

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This guidance applies to meals and snacks in child care centers, family day care homes, emergency shelters, at-risk afterschool care centers, and adult day care centers that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). For information on the CACFP meal patterns and crediting foods for children, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpages. For information on the CACFP meal patterns and crediting foods for adult participants, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpages.



Contents

Overview of USDA’s CN Labeling Program	2
Eligible Products	2
Benefits of Using CN-labeled Products	2
Considerations for CN-labeled Products	2
Identifying CN Labels	3
Table 1. Example of a CN label	4
Meal Pattern Contribution of CN Labels.....	5
MMA contribution	5
Grains contribution	5
Vegetables contribution	5
Fruits contribution.....	5
Acceptable Documentation.....	6
CN labels with a watermark	6
Authorized CN Labels and Manufacturers	6
Table 2. Sample CN Label with a watermark	7
Table 3. Sample bill of lading (invoice) for a CN-labeled product.....	7
Resources	8



Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Overview of USDA's CN Labeling Program

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) CN Labeling Program is a voluntary federal labeling program for the Child Nutrition Programs. Food manufacturers have the option to include a standardized food crediting statement on their product labels, which the USDA approves prior to use. Manufacturers participating in the CN Labeling Program must have quality control procedures and inspection oversight that meet USDA's requirements.

The USDA does not require that manufacturers make CN-labeled products or that institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs purchase foods with CN labels. Purchasing decisions are at the discretion of the local school or institution. If a CN labeled product is required, the institution must clearly state this information in their purchasing specifications.

Eligible Products

CN labels are available only for main dish entrees that provide at least ½ ounce equivalent (oz eq) of the meat/meat alternates (MMA) component of the USDA's meal patterns for the Child Nutrition Programs. Examples include beef patties, cheese or meat pizzas, meat or cheese and bean burritos, egg rolls, and breaded fish portions.

CN labels will usually indicate the contribution of other meal components that are part of these products. For example, CN-labeled pizza may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates, grains, and vegetables components; and CN-labeled breaded chicken nuggets may list contributions to the MMA and grains components.

Benefits of Using CN-labeled Products

A CN label statement clearly identifies the contribution of a commercial product toward the meal pattern requirements, based on the USDA's evaluation of the product's formulation. CN labeling provides a warranty that the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements, as printed on the label.

Considerations for CN-labeled Products

CN labels do not indicate that the product is healthier, more nutritious, or of a higher quality than a similar non-CN labeled product. The CN crediting statement declares the quantities of the creditable food items in a processed food that can be used to meet the meal pattern requirements. While a CN-labeled product is guaranteed to contain a certain quantity of food, it does not indicate that the quality of the food is any different than a non-CN labeled food. Additionally, CN labels do not indicate that the product is safer to eat, or free of pathogens or allergens.

Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Identifying CN Labels

The CN label is found on the product packaging and will contain the required elements below.

- The CN logo, which is a distinct border with “CN” on each side, surrounding the meal pattern contribution statement.
- The meal pattern contribution statement, which provides the specific crediting information for the serving.
- A six-digit product identification number, which is assigned by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the USDA.
- The USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) authorization statement: “Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.”
- The month and year of AMS approval (listed after the FNS authorization statement).
- Other required label elements, including the product name, ingredients statement, inspection legend, company signature/address line, and net weight.

Table 1 shows an example of a CN label and the required elements.



Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Table 1. Example of a CN label

1 Chicken Stir-fry Bowl

2 Ingredients: Chicken, brown rice, broccoli, red peppers, carrots, onions, water, olive oil, soy sauce, spices

4


3 CN

5 000000

6

8 Net weight: 18 pounds

9 Chicken Wok Company
1234 Kluck Street • Poultry, PA, 12345

10


- 1** Product name
- 2** Ingredients statement
- 3** CN logo
- 4** Meal pattern contribution statement
- 5** Six-digit product identification number
- 6** FNS authorization statement
- 7** Month and year of AMS approval
- 8** Net weight
- 9** Company signature/address line
- 10** Inspection legend



Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Meal Pattern Contribution of CN Labels

CN labels indicate the meal pattern contribution of MMA and other components (such as grains, vegetables, and fruits) in one serving of the product. CN labels do not include milk component crediting. Guidance for each component on a CN label is summarized below.

MMA contribution

A CN-labeled product lists the serving's MMA contribution in oz eq. Quantities for the MMA component are indicated as ounces in the CACFP meal patterns. The amount that credits as 1 oz eq or 1 ounce of MMA is the same.

Grains contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains a grain portion includes one of two crediting terms to indicate if the product credits as whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched. The term "oz eq grains" on the CN label indicates that the product meets the WGR criteria. The term "oz eq grains (enriched)" means the grain portion of the product is primarily made from enriched grains and credits toward the grains component but does not meet the WGR criteria.

Grains are indicated as oz eq in the CACFP meal patterns. The CACFP meal patterns require at least one serving of WGR grains per day. The USDA's [CACFP best practices](#) recommend at least two servings of WGR grains per day. For guidance on the WGR criteria and menu planning considerations, refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#).

Vegetables contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains vegetables lists the serving's contribution to the five vegetable subgroups in cups. These subgroups include dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other.

The USDA's [CACFP best practices](#) recommend that CACFP menus include at least one serving per week of each vegetable subgroup. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#).

Fruits contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains fruit lists the serving's contribution to the fruits component in cups.

Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Acceptable Documentation

Acceptable and valid documentation for a CN label includes 1) the original CN label from the product carton; or 2) a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton. CN labels that are photocopied or photographed must be visible and legible. Sponsors of the Child Nutrition Programs must maintain this documentation on file with all other menu records. The CSDE recommends maintaining original CN labels in a designated binder or folder for easy reference, and storing digital photos and scans of CN labels in an easily accessible electronic folder. For additional guidance on accepting product documentation, refer to the CSDE's resource, [*Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*](#).

CN labels with a watermark

Manufacturers may use a CN label with a watermark (refer to table 2) when the CN logo and contribution statement are on product information other than the actual product carton. Manufacturers may provide a watermarked CN label during the bidding process. Original CN labels on product cartons will not have a watermark.

If the original CN label or a photocopy or photograph of the original CN label is not available, a watermarked CN label is acceptable documentation for the Administrative Review of the CACFP. The watermarked CN label must be attached to a bill of lading (invoice) that contains the product name and CN number (refer to table 3).

For more information, refer to the USDA's policy memos, [SP 11-2015 \(v2\)](#), [CACFP 10-2015](#), and [SFSP 13-2015: CN Labels Copied with a Watermark Acceptable Documentation](#), and [SP 27-2015, CACFP 09-2015, and SFSP 12-2015: Administrative Review Process Regarding the Child Nutrition \(CN\) Label, Watermarked CN Label and Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#).

Authorized CN Labels and Manufacturers

The AMS publishes a list of manufacturers approved for CN labels and a list of products with CN labels. These lists are updated monthly. For more information, visit the USDA's [Authorized Labels and Manufacturers](#) webpage.

Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Table 2. Sample CN Label with a watermark

Chicken Stir-fry Bowl

Ingredients: Chicken, brown rice, broccoli, red peppers, carrots, onions, water, olive oil, soy sauce, spices

CN

CN

Each 4.5 oz Chicken Stir-fry Bowl provides 1.5 oz eq meat, 1.0 oz eq grains, ¼ cup dark green vegetable, ¼ cup red/orange vegetable, and ⅓ cup other vegetable for Child Nutrition Meal Pattern Requirements (Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 09/16).

CN


CN

Net weight: 18 pounds

Chicken Wok Company
1234 Kluck Street • Poultry, PA, 12345



Table 3. Sample bill of lading (invoice) for a CN-labeled product



Chicken Wok Company
1234 Kluck Street
Poultry, PA, 12345
123-456-7890

Bill of Lading (Invoice)

Invoice Number: 1234
Date: December 22, 2022

Bill to:
ABC School District
1234 Anystreet
Anytown, CT 01234

Ship to:
ABC School District
1234 Anystreet
Anytown, CT 01234

Item description and code number	Unit	Quantity	Unit price	Amount
Chicken Stir-fry Bowl, CN #000000	each	200	\$1.50	\$300.00
Total:				\$300.00

Using CN Labels in the CACFP

Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CACFP/Crediting/Accepting_Processed_Product_Documentation_CACFP.pdf

Appendix C: The USDA Child Nutrition Labeling Program (USDA's Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs):

https://foodbuyingguide.fns.usda.gov/Content/TablesFBG/USDA_FBG_Appendix_C.pdf

Authorized Manufacturers and Labels (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/usdausdc-authorized-labels-and-manufacturers>

Bite Size Module 2: Meal Pattern Documentation (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Related-Resources#BiteSize>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Manual (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/child-nutrition-labeling-manual.pdf>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labels (CSDE's Crediting Foods in CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Documents#CNlabels>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labels (CSDE's Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-CACFP-Adult-Day-Care-Centers/Documents#CNlabels>

CN Labeling (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/child-nutrition-cn-labeling-program>

Crediting Commercial Processed Products in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-CACFP-Adult-Day-Care-Centers/Documents#CommercialProducts>

Crediting Commercial Processed Products in Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-CACFP-Child-Care-Programs/Documents#CommercialProducts>

Presentation: CN Labels and Product Formulation Statements (USDA):

<https://theicn.org/resources/930/march-2016/109876/manufacturers-product-formulation-statement-pfs03-31-16.pdf>

Using CN Labels in the CACFP

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp>

USDA Memo SP 11-2015 (v2), CACFP 10-2015, and SFSP 13-2015: CN Labels Copied with a Watermark Acceptable Documentation:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn-labels-copied-watermark-acceptable-documentation>

USDA Memo SP 27-2015, CACFP 09-2015, and SFSP 12-2015: Administrative Review Process Regarding the Child Nutrition (CN) Label, Watermarked CN Label and Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/administrative-review-process-regarding-child-nutrition-cn-label-watermarked-cn-label-and>

Using CN Labels in the CACFP



For more information, visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Adult Day Care Centers](#) webpages, or contact the [CACFP 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/CACFP/Crediting/Using_CN_labels_CACFP.pdf.

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

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
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race; color; religious creed; age; sex; pregnancy; sexual orientation; workplace hazards to reproductive systems, gender identity or expression; marital status; national origin; ancestry; retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, intellectual disability; genetic information; learning disability; physical disability (including, but not limited to, blindness); mental disability (past/present history thereof); military or veteran status; status as a victim of domestic violence; or criminal record in state employment, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes. Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Attorney Louis Todisco, Connecticut State Department of Education, by mail 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103-1841; or by telephone 860-713-6594; or by email louis.todisco@ct.gov.