached.

Noncompetitive Procurement

TDA released updated guidance on the requirements for noncompetitive procurement in the Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 17, Procurement on November 29, 2016. This update was based on recent USDA guidance which clarified and redefined the types of noncompetitive procurement. CEs should review the updated guidance in the ARM to ensure that they are addressing noncompetitive procurements correctly.

There are four types of noncompetitive procurement. As described below, each type of noncompetitive procurement addresses a specific type of situation:

1. Inadequate Competition -- A CE releases a solicitation, and the responses are limited. The CE evaluates the inadequate competition based on specific criteria and makes a determination to use or not use a the noncompetitive procurement method based on the criteria.
2. Sole Source -- The product or service is available from only one source. The CE determines if the procurement is truly sole source using specific criteria. If the CE determines that the criteria are met, the CE must request approval for a sole source noncompetitive purchases from TDA in writing.
3. Public Emergency or Unexpected Emergency Situation -- An emergency situation occurs, and the CE must make immediate purchases that do not allow for a lengthy procurement process. The CE must request approval for emergency noncompetitive procurements in writing. However, TDA recommends that CE contact TDA by phone before submitting a written request. This will allow TDA to assist the CE in obtaining approval as quickly as possible.
4. TDA Authorization in Special Situations -- TDA determines that a situation exists in which a CE or multiple CEs must make immediate purchases that do not allow for a lengthy procurement process. These instances are rare. In these cases, TDA will notify the CE when this type of noncompetitive procurement is appropriate.

Buy American

The Buy American provision is intended to ensure that federal funds are used to support United States (US) or domestic agricultural food production. CEs must include this requirement in their contracts, requests for offers, and purchase orders for all potential contractors, including third party contractors. The CE -- not the distributor, supplier, or vendor -- must determine that the use of a non-domestic food product is acceptable.

If the CE is able to answer any one of the following questions with a response that the Buy American requirement is met, the CE may purchase the non-domestic food product as long as the CE is able to retain documentation that demonstrates compliance.

1. Is the food product grown in the United States (US) or does 51% of the final processed food product consist of agricultural commodities that were grown domestically (in the US)? If yes, the Buy American requirement is met.
2. Is this food product on the Federal Acquisition Regulation System product exception list? If yes, the Buy American requirement is met.
3. Is CE (or the distributor, supplier, or vendor purchasing on behalf of the CE) able to procure a domestic food product in large enough quantities of a satisfactory quality for the CE to purchase a US product? If no, the Buy American requirement is met.
4. Are there other domestic sources for purchasing this food product? Or is there another domestic food product that can be easily substituted for the non-domestic food product? If no, the Buy American requirement is met.
5. Is the price difference between the domestic product and non-domestic product unreasonable in light of the CE's anticipated per meal price? If yes, the Buy American requirement is met.

The Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 17, Procurement also provides additional guidance on this topic.

CACFP Meal Pattern for NSLP/SBP Contracting Entities (CEs)
TDA has incorporated the updated CACFP Meal Pattern for pre-K students into the existing NSLP and SBP meal pattern charts. Those charts are attached. ESCs and CEs may use these charts until the ARM is updated. If you have questions about the guidance presented in these charts, please submit those questions to linda.simmons@TexasAgriculture.gov. Staff will discuss those questions at the next TETN on February 9, 2017.

**Professional Standards Hiring**

CEs with a total student enrollment of 500 students or less that have made attempts to hire a qualified program director but have been unable to hire a qualified program director may apply for an exemption to hire a designated individual if the individual meets the following minimum educational and experience background: high school or General Educational Development (GED) diploma and relevant experience in a Child Nutrition Program (CNP). To apply for an exemption to the hiring standards, the CE must submit the Hiring Professional Standards Exemption Request for Contracting Entities (CEs) With a Total Student Enrollment of 500 or Less. This form is available through the Download Forms screen in the Texas Unified Nutrition Programs System (TX-UNPS) application packet. TDA will notify the CE if the exception is approved.

However, for this exemption to be valid, the CE must apply and receive approval for the designated individual prior to hiring the individual.

**Professional Standards, Timeline for Food Safety Training**

Program directors are required to have eight hours of food safety training every five years.

For existing program directors hired before July 1, 2015 - Program directors who do not have eight hours of food safety training in the previous five years must complete eight hours of food safety training by June 30, 2016. After June 30, 2016, each director must have eight hours of food safety training every five years.

For new program directors hired after July 1, 2015 - New directors hired after July 1, 2015 who have not had eight hours of training in the previous five years must obtain eight hours within 30 days of hire. After receiving food safety training, all new program directors must have eight hours of food safety training every five years.

