

National CACFP Association Celebrates 40 Years of Feeding the Future

More than 1,500 child nutrition professionals gather in Las Vegas for the 40th National Child Nutrition Conference

LAS VEGAS, NV, UNITED STATES, May 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In 1986, five advocates founded the [National CACFP Association](#) (NCA) with a shared belief: that the professionals serving nutritious meals to children and adults in care settings deserve support, education, and advocacy. Forty years later, more than 1,500 child nutrition professionals gathered in Las Vegas to celebrate four decades of community and shared purpose.



USDA Deputy Under Secretary Patrick Penn with Current and Past NCA Board Members

The 40th National Child Nutrition Conference, held April 13-17 at the Westgate Las Vegas, brought together child nutrition professionals from across the country for five days of learning, networking and professional growth. From in-depth preconference sessions and standing-room-only workshops to a vibrant exhibit hall and 40th anniversary celebration, the event delivered inspiration, connection and renewed purpose.

“NCA was founded forty years ago with the goal of supporting the people who serve children and adults in care settings. Being in Las Vegas with more than 1,500 of those professionals is a testament to that founding vision,” said NCA President Alexia Thex. “This community is dedicated and engaged, and the work we do together has never mattered more.”

Tuesday’s General Session brought together voices from across child nutrition policy and practice. NCA Board Chair Alix Pasillas opened with welcoming remarks rooted in her own CACFP journey, from field monitor to Executive Director of Food For Kids Nevada, and welcomed attendees to her home state. USDA Deputy Under Secretary Patrick Penn addressed the state of child nutrition policy, Sesame Workshop’s Antonio Freitas discussed the vital role of play in early childhood nutrition education, and motivational speaker Dee Hankins closed the session with a

personal story about resilience and the transformative power of a meal.

Wednesday and Thursday brought the conference's full workshop schedule into focus, with five session blocks each day covering everything from CACFP compliance and special diets to self-care for child nutrition professionals, AI tools for stronger programs, and USDA summer meal policy updates. Several sessions reached capacity, including "Resilience is Everything," "MAHA's Impact on the CACFP" and "Self-Care Strategies to Manage Stress and Burnout."

The Exhibit Hall gave attendees hands-on access to products and services uniquely suited to CACFP operators. On Wednesday, exhibitors donated more than 1,300 pounds of food to Las Vegas's Three Square Food Bank, a demonstration of the values that run through this community at every level.

The momentum of the conference extended beyond the venue. On Wednesday morning, USDA Deputy Under Secretary Patrick Penn, USDA Deputy Associate Administrator Tina Fritz Namian, NCA President Alexia Thex visited Lulu's Kids Care, a CACFP family child care home in Las Vegas operated by provider Orly Adani and supported by sponsoring organization Food for Kids, Inc. The visit brought federal and national leaders to a working CACFP home for a firsthand look at the program's daily impact. The group observed breakfast service, spent time with children and experienced the warm, home-based environment at the heart of the program.

"Every visit to a CACFP site reaffirms how essential this program is for children, families, and communities, connecting kids with nutritious, real food that paves a pathway to lifelong health and well-being," said Penn. "USDA is committed to supporting the caregivers who make this all possible and strengthening the program so it can best serve participants for years to come."

NCA is already looking forward to Chicago in 2027, where the 41st National Child Nutrition Conference, themed "Fresh Ideas, Shared Purpose" will continue the work of a community dedicated to ensuring 4.4 million children and adults in care settings have access to nutritious meals every day.

Since 1986, the National CACFP Association (NCA) has been a leading national organization offering support to thousands within the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) community. Its overarching goal is to ensure nutrition access for families by facilitating access to vital food programs.

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