

School Programs Commodity Update

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

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FNS HAS BEEN BUSY THIS FALL WITH DISASTER FEEDING EFFORTS!

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service is the primary federal agency assigned to provide food relief in disasters. This relief consists primarily of emergency food stamps and commodity food donations. When disasters strike, we initially depend heavily on State warehouses and local school inventories of commodities as a first response to assist emergency feeding agencies.

This year, Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma put all federal resources to the test. States directly impacted by these storms (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas) immediately released commodities from their warehouses to help feed people who were displaced. Local schools that were designated as shelters used their commodities for emergency feeding as well. In addition, North Carolina shipped 11 truckloads of commodities from its warehouses, while FNS diverted numerous loads of commodities, which were in transit to other states, to the Gulf Coast after the hurricanes struck.

FNS also expedited purchases of additional truckloads of commodities specifically for disaster feeding. In total, over 460 truck loads of commodities were dispatched to the disaster areas, in addition to the thousands of pounds of food that were served by local school districts.

Thank you for all of your efforts in this enormous undertaking!

MORE STATES ARE USING ECOS AT THE SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL

USDA's Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) provides school districts a lot of flexibility in how they use their commodity dollars. Although there are still national limits to the entitlement dollars allocated for specific commodity groups such as beef, chicken, cheese, fruits, etc., ECOS does not restrain individual school districts as to the quantities of those commodities that can be requested. Although it is expected that school districts will make requests from the entire catalogue of commodities offered, FNS does not place rigid constraints on how entitlement dollars are used at the state and local levels for specific commodities.

Twelve states will implement ECOS at the recipient agency level to some degree next school year. North Carolina and Georgia brought their local school districts onto ECOS last spring, generating orders for SY 05/06. Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, and Utah are training their school districts to use ECOS to generate commodity orders for SY 06/07. Kentucky will bring the remainder of its schools onto the system for SY 06/07 as well. These states join Virginia and Connecticut in using ECOS for all their school districts. In addition, California, Michigan, and New York allow larger school districts and cooperatives

to use ECOS for commodity ordering. Several other States have expressed their intention to implement ECOS at the school district level for SY 07/08.

Meanwhile a number of state warehouses and processors are now registered in ECOS to facilitate quick notification of USDA shipment receipts to all ECOS users. Access by all commodity program partners to such real time information about commodity shipments will expedite product usage, making the commodity program better serve local school districts' food service needs.

COMMODITY COMPLAINT CORNER

A Reminder: If you have asked for a replacement of a USDA donated product, you **must** retain the product until you have been notified otherwise by USDA. Vendors must have the opportunity to inspect and/or pick up any product they have been asked to replace. Frequently, vendors need to inspect the product to determine what went wrong.

It is also extremely important that everyone practice first-in first-out when utilizing commodities, and report problems to your State distributing agency immediately. It is unlikely that a vendor will replace a product that has been stored for an extended period of time. This is because some problems, such as rusty cans, may have developed while the product was stored in less than optimum conditions after it left the vendor, especially if they were stored over the summer months.

For more information about filing commodity complaints, please visit our website at: www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/complaints.

THANKS FOR YOUR RESPONSES TO OUR FACT SHEET SURVEY!

As we have mentioned in previous newsletters, FNS' Food Distribution Division is assessing how we can best update all of the commodity fact sheet files for schools. We want to ensure that the information presented to you is relevant, in a format that is easy to read and understand, and most importantly, accurate.

In mid-October, a questionnaire was emailed to State DAs and schools about the current layout and usage of the USDA commodity fact sheets for schools. We received a large number of responses, and we thank all who participated in the survey. The results are still being tallied; however, there were many positive comments and suggestions which we will consider in our efforts to revise these commodity fact sheets.

One of the most important changes you will notice on the updated fact sheets will be the addition of **commodity codes**. We will also adhere to the Food and Drug Administration guidelines for adding *trans*-fats to the nutrition facts box, along with adding grams of sugar. We want to make the fact sheets work best for you and your school staff.

Thank you all very much for the interest you have exhibited in this project!

WE ALSO APPRECIATE THE FEEDBACK ON THE ACCEPTABILITY SURVEY FOR HAM

During the summer we also solicited opinions from many schools on the acceptability of the commodity Ham, Frozen, Water-Added (A693). We received a great response -- over

700 comments! This feedback is important to us as we work with the Agricultural Marketing Service to ensure they purchase products that will meet your needs and be acceptable to the children you serve. Thank you all for your responses!

