Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschoolers (ages 1-4) in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. For information on the meal patterns and crediting foods for grades K-12, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs and Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpages. For information on the meal patterns and crediting foods for preschoolers, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage. For information on the ASP meal patterns and crediting foods, visit the CSDE's Afterschool Snack Program webpage.

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Required Meal Pattern Quantities

Quantities for the meat/meat alternates (MMA) component are indicated as ounce equivalents (oz eq) in the NSLP meal pattern for grades K-12, and as ounces in the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 and the NSLP and ASP meal patterns for preschoolers. The amount that credits as 1 oz eq or 1 ounce of MMA is the same. This document refers to oz eq for simplicity. For more information, visit the "Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12" and "Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Preschoolers" sections of the CSDE's school nutrition programs webpages.

Required Crediting Documentation

To credit as the MMA component in the meal patterns for school nutrition programs, commercial products that are processed or contain added ingredients (such as pizza, chicken nuggets, deli meats, hotdogs, and cheese ravioli) require documentation stating the amount of the MMA component per serving. The acceptable types of documentation for commercial processed foods include:

- the original Child Nutrition (CN) label from the product carton or a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton; or
- a product formulation statement (PFS) signed by an official of the manufacturer stating the amount of each meal pattern component contained in one serving of the product.

For example, to credit commercial breaded chicken nuggets as 2 oz eq of the MMA component, the product's CN label or PFS must state that one serving contains 2 ounces of cooked chicken.

> Commercial products without a CN label or PFS cannot credit in school meals and ASP snacks.

School food authorities (SFAs) must obtain a PFS for all commercial processed products that are not CN labeled. Crediting documentation must be maintained on file. The CSDE will review this information during the Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs.

For information on CN labels and PFS forms, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs, Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs,* and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs,* and the USDA's handout, *Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement.* For additional guidance, visit the "Crediting Commercial Processed Products in School Nutrition Programs" and "Crediting Foods in Preschool Menus" sections of the CSDE's school nutrition programs webpages. Training on the requirements for CN labels and PFS forms is available in Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation of the CSDE's

training program, *What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*.

MMA versus Protein

The school meal patterns require a specific amount of the MMA component, not a specific amount of protein. The terms "protein" and "meat/meat alternates" are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. "Meat/meat alternates" refers to the meal component of the USDA meal patterns for the Child Nutrition Programs. "Protein" refers to one of the key nutrients found in meats and meat alternates.

Except for commercial tofu and tofu products, protein content is not an indicator that a commercial product credits as the MMA component because the grams of protein listed on the product's Nutrition Facts label do not correspond to the ounces of the MMA component contained in the product. A serving of meat or meat alternate contains other components in addition to protein, such as water, fat, vitamins, and minerals. Protein is also found in varying amounts in other ingredients (such as cereals, grains, and many vegetables) that may be part of a commercial meat or meat alternate product.

Menu planners cannot use the Nutrition Facts label or ingredients statement to determine the amount of the MMA component in a commercial product. The only exception is commercial tofu and tofu products, which must contain at least 5 grams of protein in a 2.2-ounce serving by weight (refer to the CSDE's resource,*Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs*).

Serving Size

The amount of the MMA component refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. A 1-oz eq serving of the MMA component equals:

- 1 ounce of lean meat, poultry, or fish without added liquid, binders, and extenders (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs*);
- 1 ounce of cheese (low-fat recommended);
- 2 ounces of cottage or ricotta cheese, cheese food/spread, or cheese substitute (low-fat recommended);
- ¼ cup of cooked beans and peas (legumes), e.g., kidney beans, chick peas (garbanzo beans), lentils, and split peas (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Legumes in the School Nutrition Programs*);
- ½ large egg;

- 2 tablespoons of nut or seed butters, e.g., peanut butter, almond butter, cashew butter, and sunflower seed butter (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs*);
- 1 ounce of nuts or seeds, e.g., almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, soy nuts, and walnuts (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs*);
- ¼ cup (2.2 ounces) of commercial tofu containing at least 5 grams of protein (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs*);
- 1 ounce of tempeh that contains only soybeans (or other legumes), water, tempeh culture, and for some varieties, vinegar, seasonings, and herbs ingredients (tempeh products with other ingredients require a CN label or PFS);
- 3 ounces of surimi (alternate crediting amounts must be documented with a PFS);
- ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Yogurt for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Yogurt in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs*); and
- 1 ounce of alternate protein product (APP) that meets the USDA's APP requirements (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs*).

Minimum creditable amount

One-quarter (¼) oz eq is the smallest amount that credits toward the MMA component. If a menu item provides less than the full serving of the MMA component, the menu planner must include an additional meat or meat alternate to meet the full serving for each grade group.

