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Meats / Meat Alternates

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs

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Meats/Meat Alternates Component for the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP)

Child Nutrition Program (CNP) regulations require all program operators and school food authorities participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to follow a food-based menu planning (FBMP) approach. FBMP helps program operators serve cost-effective meals that are varied, balanced, safe, wholesome, and health promoting.

Meats and meat alternates (M/MA) include meat; poultry; fish; cheese; yogurt; soy yogurt; beans, peas, and lentils; whole eggs; tofu; tempeh; peanut butter or other nut or seed butters; and nuts and seeds. CNP operators must serve meals that contain the amount of M/MA required in the lunch and supper Meal Pattern Charts as shown on pages I-7 to I-17.



Specific Requirements:

- The M/MA for lunch or supper must be served in the main dish or in the main dish and one other menu item.
- In order for a food to contribute to the M/MA component, it must contain a minimum of one-quarter ounce equivalent (0.25 oz eq) of a M/MA.
- For the SBP, M/MA is not a separate meal component, but is part of the combined grains and M/MA meal component. This combined grains and M/MA meal component is only for breakfast. Schools may offer grains, M/MA, or a combination of both to meet this combined component requirement, based on ounce equivalents. For programs serving school meals to preschoolers, a M/MA may only be served in place of the entire grains component at breakfast three times a week. Program operators have the choice to serve a M/MA as one of the two meal components of a snack served in the NSLP afterschool snack service (NSLP afterschool snacks), CACFP, or SFSP.
- For the CACFP, M/MA may be served in place of the entire grains component at breakfast a maximum of three times per week.
- For all CNP, dry, mature beans, peas, and lentils may contribute toward either the vegetables component or the M/MA component, but one food item may not credit toward both meal components at the same time in the same meal or snack. If a program operator chooses to offer two servings of dry, mature beans, peas, and lentils, they must be offered in two distinct portions.
- Implemented starting on July 1, 2024, dry, mature beans, peas, lentils, and fresh, immature soybeans credited toward the meats/meat alternates meal component can also contribute toward the weekly requirement to offer ½ cup of the beans, peas, and lentils vegetable subgroup, at the menu planner's discretion. This includes beans (such as kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans, black beans, lima beans, fava beans, and soybeans), peas (such as chickpeas, black-eyed peas, pigeon peas, and split peas), and lentils. This enables menu planners to make it easier for schools to simultaneously offer dry, mature beans, peas, lentils and fresh soybeans to meet the meats/meat alternates requirement while still satisfying the weekly requirement to offer a variety of vegetables. As an example, when a school offers a ½ cup portion of refried beans as a meat alternate, the refried beans may simultaneously credit toward the minimum, daily meats/meat alternates requirement and the weekly ½ cup beans, peas, and lentils vegetable subgroup requirement. Dry,

mature beans, peas, lentils, and fresh soybeans that are offered as a meat alternate cannot simultaneously credit toward the minimum, daily vegetables meal component requirements (because double-counting in this way would reduce overall food quantities and calories).

- For all CNP, nuts, seeds, and nut and seed butters may contribute toward the full M/MA component for all meals and snacks requirements. Acorns, chestnuts, and coconuts do not credit as meat alternates because of their low protein and iron content.
- For the NSLP and SFSP, enriched macaroni-type products with fortified protein as defined in 7 CFR Part 210 Appendix A and 7 CFR 225.16 (e), may be counted as meeting half but not all of the M/MA requirement (they may also be used to meet part of the grains component, but may not meet both meal components in the same meal).
- Products formulated with alternate protein products may be counted as meeting all or part of the M/MA requirement for all CNP.
- Noodles made from bean or legume flours may credit toward the M/MA component when paired with another M/MA, such as meat or cheese. Yield data for bean flour is listed in Appendix C of the “Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs” (FBG).
- Nut and seed meal flours may credit only if they meet the requirements for Alternate Protein Products.

Some processed food items containing M/MA, such as chicken, beef, fish, or pork nuggets and patties, dried and semi-dried meat, and poultry and seafood products, may not be listed in the FBG; however, they still may be creditable with proper documentation, such as a Child Nutrition (CN) label or manufacturer’s Product Formulation Statement (PFS). These processed products do not require a minimum amount of meat by USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Labeling Standards of Identity. There is no standard yield data for these food items and the product formulations may vary widely.

