



USDA Foods: Healthy Choices. American Grown.

Did You Know ...

...USDA Foods are a healthy food choice. USDA continually explores better ways to offer healthy food choices so that schools can serve meals consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the MyPyramid food guidance system. USDA Foods are available in a variety of convenient products that are safe, wholesome, and 100 percent American grown.

...USDA Foods are available to any school that participates in a USDA school meal program. USDA Foods account for 15 to 20 percent of school nutrition program food. The remaining 80 to 85 percent of food is selected and bought by schools or State agencies from commercial suppliers. USDA Foods also go to numerous household nutrition assistance programs and the Summer Food Service Program.

...USDA sets high food safety standards. The foods USDA buys for its nutrition assistance programs must meet safety standards set by Federal regulatory agencies and USDA's two purchasing agencies – the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Farm Service Agency. At USDA, food safety is taken very seriously and standards are set high because of the vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly, participating in USDA's nutrition assistance programs.

Improvements to USDA's Foods are keeping pace with current nutrition and health advancements:

- **More fruits and vegetables:** USDA pioneered a partnership with the Department of Defense's Supply Center in Philadelphia to buy more than 60 types of fresh fruits and vegetables for schools. These purchases increased from \$4 million in School Year 1995 to over \$50 million in School Year 2008. This is in addition to more than \$8 million of fresh items that USDA now obtains for schools each year. Besides fresh produce, USDA also buys over \$180 million of canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables for schools. The 2008 Farm Bill provided an additional \$90 million to purchase even more fruits and vegetables for school meals in School Year 2009, with funding to increase each year.
- **More whole grains** In addition to whole-grain foods such as brown rice, rolled oats, whole-wheat flour, whole-grain dry kernel corn, and parboiled brown rice, USDA is now buying whole-grain rotini, spaghetti, and macaroni.
- **Less sodium (salt):** In School Year 2010 the sodium levels in all USDA canned vegetables are being reduced to 140 milligrams (mg) per serving. This greatly exceeds the Food and Drug Administration's "healthy" standard for sodium, which is 480 mg per serving. Providing low-sodium USDA vegetables to schools helps them lower the sodium levels in their menus. Schools continue to have the option to order salt-free frozen vegetables, as well.
- **Less sugar:** USDA canned fruits must be packed in light syrup, water, or natural juices. Despite the common industry practice of packing in heavy syrup, USDA has not purchased fruit in heavy syrup in nearly 20 years. Unsweetened applesauce became available to schools in School Year 2008.



For more information go to: <http://www.commodityfoods.usda.gov>

- **Less fat:** Since 1992, USDA beef is 85 percent lean as compared to commercial standard ground meat which is 70 percent lean. In the 1980s, most USDA beef products contained an average of 24 percent fat. Since 1992, schools have had the option of ordering beef patties with a fat level as low as 10 percent. USDA consistently offers a lower fat turkey taco filling, frozen diced chicken, 97 percent lean ham, and 95 percent lean turkey ham. Currently, USDA is evaluating a 95 percent lean beef patty for use in schools.

USDA takes other steps to lower fat in foods:

- USDA offers part skim milk mozzarella and several types of reduced-fat and lite cheese, e.g., reduced-fat process cheese and lite shredded mozzarella cheese.
- To manufacture a leaner finished poultry product, processors are substituting lean meat for skin and fat in processed poultry products.
- *Trans* fats have been eliminated from frozen potato products effective School Year 2008 and a fat-free potato wedge has been added to the Foods Available List for School Year 2010.
- Shortening was eliminated as an ordering option effective School Year 2008.
- Butter was eliminated as an ordering option for schools in 1997.

...USDA Foods represent a wide spectrum of convenient products. School districts and States can select from a wide variety of USDA foods that match their needs. In 1981, USDA offered schools 54 food products. Today, over 180 are offered. In addition, USDA now offers more frozen, fresh, and refrigerated products, more package sizes, and more varieties of specific foods. In response to customer demand, chicken is now offered diced, cut-up, as fajita strips, and in bulk for reprocessing.

...Schools can convert their USDA foods into ready-to-use end products. A school or State Distributing Agency (SDA) may voluntarily enter into a processing agreement with a food processor to convert a USDA Food into a ready-to-use end product. Schools send approximately 50 percent of their USDA Food to be processed. This option gives the ordering agencies control over their end products and the nutrient profile of those products for their nutrition programs. Establishing the nutrient standards for processed end products, and sharing their standards with processors, becomes the sole privilege of the school or SDA that orders the end product.

...Bonus USDA foods are optional foods offered to States and school districts. Bonus foods are purchased periodically by USDA in order to stabilize the agricultural market and then are offered to schools and school districts. If taken, bonus USDA Foods are over and above the foods USDA regularly plans for and buys for schools.

...Schools districts are never required to accept any USDA food item they cannot effectively use or do not want to use. Schools are not dumping grounds for Government foods. States are required to consider school district menu and distribution needs when ordering USDA Foods on behalf of their schools. As a result, schools select the foods they want from USDA's Foods Available List, and they have the option to receive bonus foods if and when they become available.

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