Main Dish Requirement for Lunch

SFAs must serve the daily MMA component at lunch in a main dish, or in a main dish and one other food item. The main dish is generally considered the main food item in the menu, which is complemented by the other food items. For example, a lunch menu for grades 9-12 could provide the required 2 ounces of the MMA component from a sandwich containing 2 ounces of tuna, or a sandwich containing 1 ounce of tuna (1 ounce of MMA) served with soup that contains ¼ cup of legumes (1 ounce of MMA). SFAs cannot serve the daily MMA component at lunch in more than two food items.

> SFAs should consider how these menu-planning decisions affect students' selection of reimbursable meals when implementing OVS. For example, when a lunch menu provides the daily MMA component as two food items, students must select both items to credit as the full component for OVS. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.

Requirement for Recognizable MMA

The USDA requires the meat or meat alternate must be recognizable (visible) to credit toward the MMA component. Foods that are not a recognizable main dish do not credit. For example, SFAs cannot credit peanut butter in a muffin or smoothie, soft tofu blended in a soup, or pureed beans in a muffin. The USDA's intent for this requirement is to ensure that school menus offer meats and meat alternates in a form that is recognizable to children.

The USDA allows two exceptions to the requirement for a recognizable main dish. These include yogurt blended in fruit or vegetable smoothies and pasta made with 100 percent legume flours.

- **Yogurt blended in smoothies** credits as a meat alternate. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Smoothies in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs.* **Note:** Other MMA foods like peanut butter do not credit when served in smoothies.

- **Pasta made with 100 percent legume flour** may credit as a meat alternate if the menu also includes an additional meat or meat alternate such as tofu, cheese, or meat. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Legumes in the School Nutrition Programs*.

These are the only two unrecognizable foods that may credit toward the MMA component. All other MMA must be recognizable.

Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Examples of MMA that may cause choking include nuts and seeds, e.g., peanuts, almonds and sunflower or pumpkin seeds; chunks or spoonfuls of peanut butter or other nut and seed butters; tough meat or large chunks of meat; fish with bones; and large chunks of cheese, especially string cheese.

Consider children's age and developmental readiness when deciding what types of meat/meat alternate foods to offer in school menus and modify foods and menus as appropriate. Preparation techniques to reduce the risk of choking include cutting tube-shaped foods like hot dogs or string cheese into short strips instead of round pieces; removing all bones from fish, chicken, and meat before cooking or serving; grinding up tough meats and poultry; chopping peanuts, nuts, and seeds finely, or grinding before adding to prepared foods; and spreading nut and seed butters thinly on other foods (such as toast and crackers). For additional guidance, visit the "Choking Prevention" section of the CSDE's Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/accepting_procssed_product_documentation_snp.pdf

Crediting Commercial Processed Products in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs#CommercialProducts

Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Deli_SNP.pdf

Crediting Foods for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs

Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Tofu_SNP.pdf

Crediting Yogurt in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_yogurt_snp_preschool.pdf

Crediting Yogurt for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_yogurt_snp_grades_k-12.pdf

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs/documents#MMA

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Grades K-12 in the ASP (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Afterschool-Snack-Program/Documents#MMAK12

Meat/Meat Alternates Component for Preschoolers (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/related-resources#MMA

Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/preschool/menu_planning_guide_preschool.pdf

Menu Planning Guide for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guide-for-school-meals

Questions and Answers on Alternate Protein Products (APP) (USDA):
https://www.fns.usda.gov/questions-and-answers-alternate-protein-products-app

Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/app_requirements_snp.pdf

Reviewer's Checklist for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements for Meat/Meat Alternates (USDA):
https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/reviewer_checklist.pdf

Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement (USDA):
https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/manufacturerPFStipsheet.pdf

USDA Memo SP 02-2024, CACFP 02-2024, and SFSP 02-2024: Revised: Crediting Tofu and Soy Yogurt Products in the School Meal Programs, CACFP, and SFSP:
http://www.fns.usda.gov/crediting-tofu-and-soy-yogurt-products-school-meal-programs-and-cacfp

USDA Memo SP 21-2019, CACFP 08-2019, and SFSP 07-2019: Crediting Shelf-Stable, Dried and Semi-Dried Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Products in the Child Nutrition Programs:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/crediting-shelf-stable-dried-and-semi-dried-meat-poultry-and-seafood-products-child-nutrition

USDA Memo SP 24-2019, CACFP 11-2019, and SFSP 10-2019: Crediting Surimi Seafood in the Child Nutrition Programs:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/crediting-surimi-seafood-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Memo SP 25-2019, CACFP 12-2019, and SFSP 11-2019: Crediting Tempeh in the Child Nutrition Programs:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/crediting-tempeh-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Memo SP 40-2019, CACFP 17-2019, and SFSP 17-2019: Smoothies Offered in the Child Nutrition Programs:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/smoothies-offered-child-nutrition-programs

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/cn_labels_snp.pdf

Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/product_formulation_statements.pdf

What's in a Meal Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

For more information, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs and Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpages or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_commercial_mma_snp.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
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