Program operators using these products must either request a CN label or a PFS from the manufacturer. CN labels and PFS are certified documents that provide a way for a manufacturer to demonstrate how a processed food product may contribute to the CNP meal pattern requirements. For more information on CN Labeling, please see Appendix C. Sample PFS templates may be accessed via the Food Manufacturers/Industry website at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/food-manufacturersindustry>. Schools or State agencies must add any locally purchased processed foods to their local database. The State agencies must obtain the levels of calories, saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium in the processed foods.

When a PFS is provided for a dried meat, poultry, or seafood M/MA product, it should be evaluated to ensure the following crediting principles are followed:

- The creditable meat ingredient listed on the PFS must match or have a similar description as the ingredient listed on the product label (e.g., ground beef, no more than 30% fat).
- The creditable meat ingredient listed on the PFS must have a similar description to the food item in this FBG (e.g., Beef, Ground, fresh or frozen, Market Style, no more than 30% fat).
- The creditable amount cannot exceed the finished weight of the product.

For detailed information and assistance on the proper use of these products, please contact your State agency.

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Optional Best Practices for All Child Nutrition Programs

To further strengthen the nutritional quality of meals served, program operators are encouraged, but not required, to:

- Serve a variety of lean protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans, peas, and lentils), nuts, seeds, nut and seed butters, and soy products, such as tempeh or tofu.
- Limit serving processed meats and poultry as they are typically sources of sodium and saturated fats. According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Dietary Guidelines)*, processed meats are products preserved by smoking, curing, salting, and/or the addition of chemical preservatives.
- Serve only natural cheeses and choose low-fat or reduced-fat cheeses.

This section contains yield data for:

- Fresh and frozen boneless meat, poultry, and fish in servings of 1 and 1½ ounce equivalent;
- Surimi seafood in servings of ¼ ounce, 1 ounce, and 1½ ounce equivalent;
- Some fresh and frozen meats, poultry, and fish with bones (e.g., chicken drumstick) in servings of 1 and 1½ ounce equivalent;
- Commercially prepared tofu in a serving of 1 ounce equivalent;
- Tempeh in a serving of 1 ounce equivalent;
- Peanut butter and other nut butters in 2 tablespoon and 3 tablespoon measures that are equivalent to 1 and 1½ ounce equivalent meat alternate respectively;
- Whole eggs are expressed in large egg equivalents (1 large egg = 2 ounce equivalent meat alternate) and ½ large egg equivalent (½ large egg = 1 ounce equivalent meat alternate);
- “USDA Foods” or “Market pack” is listed in column 1. For items where the USDA Foods and Market pack are both available, the items are designated as “Includes USDA Foods”;
- Commercially prepared combination foods that meet USDA FSIS standards that require a minimum percent of meat or poultry. Products listed include canned and frozen meat and poultry products at portion sizes to provide at least 1 ounce equivalent of cooked meat or poultry per average-size serving;
- Cooked beans, peas, and lentils in servings of ¼ cup and ⅔ cup (1 and 1½ ounce equivalent meat alternate respectively); and
- Standard commercially prepared canned bean or pea soups where one ½ cup serving provides ¼ cup cooked beans (1 ounce equivalent meat alternate).

Definitions

A serving of cooked meat	A serving of cooked meat is understood to be lean meat without bone. According to the <i>Dietary Guidelines</i> , lean meats and poultry contain less than 10 g of fat, 4.5 g or less of saturated fats, and less than 95 mg of cholesterol per 100 g and per labeled serving size.
A serving of cooked fresh or frozen poultry	A serving of cooked fresh or frozen poultry includes boneless meat and skin unless otherwise indicated.

A serving of yogurt	A serving of yogurt includes plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened – all types of yogurt must be commercially prepared and are further defined in the program regulations under 7 CFR parts 210.2, 220.2, 226.2, and 225.2. All yogurt served in the CACFP must contain no more than 23 grams of sugars per 6 ounces (7 CFR 226.20(a)(5)(iii)). Effective July 1, 2025 for NSLP and SBP and October 1, 2025, for CACFP, all yogurt served in the NSLP, SBP, and CACFP must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces.
“Market pack”	“Market pack” refers to foods available on the market.
IMPS	IMPS stands for Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications. These specifications describe in exact detail items most commonly used by foodservice establishments and institutional purchasers for purchasing meats. They are also used in USDA commodity specifications. Only meats that are certified by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock, Poultry, and Seed Program (LPS) may be labeled “IMPS.”
Like IMPS:	Products having the description “like IMPS” imply that the IMPS standard for the described meat cut has been met but the meat has not been certified by LPS; hence, it is “like” or “similar” to IMPS meat but is not labeled as such. The data for the products contained in the FBG was derived using certified IMPS meat, but meats matching the descriptions and specifications may use the FBG yield for the matching IMPS product.
PFF	PFF stands for “Protein Fat Free,” which is a procedure used by cured pork processors to reflect the presence of added ingredients, including water in cured pork products, and relates labeling claims to the percent of meat protein in the product. Manufacturers must monitor the PFF since adding water and other ingredients dilutes the natural protein content. Labeling regulations established by FSIS state that products such as “Ham,” “Ham with Natural Juices,” “Ham Water Added,” etc., must comply with the minimum meat PFF percentages as stated in the regulations.