The Food Safety Training Timeline Chart illustrates when program directors need to complete eight hours of food safety training based a timeline of every five years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director completed 8 hours of food safety training in...</th>
<th>Must complete 8 more hours of food safety training by...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SY2012-2013</td>
<td>June 30, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2013-2014</td>
<td>June 30, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2014-2015</td>
<td>June 30, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2015-2016</td>
<td>June 30, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SY2016-2017</td>
<td>June 30, 2022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note, School Nutrition Programs (SNPs) are also required to meet the standards established by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). DSHS provides guidance and resources at [here](#).  

**Medicaid Demonstration Project**

TDA will begin implementation of the Direct Certification with Medicaid (DCM) Demonstration Project in 2017-2018 school year. Contracting entities (CEs) will use an updated Direct Certification System located in the Texas Unified Nutrition Program System (TX-UNPS) to directly certify student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals based on Medicaid eligibility data provided by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). In brief, this system will allow CEs to use Medicaid matches to determine eligibility without an application. TDA will be releasing additional guidance on this process.

**Paid Lunch Equity (PLE) Exemption**

USDA has extended the PLE exemption for SY 2017-2018. TDA will be releasing the form to use to
apply for the exemption in the early spring.

**USDA’s Web-Based Application Prototype**

In November of 2016, USDA released a web-based version of the household meal application. This prototype is available in JavaScript, and CEs may download the prototype at no cost. CEs that have an existing web-based application software should ask their technology staff to review the materials USDA has provided to see if there are new strategies they can adopt that will maximize their use of web-based applications. CEs that do not have an existing web-based application software should discuss the new tool with their technology staff. USDA provides detailed explanations and guidance [here](#).

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**Texas Farm Fresh Initiative**

**NEW! Important Farm to School Survey of NSLP CEs**

TDA is collecting information from NSLP CEs, regarding current Farm to School activities and interest. Information gathered in this survey will be used to guide program staff in developing the resources most helpful to Texas CEs interested in incorporating Farm to School. The resources will be made available to all NSLP participants.

All CNDs participating in NSLP will receive an email invitation to participate in this survey. As you are working with districts during the upcoming weeks, please encourage them to complete the survey by **March 1, 2017**. Thank you in advance for your assistance!

Districts in your region can access the survey [here](#).

For additional information about this survey or other Farm Fresh activities, please contact Alyssa Herold at Alyssa.Herold@TexasAgriculture.gov.

**NEW! Local Food Processing Video and Case Studies**

Farm to Institution New England’s New England Food Processors Community of Practice has released a short video and suite of seven comprehensive case studies that highlight some of the challenges to processing local food and the innovative solutions that are helping bring local products to institutions. Explore these new resources [here](#).

**NEW! Action for Healthy Kids Webinar**

On Jan. 25th, Action for Healthy Kids hosted a webinar entitled "Creating a Healthier School Food Culture" to explore how school food culture extends beyond the cafeteria. The webinar includes information about policies and regulations related to the school food environment, and outlined project ideas and resources for healthy fundraisers, celebrations and family events, healthy snack programs and non-food rewards. If you were unable to attend the webinar, you can access a recording [here](#). A few resources referenced in the webinar include:

- **Healthy School Food Culture Tip Sheets**: Fundraising, Food Sales, Celebrations, Rewards, School Snacks, Nutrition Education, Healthy Food Ideas
- **Healthy Valentine’s Day at School Tip Sheet**
- **Nutrition Fitness BINGO**
- **Rainbow Challenge**
- **Rainbow Color Sheet**
- **Sample Healthy Role Model Poster**
- **Action for Healthy Kids’ fundraising program, the SuperFit School Challenge**

**2017 Carton 2 Garden Contest**

Evergreen Packaging and KidsGardening.org are proud to present its third annual national Carton 2 Garden Contest. The contest is open to public and private schools and winners will be selected based on their implementation of an innovative garden creation featuring creative and sustainable uses for repurposed milk and juice cartons. **Submissions are due April 12, 2017.** Learn more [here](#).

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**Other Updates**
CEP Characteristics Study

USDA has contracted with the vendors 2M Research Services and Abt Associates to collect data for a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Characteristics Study. Districts selected for the study will be contacted directly by the vendor for additional information. For a list of districts selected for the study please see the attached Excel spreadsheet. A list of FAQs regarding the study are also attached.

USDA Summer Meals Newsletter

The USDA Summer Meals Newsletter is now available and can be accessed [here](#).

Click here for previous issue.

By unsubscribing, be aware that this email address will no longer get required communication from TDA via this distribution method. It is up to the organization to find an alternative method of obtaining the information as your organization will still be responsible for all content contained in the communications.