

School Programs Commodity Update

What's New in USDA's Food Distribution Program for Schools

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The school year is nearly over already! This will be the last *School Programs Commodity Update* for this school year. There have been some changes and many improvements this year in the commodity programs, and we have tried to keep you informed of them. Please let us know if there are any commodity-related issues that you would like us to address in the upcoming school year. If you have any comments, you may email us at: fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov . Have a nice summer!

WE NEED YOUR FEEDBACK ON OUR COMMODITY FACT SHEETS

We are continuing to work on a major project to review and update our commodity fact sheets for schools. We want to hear from you if you have any ideas for changes to the fact sheets. Please e-mail them directly to our Program Support Branch at: fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov.

Once updated, the fact sheets will be on a web-accessible database that will house all information related to our commodity fact sheets. The database will contain all information currently on the fact sheets including packaging information, preparation and storage instructions, and nutritional facts. We plan to include the commodity code on each fact sheet so that schools and other recipients can easily access them. Another significant enhancement will be a direct link from ECOS to the fact sheets and the commodity specifications.

We know that schools really use our fact sheets, and depend on them to obtain pertinent information on our commodities. Thus, we want to make sure that the fact sheets are up-to-date and easy to access.

To view the fact sheets on our website, please click on this link:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/facts/schfacts/cats.htm>. //

ANOTHER ECOS ENHANCEMENT EXPEDITES SHIPPING INFORMATION

The Food Distribution Division continues to improve the functionality of the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS). It recently activated a Shipment Receipt Notification feature. This feature allows a receiving organization, such as a processor or state contracted warehouse, to electronically receipt for USDA shipments as they arrive.

When this feature is used, ECOS will change a USDA shipment's delivery order status code to "SH" (shipped) which provides real time information to all ECOS users in the state regarding a commodity shipment's availability. If the USDA shipment was to a processor, the State can quickly notify recipient agencies that the raw commodity has arrived for further processing. If the USDA shipment was to a state contracted warehouse, the State can quickly notify recipient agencies that the commodity is available for ordering in their next delivery cycle.

Eight States are now operating with ECOS at the recipient agency level. In those states, the recipient agencies are able to see this shipping information at the same time as the state agency, thus eliminating any notification delay. As additional States follow this lead of utilizing ECOS at the local level, more recipient agencies will experience the many benefits of this exciting Internet based system. //

VISIT OUR ONE-STOP COMMODITY INFORMATION WEBSITE

There may be some of you who are not familiar with the USDA Commodity Food Network (CFN) Website. This website is a "One-stop, single point-of-contact website" that will give visitors instant access to a variety of commodity food information available on both Federal and non-Federal websites that support the USDA Commodity Programs.

Of particular interest to schools, the CFN website includes a special web page designed primarily for Schools and other Child Nutrition Programs. This page provides direct links to many resources that will be useful to you. If you have not already done so, please take a few minutes to check out this website at:

www.commodityfoods.usda.gov. //

DOD's FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO BE POPULAR

Schools are purchasing a wide variety of fresh produce with a portion of their commodity entitlement funds through a partnership between the Food Distribution Program and the Department of Defense (DoD). On a national basis, \$50 million of commodity entitlement is designated for this DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. States and schools are extremely pleased with the quality, condition, and appearance of the products, and they report deliveries are frequent, on time, and the cost is reasonable. States, or their schools, place orders directly with DoD's field offices for a variety of

domestically grown fresh products. Schools are excited about the extensive selection of products that are currently available. A few of the many offerings include various types and pack sizes of: lettuce, salad mix, broccoli, watermelon, apples, oranges, lemons, honeydew, nectarines, kiwi fruit, strawberries, pineapples, pears, celery sticks, kale, cantaloupe, red grapes, collard greens, cucumbers, carrots, avocado, tomatoes, peaches, spinach, and bananas. States may limit the types of products their schools may order.

States, and their schools, are also limited to the amount of commodity entitlement that can be designated for this program. Due to this limitation, many schools have also exercised the option to use Section 4 & 11 meal reimbursement funds to purchase produce through DoD. Contact your State Distributing Agency to determine how you can participate in the DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and for contact information for DoD. //

CHECK OUT WORKSHOPS ON COMMODITIES AT UPCOMING SNA ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE

If you are planning to attend the School Nutrition Association's Annual National Conference in July, plan to check out some workshops about commodities! We will be presenting several workshops, including "*Effective Commodity Ordering (Getting the Most Bang for your Buck,*" "*Commodity Processing,*" and "*Making Donated Commodities Better.*" //

QUESO BLANCO CHEESE WILL BE OFFERED IN SCHOOL YEAR 2006

We will be offering the new Queso Blanco cheese next school year as a test buy. Queso Blanco is a Latin-style cheese which is popularly used in enchiladas, burritos, or combined with fruits as a dessert. This cheese will be a pasteurized product. //

2004 COMMODITY ACCEPTABILITY PROGRAM REPORT IS AVAILABLE

The Food Distribution Division has completed compilation of the 2004 Commodity Acceptability Progress Reports (CAP). Every two years, FNS/FDD surveys its States, who in turn survey 10% of their recipient agencies, to gather information from actual commodity users about how well commodities are received. Not only does this report capture the most acceptable and least acceptable commodities in each of five commodity programs, but user comments are also utilized to improve future commodity offerings.

We recognize that school food service directors are asked to respond to numerous surveys. We appreciate the time and effort that you put forth to provide valuable feedback to FDD about user acceptability of commodities and your suggestions for improvements. You may review the 2004 CAP Reports at the FNS/Food Distribution Program website:

www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/caps. //

COMMENTS

Please let us know if there are any commodity-related issues that you would like us to address in future editions of the School Programs Commodity Update. If you have any questions or comments on our products or services, including comments on ways to improve our commodity fact sheets, please e-mail them directly to our Program Support Branch at: fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov. You can also write to the Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520, Alexandria, VA 22302. //

Acronym List

CAP	Commodity Acceptability Progress Report
CFN	Commodity Food Network
DoD	Department of Defense
ECOS	The Electronic Commodity Ordering System
FDD	Food Distribution Division
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
NDM	Nonfat Dry Milk
SNA	School Nutrition Association
SY	School Year
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

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