TRANS FAT LABELING

Beginning in January 2006, the Nutrition Facts label on packaged food must list the amount of *trans* fat in a serving. The only exception to *trans* fat labeling is when the **total** fat in a food is less than 0.5 gram (or 1/2 gram) per serving and no health claims are made about fat, fatty acids or cholesterol content on the food label. This new Federal ruling should help schools design menus low in *trans* fat and keep those menus in line with messages from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid: limit intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or *trans* fatty acids, and choose products low in such fats and oils. Limiting consumption of foods made with *trans* fat -- vegetable shortenings, hard margarine, cookies, crackers, candies, snack foods, pastries, baked goods, and other processed foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils -- provides the most effective means of reducing intake of *trans* fat.

FOOD SAFETY INFORMATION

The Importance of Reporting a Foodborne Illness

No one ever wants a foodborne illness to occur. However, despite efforts to prevent illnesses from occurring, they sometimes do. When a foodborne illness is suspected, it is important to respond quickly. Part of an effective response is reporting the problem. All too often, however, foodborne illnesses go unreported.

Illnesses should be reported to the local health department as soon as possible. The health department will conduct an investigation. It is helpful, in an investigation of a potential foodborne illness, to have a sample of the individual food items or meal which is suspected to have caused the illness. A good food safety practice is to keep a sample of each day's menu items refrigerated for one week in case foodborne illness is suspected. These foods may be tested in the event of an outbreak.

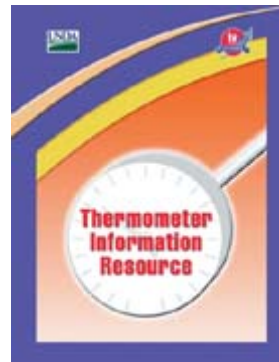
Also, in the case of a potential illness associated with a USDA commodity, a food safety complaint should be logged in the Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) by your State DA as soon as possible and with as much information as possible. Some of the most important pieces of information when reporting are: the establishment number of the company producing the commodity, number of persons ill, onset and duration of illness, symptoms, any lab confirmed test results from ill persons, and a description of the problem with the food.

Reporting foodborne illnesses is an important factor in preventing further illnesses and in providing data to establish trends which can be used in early prevention and targeted education.

THERMOMETER INFORMATION RESOURCE TEACHING PACKAGE

FNS, working under a cooperative agreement with the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), has just released the *Thermometer Information Resource Teaching Package*. The goal of the resource is to assist State agencies in training and implementing correct thermometer usage in Child Nutrition Programs. The release is especially useful at this time because the resource supports the implementation of school food safety programs, as mandated by the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act.

The package contains a variety of easy-to-use training components for delivering thermometer education to food service staff. It contains: a manual (print and CD-ROM); a training video; a resource DVD; and a digital thermometer. NFSMI is providing an initial distribution of the package at no charge to State agencies, School Food Authorities, and FNS Regional Offices based on the results of a previous State agency survey. The digital thermometer will only be a part of this initial distribution. However, additional copies of the other components will be made available through the NFSMI web site at: http://www.nfsmi.org/Information/thermometer_resource.html.



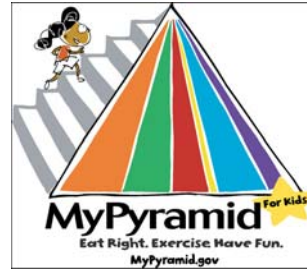
HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY USING SHREDDED, REDUCED-FAT CHEDDAR CHEESE

This commodity product tends to get moldy fast, so use it quickly from stored supplies. The shredding process exposes a lot of surface area. Once exposed to air, mold and dehydration may occur. To protect cheese from mold, always work with it in a clean area and re-wrap it in fresh plastic wrap after each time it is opened, or place it back in its original container or a sealed container, if possible.

Cheddar cheese can be frozen, but may exhibit changes in body and texture due to moisture crystallization during freezing. Thaw frozen cheese in the refrigerator to reduce moisture loss for 72 hours at 35°F in its original wrapper. The slower the cheese is thawed, the better. Daily usage should be planned to thaw only the quantity of cheese that will be used.

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 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 508, Alexandria, VA 22302. //



MyPyramid for Kids

MyPyramid for Kids is a child-friendly version of USDA's new MyPyramid Food Guidance System targeting kids ages 6-11. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns released it in September. Through an interactive game, lesson plans, colorful posters and flyers, worksheets, and valuable tips for families, *MyPyramid for Kids* encourages children, teachers, and parents to work together to make healthier food choices and be active every day. The logo and other materials designed for elementary school-aged children can be accessed through the MyPyramid.gov and teamnutrition.usda.gov websites.

ACRONYM LIST

DA	Distributing Agency
ECOS	The Electronic Commodity Ordering System
FDD	Food Distribution Division
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
NFSMI	National Food Service Management Institute
SY	School Year
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

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