

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



December 2007

New WIC Food Package Approved – Healthful Options Added

After lengthy consideration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's regulations for new, improved WIC food packages were announced earlier this month. The new WIC food packages feature foods of increased nutritional quality and offer more choices for participants. Changes reflect advances made in nutritional knowledge and health since the WIC food packages were last revised in 1980. In the new food packages, the addition of whole grains, a move to lowfat milk and the choice of a wide range of fruits and vegetables allow WIC to strengthen their efforts to reduce obesity and improve nutrition for participants.

Changes have been proposed in the WIC food package for over a decade. In 2005, the Institute of Medicine issued a report with cost-neutral recommendations for updating the WIC food packages based on evolving dietary guidance and cultural eating patterns. Public

comment weighed in on the changes, as USDA received 47,000 comment letters from individuals and organizations.

Many of the changes made are consistent with recommendations made in those comments, including increasing fruits and vegetables, tofu and soymilk added to the food package, retaining strong nutritional standards and current food types, increasing participant choices and expanding culturally-appropriate food choices. The reforms will also provide a wider array of resources, including WIC Farmers' Markets to increase availability of fruits and vegetables in low-income communities. New food package enhancements will also better promote breastfeeding, with exclusively breastfeeding women receiving an additional \$2 in fruit and vegetable vouchers each month.

States now have up to 18 months to implement the

changes in the WIC Food Package. Kansas WIC Nutrition Services Coordinator Patricia Dunavan says the process of making the changes is lengthy and will probably require until the August 2009 deadline. In Kansas, as in other states, a group of committed individuals will convene to support the implementation process.

"We will work with our WIC advisory committee, which is comprised of local agency advisors as well as a vendor advisory group, to develop the new food lists for Kansas," Dunavan said. One next step in implementation is discussion at a regional meeting in Colorado in the spring of 2008, then work continues with food manufacturers. The process will go back to the WIC advisory group for review of both nutrition and cost parameters.

Although some changes were anticipated and can be readily adopted, others will require time to meet. One example is soy milk – the

definition of the product in the new regulations does not meet the criteria of any soy milk presently on the market, Dunavan said. "It will take time to fit all the pieces together. But we will be ready to implement the revisions. The statewide computing system (used at each local WIC office) is ready to handle the changes now."

"We are very excited about the new changes," Dunavan said. "The main benefit is that we will be able to immediately put into practice the nutrition counseling we are currently doing with WIC clients. We will be able to provide nutrition information to the individual that is tailored to their needs – and immediately provide checks for the foods required for the changes they need to make."

Sources: USDA Issues Healthy New WIC Food Packages: Your Comment Letters Helped Make it Happen! Food Research and Action Center: <http://www.frac.org/WIC/index.html> accessed 12/10/2007.

Personal communication: P. Dunavan, December 12, 2007.

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777. Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit **Sandy Procter**, PhD, RD, LD, Extension Specialist, Maternal and Child Nutrition and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) Coordinator, Department of Human Nutrition; Kansas State University; *New WIC Food Package Approved — Healthful Options Added*, December 2007.

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county Extension offices, experiment fields, area Extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus, Manhattan.

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned. **Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas.** Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.