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School Programs Commodity Update

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

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COMMODITY UPDATE

Although the weather is cooling down, many commodities were affected by the heat and drought. High prices are expected for several key fruit and vegetable products and certain turkey products for the remainder of the school year.

Fruit and Vegetable Products - Harvests for most canned fruits and vegetables have ended or are winding down. The California cling-peach harvest is down significantly from last year. Later seasonal varieties have even less fruit, because of cold weather in the spring, followed by the July heat wave. The California Farm Bureau Federation reports peach production may reach its lowest level in 20 years or more. Due to lack of bids, we were unable to purchase all of the canned peaches ordered, and we will not buy canned mixed fruit, which contains peaches.

While we were able to purchase some extra tomato products, prices are also higher than previous years due to weather conditions and tight supplies. On the positive side, we have recently offered a limited supply of bonus cranberry products with deliveries to begin in the fall and through the school year.

Despite the bad weather across the United States, there is an abundance of canned pears and canned corn. We offered schools the chance to order more of these commodities. Most other fruit and vegetable purchases for the remainder of the school year will be completed by mid-September.

Dairy Products - Severe summer temperatures that lingered in California and the rest of the country created a poor environment for milking cows. Milk production is down 15-25%, and it is expected to remain low. Reduced supplies will mean higher prices for milk and cheese products delivered this fall.

Beef and Pork Products - The beef and pork products have been successfully purchased on schedule. Surveys for these products will remain open until the end of December, and

additional red meat products may be ordered for delivery from November 16, 2006, through June 15, 2007.

We will be ready soon to test a cooked, chilled, thinly sliced ham and a frozen cubed ham. Both products are easy to use, and they can be prepared in a variety of ways.

Poultry Products - We are encouraging schools to order additional poultry products to support the egg and laying hen market. Supplies are plentiful, and prices are low for diced cooked chicken, frozen eggs, and bulk hens for reprocessing. Additional broiler products: breaded, cut-up, fajita, and bulk pack, may also be ordered for delivery November 30, 2006, and later. Surveys will remain open until December 29, 2006. Remember, bulk pack product orders must be coordinated with the processor.

The turkey market is even tighter this year with reduced quantities offered due to weather and other production factors. Many requests for turkeys will not be purchased for Thanksgiving, so districts will need to purchase turkeys commercially, or plan an alternative menu. Due to USDA's inability to purchase turkey roasts and whole consumer pack birds, we have asked States to work with districts and cancel orders not purchased for July-November deliveries. We hope to purchase turkey items for delivery after the holidays, January through May 2007. Turkey ham and turkey taco meat (from the dark meat) are expected to be available.

USDA ANNOUNCES VALUE OF DONATED FOODS FOR SY 2006-2007

For the 2006/2007 school year, July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2007, USDA announced the value of donated foods or cash-in-lieu of donated foods it gives schools and institutions as 16.75 cents. The per-meal rate applies to each lunch served by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

Additional commodity entitlement for the 2006/2007 school year will be available, because the requirement that 12% of all Federal assistance in the NSLP be provided in the form of commodities, was not met during last school year. This will mean about $86 million more in commodity support for this school year. While the published per-meal rate remains at 16.75 cents, the adjustment for the 12% will provide about 1.75 cents more per meal, for a total of slightly more than 18.50 cents.

TRANS FATS FACT SHEET NOW AVAILABLE

As of January 1, 2006, all packaged foods, including dietary supplements, under the jurisdiction of the Food and Drug Administration, must list the amount of *trans* fats on the Nutrition Facts label.

For a fact sheet summarizing the details, go to: www.commodityfoods.usda.gov/facts.htm and click on the FD Fact Sheets link, which is the third bullet listed under the heading entitled *Food and Program Facts*.

BONUS COMMODITIES ARE AVAILABLE FOR SY 2006-2007

Following are bonus items that may be available to you during this upcoming school year:

Sweet Potato Products – Canned & Frozen
Dehydrated Potatoes
Dry Beans
Frozen Cherries
Canned Crushed Pineapple
Cranberries – Canned Sauce & Dried

Just a reminder: bonus purchases are initiated at the request of industry and the approval of the purchase depends on current market conditions (high inventory levels and/or rising competition from foreign markets) or an above average harvest season.

WE ARE NOW UPDATING THE COMMODITY FACT SHEETS FOR SCHOOLS

We have entered into a collaborative project with the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) to review, revise, update, and reformat all of USDA's Commodity Food Fact Sheets for Schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and other institutions. The fact sheets contain information about product pack sizes, yields, storage, preparation, and nutritional values. Once completed, these fact sheets will be available again to schools via the FDD website as a tool for planning menus and ordering commodity foods. We hope to have this project completed before the end of this year.

FOOD SAFETY CORNER

September is a special month for two reasons: first, it is Chicken Month according to the National Chicken Council, and second, it is Food Safety Education Month for twelve years in a row. So, what better way is there to share both agendas than with some food safety tips focused on poultry?