NOTE: Products named “Ham and Water Product, X% of weight is added ingredients” do not have standardized PFF values since the amount of water/ingredients added is not limited. For products labeled “Ham and Water Product X% of weight is added ingredients” to be properly used in CNP, you should either:

- purchase a CN labeled product, or
- take out the percent of added water/ingredients by multiplying the finished weight by the percent added ingredients, then subtracting that amount from the finished weight, divide by the manufacturer’s cooking yield to obtain the raw weight of the product, then apply the FBG yield for the specific cut of pork used to process the product.

Please note that luncheon meats that are not CN Labeled or listed in the FBG are not creditable toward meal pattern requirements.

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Yields

Standard commercially prepared combination foods: The yields for commercially prepared combination foods having Federal standards of identity (see 9 CFR parts 319 and 381 for FSIS regulations pertaining to standards of identity for meat and poultry products) listed under Chicken Products (and Beef or Turkey Products) are based on the minimum meat and poultry requirements for food products that are packed for interstate shipment under Federal Meat and Poultry Inspection. The serving size listed for these products will provide at least one ounce equivalent of cooked meat or poultry. Purchasers of these products will need to ensure that the name of the food on the product label exactly matches the FBG description for the “Food As Purchased” in Column 1 before using the crediting information.

Breaded fish portions or sticks: Yields are based on raw fish portions and the amount of fish in the product. “Precooked” or “Fried” seafood is not fully cooked; only the breading or batter is flash-fried to set. The fish is raw. For serving purposes the product must be fully cooked. For crediting purposes, the calculations were done using the weights and yields for cooked fish.

Yields of cooked meat and poultry vary with type, age, fat content, and weight of the animal, and the method, time, and temperature of cooking. The quantities of food to purchase are based on average yields of cooked meat and poultry.

Explanation of the Columns

The yield information is presented in table form for easy reference. The data on M/MA in the following table include yield information on common types and customary serving sizes of products that you can buy on the market, as well as some USDA Foods products. The columns are numbered 1 through 6 as follows:



Column 1: Food As Purchased, AP

The individual foods are arranged in alphabetical order by species (for example, ham is listed under PORK, MILD CURED). Within each species, all of the raw items are listed first followed by cooked and/or canned products. For chicken and turkey, the raw items are presented starting with the whole bird followed by whole parts and then the remaining raw items. Other characteristics are given, such as fat content, with or without bone, percent of fish in fish products, and weight of individual pieces of chicken. The items are listed according to the forms in which they appear in the market—fresh, canned, frozen, or dehydrated.

Column 2: Purchase Unit

The purchase unit is generally given as either a pound, a No. 10 can, or, in many cases, a smaller-sized can.

Column 3: Servings per Purchase Unit, EP (Edible Portion)

This column shows the number of 1 or 1½ ounce lean meat or equivalent servings you will get from each purchase unit. Numbers in this column have been rounded down in order to help ensure enough food is purchased for the number of servings stated.

Column 4: Serving Size per Meal Contribution

The size of a serving is given as 1 or 1½ ounce cooked lean meat or equivalent [¼ cup or ⅜ cup of cooked beans, peas, or lentils; 1 or 1½ ounce equivalent of cheese; ½ large egg (1 ounce) or 1 large egg (2 ounces); or 2 or 3 tablespoons of peanut butter]. Individual servings such as frankfurters, chicken pieces, or fish portions are listed by the piece along with the equivalent ounces of lean meat given in parentheses under the portion size.

Column 5: Purchase Units for 100 Servings

This column shows the number of purchase units you need for 100 servings of the corresponding serving size listed in column 4. Numbers in this column have been generally rounded up to help ensure enough food is purchased for the number of servings.

Column 6: Additional Information

This column gives other information to help you calculate the amount of food you need to prepare meals. It shows the amount of cooked ready-to-serve meat you will get from 1 pound of meat, poultry, seafood, or acceptable meat alternate as purchased.