



Food and
Nutrition
Service

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Park Office
Center

SUBJECT: Questions and Answers on the Final Rule *Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements*¹

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TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

Attached are Questions and Answers (QAs) on the final rule *Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements* (83 FR 63775, December 12, 2018), which provides menu planning flexibilities in the Child Nutrition Programs beginning July 1, 2019. The QAs address the following key provisions of the final rule:

Flavored Milk

The rule allows schools in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs to offer flavored, low-fat (1 percent) milk at lunch and breakfast and as a beverage for sale a la carte, without the need to demonstrate operational hardship, and requires that unflavored milk (fat-free or low-fat) be available at each school meal service. For consistency across Programs, the rule extends the milk flexibility to the Special Milk Program for Children and to the Child and Adult Care Food Program for children ages six and older and adult participants.

Whole Grains

The rule requires that half of the weekly grains in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs be whole grain-rich; the remaining weekly grains offered must be enriched.

Sodium Reduction Timeline

The rule retains Sodium Target 1 through School Year 2023-2024, moves Target 2 to School Year 2024-2025, and removes the Final Target in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

¹ Pursuant to the Congressional Review Act (5 U.S.C. §801 et seq.), the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs designated this memorandum as not a major rule, as defined by 5 U.S.C. § 804(2).

Regional Directors
State Directors
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State agencies are reminded to distribute this memorandum to Program operators. Program operators should direct any questions concerning this guidance to their State agency. State agencies with questions should contact the appropriate FNS Regional Office.

Original Signed

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Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements Final Rule (83 FR 63775, December 12, 2018)

Questions and Answers

1. When may Program operators use the flexibilities established by this final rule?

The implementation date of the flexibilities in this rule is July 1, 2019. This rule revises the whole grain-rich requirement beginning school year (SY) 2019-2020. Effective July 1, 2019, at least half of the weekly grains offered in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) must be whole grain-rich, and the remaining weekly grains offered must be enriched. Therefore, schools will be able to offer enriched grain items as part of the weekly menu and credit them toward the grains component.

This final rule also continues the existing flexibility to offer flavored, low-fat (1 percent) milk in the NSLP and SBP to children in grades K-12, and to children ages 6 and older participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and Special Milk Program (SMP). The flexibility also applies for adult participants in the CACFP. In addition, this rule retains sodium Target 1 in the NSLP and SBP through SY 2023-2024, and requires sodium Target 2 effective SY 2024-2025.

Please visit the *Nutrition Standards for School Meals* web page (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>) for updated information such as the meal pattern charts with the flexibilities for SY 2019-2020 and beyond.

2. How will the whole grain-rich flexibility impact breakfast when meats/meat alternates are used to meet part of the requirement?

The whole grain-rich requirement applies *only* to grain-based food items, and not meat/meat alternates crediting toward the grains component. Half of the actual grains offered throughout the course of the week must be whole grain-rich. Whole grain-rich products contain at least 50 percent whole grains and the remaining grains if any, must be enriched.

3. Does USDA have a useful tool for schools to use in tracking the amount of whole grains and enriched grains offered?

Schools may track meal components, including grains, using the following methods:

- USDA-approved software, purchased by schools (see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/usda-approved-nutrient-analysis-software>)
- Certification of Compliance worksheets (see <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/certification-compliance>)
- Production records: The Menu Planner for School Meals includes sample production records (please note States may have their own specific documentation requirements)

- The Menu Planner for School Meals Chapter 4
https://fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/MenuPlanner_Ch4_508.pdf
- The Menu Planner for School Meals - Appendix 4.A
https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/TNMenuPlanner_Appendixes.pdf

4. What guidance exists for understanding the enriched grain requirements?

Enriched grains are refined grains that have been processed to remove the nutrient-rich bran and germ, and then have thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid, and iron added after processing. Similarly, a food that is fortified has certain vitamins and minerals added to increase the nutritional quality. Foods made from refined grains that meet at least one of the following criteria are considered creditable:

1. The food is labeled as “enriched.” For example, long grain rice that is enriched will have the product name “enriched long grain rice.”
2. An enriched grain is listed as the first ingredient on the food’s ingredient list or second after water. The ingredient list will usually state “enriched flour” or “enriched wheat flour,” or there is a sub-listing of nutrients used to enrich the flour, for example, “yellow corn flour {iron, folic acid, riboflavin, niacin, and thiamine}.”
3. For breakfast cereals, the product is labeled as “fortified” or the ingredient list names the vitamins and minerals that have been added to the product. If a breakfast cereal is fortified, it does not need to be enriched. For example, the ingredient list of a fortified breakfast cereal may read, “Ingredients: Wheat flour, sugar, contains 2% or less of salt, baking soda, caramel color, BHT for freshness. Vitamins and Minerals: Vitamin C (sodium ascorbate, ascorbic acid), niacin, vitamin B6 (pyridoxine hydrochloride), reduced iron, zinc oxide, folic acid, vitamin B2 (riboflavin), vitamin B1 (thiamin hydrochloride), vitamin A palmitate, vitamin D, vitamin B12.”

