

School Programs Commodity Update

What's New in USDA's Food Distribution Program for Schools

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LOOKING TOWARDS SCHOOL YEAR 2008/2009

Catfish Strips: We are again offering breaded, partially fried, frozen catfish strips (A752). These freshwater catfish strips are prepared from trimmed catfish shank fillet. They consist of no less than 75% catfish flesh in the raw formula. Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is not allowed in this product. *CN Crediting:* One 2.0 oz catfish strip when cooked provides 1.2 oz-equivalent meat/meat alternate.

Low Sodium Canned Vegetables: The sodium levels in commodity canned tomato products (tomato paste, tomato sauce, and salsa) and canned dried beans products will be reduced to 140 mg per serving in School Year 2008/2009. This change will bring our commodities more in line with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Tuna Pouch: The fact sheet for Tuna Pouch 43 (A745) was incorrect. It originally stated that there were 33.1 ounces of usable tuna for each 43 ounce package. In fact, the pouch weight is exactly the same as the usable product. This fact sheet has been updated with the correct information and is now posted on the Food Distribution website. To access the fact sheets, click on:

<http://www.commodityfoods.usda.gov>.



ANOTHER SCHOOL YEAR IS ALMOST OVER

We are quickly coming to the end of another school year! This will be the last *School Programs Commodity Update* for this school year. We continue to make changes and improvements in the commodity programs that we will pass on to you through this newsletter. Have a good summer.

MAXIMIZE YOUR COMMODITY VALUE AND USAGE



You are probably fully aware that prices for USDA

commodities continue to escalate. This causes your commodity entitlement dollars to support less of the costs of your school's lunch and breakfast programs. We understand the impact this is having on operational costs. Here are some helpful tips that can help you maximize your commodity value and usage:

- Commodities are real dollars. Know your planned assistance level (commodity entitlement) and order the total value.
- Be aware of your State's ordering, processing, procurement, storage, and delivery options to help you make good choices in managing your commodities.
- Do an annual procurement plan based on your menus. Order commodities to meet your menu needs to maximize the use of commodity dollars. Commodities should complement your menu to allow you to maximize your participation.
- Be aware of the value of commodities and compare them with your commercial prices.
- Make the most of your entitlement dollars. Order some bulk commodities for processing to get a lower cost per pound. This enables you to stretch your commodity dollars.
- Minimize storage and warehousing costs by:
 - Ordering wisely across all commodity groups. Don't put all your eggs in one basket!

- Moving all commodities quickly through your distribution system.
- Negotiating ordering and delivery schedules with processors.
- Track your entitlement throughout the school year, and know if there are opportunities to order more commodities.
- Become a partner with your State Distributing Agency to ensure the most cost effective ordering, distribution, and delivery system.

USDA COMMODITIES... HEALTHY CHOICES, AMERICAN GROWN WEBSITE



Commodity foods have improved dramatically over the past few decades, but public perception is still framed by myths and inaccuracies. To set the record straight about commodity foods, FNS' Commodity Image Team has created a new website to offer many resources to provide both accurate and timely information about the USDA commodity programs and commodity foods. This new website has resources for school nutrition professionals, the media, and parents. Users can find a variety of factsheets, recipes, talking points, and other resources with information about commodities.

The new website can be accessed at: www.commodityfoods.usda.gov, by clicking on the new logo. The School Nutrition Association has posted a link to this information as well.

HOLDS AND RECALLS – RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU

The recent unprecedented recall of ground beef had an impact on almost everyone. The recall brought up questions about what resources are available to help during a recall or to help be better prepared for the next hold or recall. Following are a collection of links and information about a number of hold/recall materials that the FNS Food Safety staff has developed in cooperation with the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI).

Currently on the FNS Food Safety site:

- A sub-page entitled, “Learn More about Hold and Recall Procedures,” links to the Commodity Hold Recall Procedures and also the State Departments of Health: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/safety/hold-recall.htm>
- Commodity Hold and Recall Procedures page itself: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/fd_foodsafety.htm

On the NFSMI website:

- A recall Standard Operating Procedure: <http://sop.nfsmi.org/HACCPBasedSOPs/Ha ndlingaFoodRecall.doc>
- The document “Responding to a Food Recall”:
<http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/recallmanual.pdf> and “Responding to a Food Recall - Leader Guide Training Resource”:
<http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/recallguide.pdf>

- A brochure describing the document, “Responding to a Food Recall”:
<http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/recallbrochure.pdf>

Information on food recalls issued by either the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service or the Food and Drug Administration can be found at: <http://www.recalls.gov>. This is an online resource for recalls; you can also sign up for email notification of recalls.

FNS worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a part of the National Coalition for Food Safe Schools to develop another resource, Food Safe Schools Action Guide:

<http://www.foodsafeschools.org/>.

