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# WIC UPDATE: USDA PROPOSED RULE ON FOOD PACKAGE

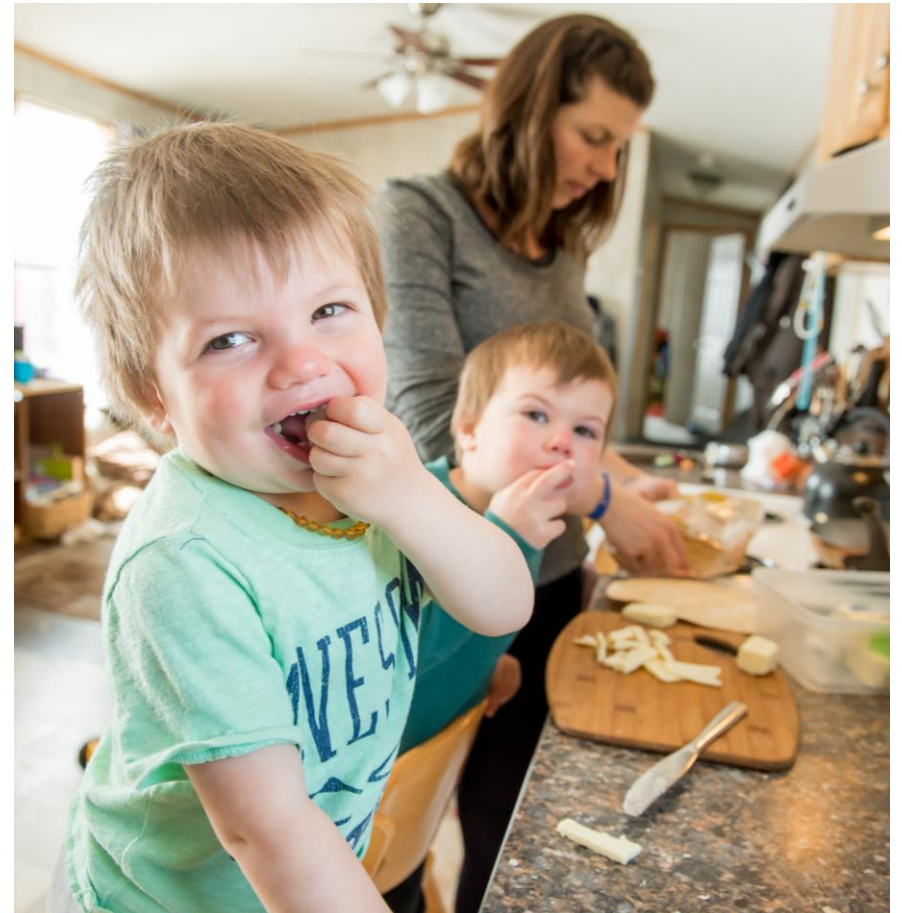
**BRIAN DITTMEIER**  
SENIOR DIRECTOR, PUBLIC POLICY  
NATIONAL WIC ASSOCIATION



**National WIC Association**  
Your child has you. And you have WIC.

# WHY IS THE WIC FOOD PACKAGE UPDATE IMPORTANT?

- USDA proposed the first food package update in more than a decade, offering the opportunity to adjust **the overall value** of the WIC benefit and the **nutrition standards** that guide WIC's public health success
- WIC food package update – including making the F/V bump permanent – is a commitment in the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health
- 2009 food package changes were transformational:
  - Added fruits and vegetables as a cash value benefit
  - Added whole grains
  - Resulted in 9% decrease in childhood obesity rates among WIC-enrolled toddlers



# USDA PROCESS FOR PROPOSED RULE



- Congress required a decennial review of the WIC food packages in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010
- In 2017, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) issued a 1,000 page report with key recommendations. The report was titled *Improving Balance and Choice*
- In 2020, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans were issued with the first iteration of life-stage specific advice for pregnancy, lactation, and early childhood
- American Rescue Plan Act and appropriations bumped up fruit/vegetable benefits to \$25 for kids, \$44-49 for women
- USDA proposed rule issued on November 17. Comment period is open today through February 21, 2023.



# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: FRUITS AND VEGETABLES



- **Permanent increase to the Cash Value Benefit**
- Require WIC-authorized vendors to stock at least three forms of vegetables
- Add fresh herbs (e.g., cilantro) to the Cash Value Benefit
- Reduce juice and allow for substitution of full juice benefit for added CVB
  - **NWA recommends:** eliminate default juice issuance and allow juice only as a substitution at participant request

# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: PROTEIN FOODS

- **Seafood added across child and adult food packages**, increasing proportion of WIC participants receiving seafood from 3.4% to 58.7%.
  - USDA requests information on package size and fish types suitable for one-year-old children
- Authorize canned legumes in addition to dried legumes
- Authorize legumes and peanut butter, and option for tofu, as an egg substitution to accommodate allergies, vegan diets, and cultural preferences





# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: WHOLE GRAINS



- **Require whole grain cereals to boost intake among children**, underscoring potential for WIC standards to spur industry reformulation and innovation
- Boost whole grain issuance across all women categories (from 1 pound to 4 pounds) to boost adult whole grain intake
- Add cultural grain options, including quinoa, wild rice, teff, buckwheat, corn meal (including blue), triticale, millet, amaranth, kamut, sorghum, wheat berries, tortillas with folic acid-fortified corn masa flour, and whole wheat pita, English muffins, bagels, and naan

# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: DAIRY

- **Balance issuance across food categories and promote greater choice within dairy.** Dairy would see slight reductions in issuance.
- New substitution patterns would encourage yogurt as a substitute to fluid milk.
- USDA would remove limitation on quarts of fluid milk, allowing greater flexibility to redeem yogurt, tofu, and cheese without having to choose.
- Comprehensive approach to added sugars, including new total sugar limits for yogurt and soy beverages.
- Pathway to approve nutritionally comparable alternatives to dairy (e.g., almond milk)





# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: PACKAGE SIZES



- **USDA would allow package and container size flexibility across all food categories (except for infant formula)**
- Avoid the problem of “WIC-only sizes” that NASEM had flagged in yogurt and breads
- States could authorize products at sizes that allow less than the full monthly amount. Open question of whether the package sizes have to add up to the total amount.
- Households could redeem package sizes at greater than a monthly amount if covered by aggregate benefit (e.g., a pregnant woman and child participant)



# SPECIFICS OF WIC FOOD PACKAGE RULE: INFANT FEEDING



- **Priority of WIC services to promote and support sustained breastfeeding**
- Tailored formula issuance to support breastfeeding moms in meeting their goals
- Reduced infant cereal and jarred infant food issuance to reflect DGAs
- New substitution option to allow participants to exchange half or all of jarred infant fruits/vegetables to obtain additional Cash Value Benefit
- Jarred infant meats are retained with no substitution option

# NEXT STEPS: RALLYING FOR COMMENT

- Comment period closes on **February 21, 2023** – the first day of NWA's virtual National Policy Conference
- NWA has prepared a comment platform with additional template language to help you craft your comment.
- Remember: **commenting is not a lobbying activity**
- **Who can comment?** Everyone! Rally WIC staff, WIC participants, community partners, your friends and neighbors to comment before February 21.
- **Need help?** Reach out to NWA staff: Brian at [bdittmeier@nwica.org](mailto:bdittmeier@nwica.org), Noora at [nkanfash@nwica.org](mailto:nkanfash@nwica.org), Nell at [nmenefeelibey@nwica.org](mailto:nmenefeelibey@nwica.org), Darlena at [dbirch@nwica.org](mailto:dbirch@nwica.org), or Christina at [cchauvenet@nwica.org](mailto:cchauvenet@nwica.org)