NOTE: The ingredient list of a non-fortified cereal would not name any added vitamins and minerals. For example, the ingredient list of a non-fortified breakfast cereal may read, “Ingredients: rice flour, corn flour, evaporated cane juice, pomegranate juice concentrate, sea salt.” This particular cereal would not be considered a creditable grain because it is not made from whole or enriched grains and is not fortified.

Beginning July 1, 2019, the Child Nutrition Labeling Program will also include enriched grain crediting information on new product labels for use by Program operators.

Consistent with existing whole grain-rich guidance for schools, any non-creditable grains in products or recipes used to meet the enriched grain requirements are limited to an insignificant amount, which is defined as less than 0.25 ounce equivalency. For products from Exhibit A, Groups A – G, this means that there must be *fewer* than 4 grams of non-creditable grain per portion. For products from Group H, this means that there must be *fewer*

than 7 grams of non-creditable grain per portion. FNS is updating our grain guidance and resources to promote flexibility.

5. What are the requirements for unflavored milk in the Child Nutrition Programs?

Schools in the NSLP and SBP may offer fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk, and currently have the option to offer flavor in either type of milk. This flexibility is also allowed for children 6 years and older in the CACFP and SMP and adult participants in the CACFP. To ensure that milk variety is not limited to flavored milk, beginning SY 2019-2020 schools in the NSLP and SBP must offer at least one type of unflavored milk (fat-free or low-fat) at each meal service.

6. Is the flavored, low-fat milk flexibility available to CACFP operators other than school sites?

The flexibility to offer flavored, low-fat (1 percent) milk, which first became available in SY 2018-2019, is not restricted to school locations. This flexibility is available to all CACFP child care facilities that serve meals to children ages 6 and older, and adult day care centers. Flavored milk may only be offered to CACFP participants ages 6 and older.

7. Is flavored low-fat milk allowable in the NSLP afterschool snack service, and does the requirement to offer unflavored milk apply?

The NSLP afterschool snack service must include two full servings of any of the following: fluid milk; meat or meat alternate; vegetable or fruit, or full-strength vegetable or fruit juice; whole-grain or enriched bread. Flavored, low-fat milk is allowable in the NSLP afterschool snack service. Because the service of afterschool snacks should be simple, the requirement to offer a variety of milk types, including unflavored milk, does not apply in the NSLP afterschool snack service. Juice must not be served when fluid milk is served as the only other component.

8. Do these flexibilities apply to Smart Snacks in Schools (SSIS)?

The only change that affects SSIS is the flexibility to sell flavored, low-fat milk as a competitive food on the school campus, during the school day. This final rule does not change the SSIS requirements regarding grains or sodium (7 CFR 210.11). The SSIS standard is a nutrition requirement for an individual food item. In contrast, NSLP and SBP have daily and weekly requirements.

9. May schools offer water in place of milk?

No. Fluid milk is a required component of a reimbursable meal. Program operators must not promote or offer water, juice, or any other beverage as an alternative selection to fluid milk in a reimbursable meal throughout the food service area. Schools must not directly or indirectly restrict the sale or marketing of fluid milk (7 CFR 210.10(d)(4)).

Although water is not a required part of a reimbursable meal, potable water must be available to students at no charge during meals, in the food service area or on the service line, separate from fluid milk (to prevent confusion).

Schools must use signage to help students select a reimbursable meal. See memorandum SP 28-2011 *Revised Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010: Water Availability During National School Lunch Program Meal Service* (July 12, 2011, available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/water-availability-during-nslp-meal-service>) and memorandum SP 39-2019 *Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs* (September 19, 2019, available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/resource/clarification-milk-and-water-requirements-school-meal-program>).

10. May State agencies establish State standards that are stricter than the Federal requirements for milk, whole grains, and sodium in the NSLP and SBP?

The flexibilities established by this rule will give schools greater ability to incorporate local preferences into menu planning. Accordingly, USDA expects these flexibilities will help schools run their food service operations more efficiently and effectively while meeting the needs of their communities.

The regulations at 7 CFR 210.19(e) allow State agencies discretion to set additional requirements that are not inconsistent with the minimum nutrition standards for school meals. However, a State agency must reimburse school food authorities for meals and afterschool snacks served in accordance with the Federal requirements. A State agency cannot withhold Federal Program funds or take back reimbursement for meals that meet the minimum Federal requirements. When considering matters of local control, USDA encourages States to establish standards incorporating the flexibilities that work best for their communities and schools.

11. How do lawsuits impact Program requirements and flexibilities?

Schools are obligated to comply with Program requirements, including those in all final regulations. Generally, pending litigation does not affect Program requirements and flexibilities. Once a lawsuit has been resolved, any resulting changes to Program requirements and flexibilities would be announced through rulemaking and/or published guidance.