

WIC PARTICIPANT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS 2012: FOOD PACKAGE REPORT

Background

The *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2012: Food Package Report* is a supplement to the *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2012* biennial report. The Food Package Report describes the content of Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food packages based on information on the packages or prescriptions issued to WIC participants in April 2012.

The WIC Food Package

The foods described in this report were prescribed under the interim food package regulations which aligned the food packages more closely with updated nutrition science, sought to promote long-term breastfeeding, and added optional substitutions to some food categories to better meet the needs of WIC’s diverse population.¹

WIC offers seven food packages that vary in the types and amounts of foods they contain. The foods provided through WIC, e.g., infant formula, fruits and vegetables, and whole-wheat bread and other whole-grain options, are designed to supplement participants’ diets with specific nutrients and foods consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Different foods are provided to each category of participants.

Federal regulations describe minimum requirements for supplemental foods as well as maximum monthly allowances (MMA) for WIC foods, and the MMAs vary by participant and food category. Consider, for example, that the MMA for infant formula varies by infant age, breastfeeding (BF) status, and formula form, i.e., ready-to-feed, liquid concentrate, or powder. Thus, the MMA for fully formula-fed infants aged 4 to 5.9 months is between 884 and 960 ounces (depending on form) while older and younger infants who are fully formula-fed have lower MMAs. By contrast, the MMA for partially BF infants over

1 month of age is 312 to 522 ounces. Within these parameters, however, State agencies have broad discretion in allowable substitutions, e.g., in the types and forms of foods allowed.

The WIC Food Package Report provides an overview of the foods prescribed to participants while demonstrating some of the flexibility States have in the foods that are prescribed. The report also provides a description of changes in prescription amounts due to the interim food package rule, published in 2007 and implemented in 2009.

This summary highlights just a portion of the overall findings from the full report, which is available on the FNS Web site. The findings described are for foods prescribed per month, per participant.

Findings

Formula

As noted above, MMAs for infant formula vary depending on infant age, BF status, and formula form. Additionally, infant formula amounts for partially breastfed infants are individually tailored based on an assessment of their nutritional needs.

Figure 1: Quantity of Formula Prescribed to WIC Infants (Ounces) by Age in Months: Fully BF, Partially BF, and Fully Formula-Fed Infants

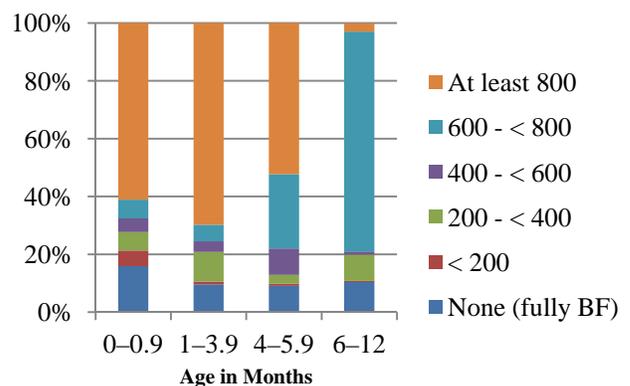


Figure 1 shows the amounts of formula prescribed to infants up to 12 months of age. As can be seen in the figure, most infants under 6 months are prescribed at least 800 ounces of formula whereas most infants between 6 and up to 12 months are prescribed between 600 and 800 ounces of formula.

¹ The final rule for these updates, published in March 2014, provides additional changes to the food packages that will be implemented in 2014 and 2015. The Final Food Package Rule is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/final-rule-revisions-wic-food-packages>.

Whole-Grain Products

The WIC food prescription for children and pregnant, fully BF, and partially (mostly) BF women can include whole-wheat or whole-grain bread or other whole grains (e.g., soft corn or whole-wheat tortillas, brown rice, oatmeal, bulgur, and whole-grain barley).