Looking to the future, the FNS Food Safety staff is currently revising and updating “Responding to a Food Recall” which is projected to roll-out by July 2008. The format of the new resource will be practical and user-friendly. More details about that resource will be in the next newsletter.

DID YOU KNOW?

... USDA sets high food safety standards for commodities. The commodities USDA specifically purchases for its nutrition assistance programs must meet food safety standards set by federal regulatory agencies and USDA’s two purchasing agencies - the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Farm Service Agency. At USDA food safety is taken very seriously and standards are set high because of the vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly, participating in USDA’s nutrition assistance programs.

USDA COMMODITY LABEL REDESIGN



FNS's Food Distribution Division has finished a complete

redesign of USDA's commodity labels for canned fruits and vegetables, updating them to look more like their commercial counterparts.

The use of commercial labels has always been a vendor's option. We encourage vendors to use commercial labels where possible. In fact, for Group B commodities, all vendors are using their commercial labels. Using commercial labels may help to reduce delivery delays, increase competition, lower program costs, and eliminate the stigma of inferior products.

While most Group A commodities such as frozen poultry and meats (includes tray pack chicken and ground beef) are commercially labeled, there are many reasons why some vendors still use USDA labels. Some small companies only pack for distributors or food chains so they don't have their own label (this is very common with fruit and vegetable canners). A few of our specifications are different than the commercial product (e.g., lower salt than the commercial). For these reasons, many vendors that pack our canned fruits and vegetables do not have their own commercial label.

As we continue our efforts to improve the image of our commodities, the labels also need to properly reflect the high quality of the food inside. For those vendors who do not use their own labels, the redesign of our canned fruit and vegetable labels accomplishes the following:

- Improving Perceived Quality – Even though commodity products are of high quality, current USDA commodity labels give an impression of low quality.
- Conforming to Commercial Standards – The current two-color labels on low-quality paper with simple graphics are not as eye-catching or appealing as their commercial counterparts. They foster the negative impression that USDA products are generic.
- Responds to Customer Preferences – Commodity program recipients have indicated they prefer USDA commodities in commercial labels, or commercial-like labels, over the current USDA commodity labels.

These new USDA labels for the canned fruits and vegetables will begin to be available on commodity products in the fall of 2008.

COMMODITY WORKSHOPS AT THE UPCOMING SNA NATIONAL CONFERENCE



If you are planning to attend the School Nutrition Association's Annual National Conference in Philadelphia this July 20-23, plan to check out the Commodity Track

workshops again this year. They cover a variety of topics on commodities. We believe you will learn a lot.

The SNA Commodity Track will offer a choice of workshops:

- *Why Commodities*
- *The Steps Involved in Commodity Ordering*
- *Meshing Commodities with Nutrient Standards*
- *DoD Fresh Program*
- *Commodity Holds and Recalls*
- *ECOS Overview*
- *Commodity Processing 101*

- *Managing Processing Inventory*
- *Calculating the Profitability of Commodity Processing*

For more information on these workshops, check out the School Nutrition Association 2008 Conference website at: <http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/meetingsandevents/anc2008/>.

CLOSING OF DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD) PRODUCE BUYING OFFICES



The DoD Fresh Program is a cooperative effort between USDA and DoD to supply fresh fruits and vegetables to schools, paid for with commodity entitlement funds. On March 31, 2008, the Defense Logistics Agency’s Defense Subsistence Center Philadelphia (DSCP) closed its system of regional produce buying offices that, among other functions, had been used to take orders from schools and States under the DoD Fresh Program. These produce buying offices are being replaced with a new system of prime vendor contracts which DoD is establishing in 48 areas across the country. Delays in implementation of the prime vendor contracts in some areas of the country, combined with the previously scheduled closing of DoD regional produce buying offices nationwide, has resulted in the need for DoD to set up a temporary system whereby States and schools are submitting orders directly to the DSCP Headquarters office in Philadelphia until prime vendor contracts in those areas are operational.

COMMENTS

Please let us know if you have any commodity-related issues that you would like addressed in future editions of the School Programs Commodity Update. If you have any questions or comments on our products or services, please e-mail them directly to our Program Support Branch at: fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov. You can also write to the Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 508, Alexandria, VA 22302.

ACRONYM LIST

CN	Child Nutrition
DoD	Department of Defense
DSCP	Defense Subsistence Center Philadelphia
FDD	Food Distribution Division
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
NFSMI	National Food Service Management Institute
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
SDA	State Distributing Agency
SNA	School Nutrition Association
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Prepared by: USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Food Distribution Division’s Program Support Branch, in conjunction with the Operations Branch and the Food Safety Unit.