All chickens found in retail stores are either inspected by USDA or by State systems which have standards equivalent to the Federal government. Each chicken and its internal organs are inspected for signs of disease. The "Inspected for wholesomeness by the U.S. Department of Agriculture" seal ensures that the chicken is free from visible signs of disease. In addition to inspection services, USDA provides safe handling and preparation tips for poultry including:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food;
- Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other foods;
- After cutting raw meats, wash cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water;
- Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water; and
- Use a food thermometer to ensure food has reached the safe internal temperature – in all parts of the bird. Cook poultry to at least 165° F to kill foodborne germs that might be present, including the avian influenza virus.

More detailed information on poultry safety may be found at www.fsis.usda.gov and www.fightbac.org. Contact information and instructions on reporting a complaint concerning the safety of commodity poultry

products or any commodity product may be found at the Food and Nutrition Service's Food Safety Unit website: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/safety/complaint.htm. Other questions or concerns on poultry safety may be directed to the FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline (1-888-674-6854).

PROMOTE HEALTHFUL WHOLE GRAINS IN SCHOOL MEALS

The 2005 *Dietary Guidelines* recommends consuming at least 3 ounce-equivalents of whole grains per day. This can reduce the risk of several chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and Type 2 diabetes, and it may help with weight management. The high fiber and antioxidant content of whole grains also appears to reduce the incidence of heart disease, and encourages a healthy heart.

Whole grains consist of the entire grain seed, usually called a kernel. The kernel is made up of three components – the bran, the germ, and the endosperm. When grains have been refined, as in white bread or white rice, some or all of the bran and germ have been removed, and, with that, most of the kernel's nutrients.

By substituting refined grains with whole grains, you can easily meet the daily recommendation of at least the 3 ounce-equivalents. Reaching this goal can be easier than you may think. By planning a simple sandwich for lunch on two slices of whole grain bread (one regular-sized slice of whole grain bread equals one ounce-equivalent of whole grains), you have just offered two servings. Other whole grain products include cereal grains (rolled oats, whole barley, whole buckwheat, whole bulgur or cracked wheat, whole wheat, and whole corn, among many others), brown rice, and whole grain pasta.

It may be more difficult to increase whole grain consumption in younger children, so a good rule of thumb is for them to consume at least half of their grain consumption as whole grains. There are many approaches to incorporating whole grains into school meals. Whole grain pastas can be substituted into any pasta recipe, and whole grain taco shells can be used when serving a beef or chicken taco. Whole grain cooked breakfast cereals, like oatmeal, and whole grain bagels, breads, pitas, tortillas, buns, crackers, macaroni noodles, or brown rice are just a few of the ways that whole grains can be incorporated into menus.

We offer whole grain commodities to help you make the change from refined foods in school menus. These include whole wheat flour, brown rice (quick-cooking brown rice will soon be available as well), and rolled oats. We will soon also be offering whole grain spaghetti and macaroni.

Whole wheat flour can be used in place of enriched all-purpose flour to make any type of baked goods, such as breads, muffins, pizza crusts, or hamburger and hotdog buns. You can use brown rice in any recipe asking for cooked rice, or include it in soups, salads, stuffings, or main dishes. Rolled oats are also a whole grain and are perfect in baked goods such as breads, rolls, muffins, or cookies.

If your school prepares meals from "scratch," there are many tasty and interesting possibilities for incorporating USDA's commodity whole grains into school meals. Schools that heavily rely on commercially-prepared foods for school meals should investigate processing your whole-grain commodities into whole-grain products to offer your students the healthiest possible choices.

COMING SOON -- QUICK COOKING BROWN RICE

We will be soon offering a quick cooking long-grain brown rice (which has been partially cooked, then dehydrated) that cooks in about 15 minutes (versus 45 minutes for regular brown rice). This quick cooking brown rice will help you to offer more whole grains on your menus and help students meet the whole grain recommendation from the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines*.

Make no mistake, brown rice is a **100% whole grain food**. Each ½-cup serving of cooked brown rice counts as 1 ounce-equivalent of whole grains from the grains group of MyPyramid, USDA's food guidance system. Brown rice is nutrient-dense and contains important nutrients including dietary fiber, B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folate), and minerals (iron, magnesium, and selenium). The bran gives brown rice its light tan color, nutlike flavor, and chewy texture. It contains more fiber than regular white rice, which helps you feel full with fewer calories.

Cooking Tips - Use slightly more water for sticky rice. Use slightly less water for fluffy, separate rice (the American preferred style). Adding a couple of tablespoons of yogurt to brown rice may help give it the texture of white rice. It is possible to substitute a broth for the salted water for a different flavor. To spruce up brown rice, try adding toppings like nuts, raisins, sesame seeds, or sautéed vegetables.

Storage Tips - Brown rice has a limited shelf life of approximately six months because of the oil in the bran layer. For extended storage, you should store brown rice in the refrigerator in an airtight container.

To read more about whole grains, please visit the Grains section from *Inside the Pyramid* at http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/grains.html.

COMMENTS

Please let us know if there are any commodity-related issues that you would like us to address 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

FDD	Food Distribution Division
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
NFSMI	National Food Service Management Institute
SY	School Year
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Prepared by: *USDA, FNS, FDD's Program Support Branch, in conjunction with the Operations Branch and the Food Safety Unit.*