



## 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. USDA Foods also go to numerous household nutrition assistance programs and the Summer Food Service Program.

**...USDA sets high food safety standards for foods they purchase.** The foods USDA purchases for its nutrition assistance programs must meet food 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.

### USDA's food improvements are keeping pace with current nutrition and health advancements:

- **More fresh 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 Fiscal Year 1993 to \$50 million per year in Fiscal Year 2003. This is in addition to more than \$8 million of fresh items that USDA now purchases for schools each year. Besides fresh produce, USDA also purchases over \$180 million of canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables for schools.
- **More whole grains:** In addition to whole-grain foods such as brown rice, rolled oats, whole-wheat flour, and whole-grain dry-kernel corn, USDA is now purchasing whole-grain pastas (spaghetti and rotini) for School Year 2008-09. Currently, USDA is also pursuing the purchase of whole-grain macaroni and quick-cooking brown rice.
- **Less sodium (salt):** Most USDA canned vegetables meet the Food and Drug Administration's "healthy" standard for sodium, which is less than or equal to 480 mg per serving. In School Year 2008-09, USDA intends to reduce the sodium content of canned vegetables even more. Schools continue to have the option to order salt-free frozen vegetables.
- **Less sugar:** 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 2007-08.



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 has recently offered 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/lite cheese, i.g., reduced-fat processed 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 2007-08 and a fat-free potato wedge is being evaluated.
- Shortening was eliminated as an ordering option effective School Year 2007-08.
- 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, breaded, 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 divert approximately 50 percent of the value of USDA foods to be further processed. This option gives the ordering agencies control over what end products are made and the nutrient profile of those end products for their nutrition program. 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 USDA foods are purchased periodically by USDA in order to stabilize the agricultural market and then are offered to schools and school districts as an option. Bonus USDA foods are received by schools or school districts over and above the foods USDA regularly plans for and purchases with appropriated funds.

**...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 USDA foods if and when they become available.