Figure 2: Types of Whole-Grain Products Allowable for Purchase by Participant Category

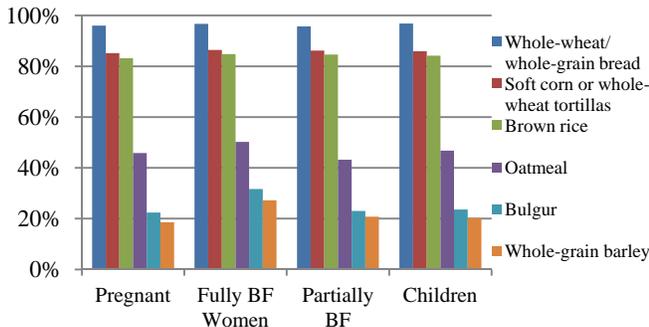


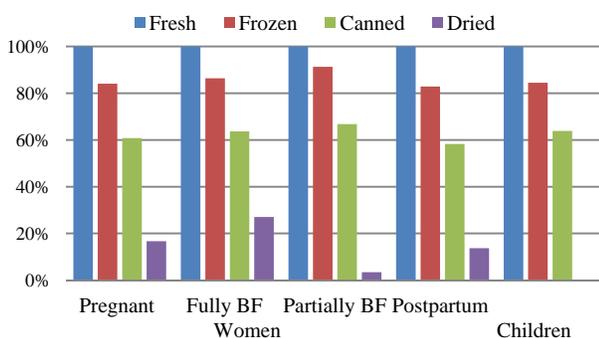
Figure 2 provides a description of the types of whole-grain products allowed in WIC prescriptions by WIC participant category. Note that some prescriptions allow participants to choose among the different types of whole grains, e.g., a participant may choose a combination of whole-wheat bread and brown rice, so percentages add to over 100 percent in each participant category.

As can be seen in Figure 2, whole-wheat or whole-grain bread, brown rice, and soft corn or whole-wheat tortillas were allowed in the majority of prescriptions while oatmeal, bulgur, and whole-grain barley were not allowed as frequently as the other whole grains. Additionally, the percentages in Figure 2 do not include the small minority of participants who receive special medical foods (i.e., Food Package III).

Fruit and Vegetable Cash Value Vouchers

In addition to food instruments, WIC also provides participants with cash value vouchers or equivalent

Figure 3: Types of Fruits and Vegetable Allowable for Purchase by Participant Category



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electronic benefit transfer benefit so participants can purchase WIC-eligible fruits and vegetables. All cash value vouchers allow fresh fruits and vegetables, and most vouchers also allow frozen and/or canned fruits and vegetables. Some State agencies also allow women to purchase WIC-eligible dried fruits and vegetables.

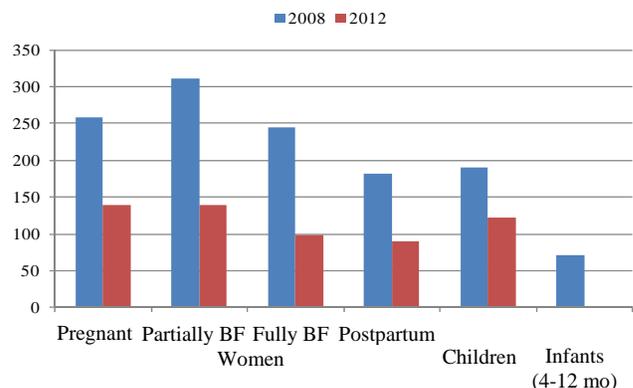
Figure 3 shows the percent of vouchers that allow fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits and vegetables. Note that as with the whole-grain foods, participants may choose among forms of fruits and vegetables, e.g., they may choose a combination of fresh and frozen vegetables, so percentages add to over 100 percent in each participant category. In 2012, children received a monthly \$6 fruit and vegetable benefit while women received \$10 per month. (The Food Package Report also contains prescription amounts for other foods, e.g., juice, milk, cereals, eggs, and infant foods.)

Changes in WIC Food Prescriptions 2008-2012

The report also contains concise, graphic comparisons of food prescription types and amounts before and after the changes in the food packages due to the interim rule. These comparisons exemplify the interim rule's emphasis on lower fat milk and reduced quantities of eggs and juice to align the food packages with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Figure 4 shows changes due to the interim food package rule in the amounts of juice prescribed, by participant category, between 2008 (before the interim rule took effect) and 2012 (after the rule was implemented).

Figure 4: Mean Fluid Ounces of Juice Prescribed by Participant Category, 2008 and 2012



The full Food Package Report can be downloaded at www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.