

*This report, required under the 2008 Farm Bill, reviews the nutritional quality of the food package provided through USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), comparing its content to scientific standards including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), the Thrifty Food Plan nutrient standards and the Healthy Eating Index-2005. The FDPIR food package provides a nutritious variety of foods, and sufficient calories to meet the energy needs of most sedentary individuals and many moderately active children. While, similar to American diets in general, there is room for improvement in the quantities of fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products and whole grains, the nutritional content of the package is considerable. **Individuals consuming FDPIR foods in the quantities provided would achieve a HEI-2005 score of 81 out of 100, considerably better than Americans in general (58 out of 100) and SNAP participants (52 out of 100).** The efforts of the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group, a partnership between FNS and the American Indian community to improve the food package, have contributed to the package's quality.*

Background

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) provides USDA foods to low-income households living on Indian reservations, to American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations or in Oklahoma, and to Alaska Natives. FDPIR serves as an alternative to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program).

In fiscal year 2008, FDPIR provided benefits to an average of over 88,000 individuals per month in 271 tribes, at a cost of \$88.5 million. Approximately \$34.7 million of this was designated for local administrative expenses, the remainder for food purchases. Program rules require that "[t]he food package offered to each household shall [provide] an opportunity to obtain a more nutritious diet and shall represent an acceptable nutritional alternative to Food Stamp Program benefits." USDA offers nearly 100 different items. Participating tribes choose within food categories which items to provide to participants based on their storage capabilities and client needs and preferences.

Nutritional and Health Challenges

While specific information is limited on the health and nutritional challenges facing those FDPIR serves, American Indians in general face high rates of overweight, obesity and diabetes. Over 16 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults served by the Indian Health Service have been diagnosed with diabetes, about twice the rate found in U.S. non-Hispanic whites. Diabetes-related mortality for these groups is about three times the national rate. In addition, up to 75 percent of American Indians are lactose intolerant, potentially limiting their use of low-

cost dairy products and presenting a challenge in delivering adequate calcium, potassium and vitamin D.

FDPIR Food Package Determination

The FDPIR food package is regularly adjusted to respond to the *Dietary Guidelines*, participant preference, and market factors. Since 2002, the FDPIR Food Package Review Work Group, a partnership between FNS and the American Indian community, has worked to improve the food package to better meet the nutritional needs and food preferences of recipients.

Methods

FNS analyzed all foods made available through FDPIR as of 2008 using the most recent available versions of nutrition databases. Analysis was conducted at two levels: one reflects the full variety of foods *offered* by USDA/FNS to distributing agencies; the other reflects the relative quantities of the foods actually ordered by and *delivered* to these distribution sites, corresponding more closely to the foods available to participating households. The results were compared to four external standards:

- The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs);
- the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*;
- the USDA Thrifty Food Plan dietary standards; and
- the Healthy Eating Index-2005, which measures conformance to the recommendations of MyPyramid.

Key Findings

Comparison to Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs): The average food package offered to FDPIR agencies provides about 2,100 calories, and the average package

delivered provides nearly 1,825 calories. This is about 85 percent of the daily calories required at moderate activity level by the reference household at median height and weight.

- On average, packages meet many, but not all, of the DRIs of reference household members. As delivered, the average food package provides protein, total fat, essential fatty acids and carbohydrate at levels that fall within acceptable DRI ranges for a healthy diet, and provides levels of saturated fat and cholesterol that meet the *Dietary Guidelines* recommendations.
- The average package provides more than the average household Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) or Adequate Intake (AI) level for copper, iron, phosphorus, zinc, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folate, and vitamins B6, B12, and C.
- It provides less than the RDA or AI for calcium, potassium, dietary fiber, and vitamins A and E. The average household magnesium RDA is met by the packages offered, but not by those delivered. The average package provides sufficient but not excessive sodium.

Compared to the 25 Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) nutrient standards, the FDPIR food package for the reference household meets 19 and does not meet the following five: calcium, potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin A and vitamin E. Magnesium is met by the packages offered, but not by those delivered.

Compared to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the average FDPIR food package provides, on a per 2,000 calorie basis:

- two times the required total grains;
- 45 to 60 percent of the recommended quantities of fruits, vegetables, and milk/dairy;
- meat/beans and oils at close to the recommended level.

Ample whole grains are offered (129 percent), but the quantity selected and delivered is less than half of the recommendation.

Compared to the Healthy Eating Index-2005 (HEI-2005), if the average FDPIR food package comprised all of the food eaten by participants, the average package as offered achieves a score of about 87, and the package as delivered scores 81 out of 100. These scores

are considerably above those achieved by Americans on average (58 out of 100) and by SNAP participants (52 out of 100). Individuals eating foods solely from the FDPIR food package would have HEI-2005 scores in the top 10 percent of the U.S. population.

Distribution Costs and Challenges

The FDPIR food package must be designed not only to provide a nutritious diet to participants, but also to work within the program's resource constraints and the needs and circumstances of distributing agencies and program clients. Making small deliveries of foods to remote locations is costly, and those transportation costs reduce the amount of resources available to procure food. The food package is designed to ensure that foods can be transported, stored and used safely and cost-effectively across the various circumstances faced by ITOs and the clients they serve, including limited storage and distribution infrastructure.

Plans for the FDPIR Food Package

The FDPIR food package is continuously evolving to offer highly nutritious and acceptable foods to its participants. FNS, cooperatively with the Native American community, regularly reviews the content of the package to ensure that its nutrient profile is consistent with the latest version of the *Dietary Guidelines*, and reflects participants' food preferences to the extent possible. In spring 2008, the food package was updated in accordance with key recommendations of the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines*.

Conclusion

While there is room for improvement in the nutritional content of foods provided by FDPIR, the current package provides a nutritious variety of foods which scores considerably higher than the foods eaten by almost all Americans and SNAP participants.

Future improvements should be considered to better meet the *Dietary Guidelines* once the impact of the most recent improvements can be assessed. Though currently quite nutritious, the food package would be even more consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines* if it included more fruits, vegetables and fat free or low-fat dairy products, whole grains of greater acceptability and fewer refined grain products.

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