

TALKING POINTS FOR INTERIM WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE

OVERVIEW

- On December 6, 2007, an interim final rule revising the WIC food packages was published in the Federal Register.
- The revisions align the WIC food packages with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- The last major revisions to the WIC food packages were in 1980.
- The interim final rule revisions largely reflect recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies in its report, “WIC Food Packages: Time for a Change,” with certain cost containment and administrative modifications found necessary by the Department to ensure cost neutrality.
- FNS received over 46,000 comments on the proposed rule.
- The changes to the WIC food packages are designed to improve the nutrition and health of the nation’s low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants and young children.

BACKGROUND ON WIC FOOD PACKAGES

- The WIC food packages provide supplemental foods designed to meet the special nutritional needs of low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, non-breastfeeding postpartum women, infants and children up to five years of age who are at nutritional risk.
- WIC food packages and nutrition education are the chief means by which WIC affects the dietary quality and habits of participants.
- Depending on participants’ eligibility status and nutritional needs, the foods currently provided in the WIC food packages are: infant formula, exempt infant formula and WIC-eligible medical foods, milk, eggs, cheese, juice, cereal, peanut butter, and dried peas or beans. Tuna and carrots were provided to exclusively breastfeeding women only.

- The revised food packages retain the same food categories, but add new food categories and optional substitutions for some current food categories to better meet the needs of WIC's diverse population including:
 - Addition of fruits and vegetables (either fresh, frozen, or canned)
 - Addition of soy-based beverage and tofu as milk alternatives
 - Addition of whole grains (cereals, bread, and other whole grains)
 - Reductions in some food allowances, including milk, eggs, and juice

COST NEUTRALITY

- Since the WIC Program receives a finite amount of funding annually to serve as many participants as this funding allows, it is important to note that the revisions to the WIC food packages are cost neutral; that is, the new food packages were designed to cost no more than those that have been replaced.

IMPLEMENTATION

- An interim final rule allows FNS to obtain feedback on the major changes as recommended by IOM while allowing implementation to move forward.
- State agencies must implement the provisions no later than October 1, 2009.
- The interim final rule comment period ends on February 1, 2010.
- USDA will issue a final rule after review and analysis of public comments.