

# Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

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 [ASP](#) webpage.

Quantities for the meat/meat alternates component are indicated as ounce equivalents 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 ounce equivalent or 1 ounce of meat/meat alternates is the same. This document refers to ounce equivalents for simplicity.

## Required Crediting Documentation

To credit as the meat/meat alternates 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 meat/meat alternates component per serving. Acceptable documentation includes:

- an 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 total weight of meat/meat alternates contained in one serving of the product.

For example, to credit commercial breaded chicken nuggets as 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates 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 the meal patterns for school nutrition programs.

## Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP

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, *Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program*, *Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs*, and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the NSLP and SBP*, 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*.

### Meat/Meat Alternates versus Protein

The school meal patterns require a specific amount of the meat/meat alternates 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 meat/meat alternates component because the grams of protein listed on the product's Nutrition Facts label do not correspond to the ounces of the meat/meat alternates 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 meat/meat alternates 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. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP*.



## Serving Size

The amount of the meat/meat alternates 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-ounce equivalent serving of the meat/meat alternates 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 NSLP and SBP](#));
- 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 NSLP and SBP](#));
- 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 NSLP and SBP](#));
- 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 NSLP and SBP](#));
- 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 NSLP and SBP](#));
- 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 NSLP and SBP](#) and [Crediting Yogurt for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP](#)); 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 NSLP and SBP](#)).

One-quarter (¼) ounce equivalent is the smallest amount that credits toward the meat/meat alternates component. If a menu item provides less than the full serving of the meat/meat alternates 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

School food authorities (SFAs) must serve the daily meat/meat alternates 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 meat/meat alternates component from a sandwich containing 2 ounces of tuna, or a sandwich containing 1 ounce of tuna (1 ounce of meat/meat alternates) served with soup that contains ¼ cup of legumes (1 ounce of meat/meat alternates). SFAs cannot serve the daily meat/meat alternates 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 meat/meat alternates 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 Meat/Meat Alternates

The USDA requires the meat or meat alternate must be recognizable (visible) to credit toward the meat/meat alternates 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. Other meat/meat alternates such as peanut butter cannot credit when served in smoothies. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Smoothies for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP in the NSLP and SBP*.
- Pasta made with 100 percent legume flours 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 NSLP and SBP*.



## Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Examples of meat/meat alternates 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.

For more information on the meat/meat alternates component, 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.

## Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Accepting\\_Proccsed\\_Product\\_Documentation\\_SNP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Accepting_Proccsed_Product_Documentation_SNP.pdf)

Afterschool Snack Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Afterschool-Snack-Program>

Afterschool Snack Program Handbook (CSDE)

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/ASP/ASP\\_Handbook.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/ASP/ASP_Handbook.pdf)

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CN\\_Labeling\\_Program.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CN_Labeling_Program.pdf)

Choking Prevention (CSDE’s Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Food-Safety-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs/Documents#ChokingPrevention>

Crediting Commercial Processed Products in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs#CommercialProducts>

## Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP

Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit\\_Deli\\_SNP.pdf](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 NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit\\_Tofu\\_SNP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Tofu_SNP.pdf)

Crediting Yogurt for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit\\_Yogurt\\_SNP\\_preschool.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Yogurt_SNP_preschool.pdf)

Crediting Yogurt in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit\\_Yogurt\\_SNP\\_grades\\_K-12.pdf](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>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents>

Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-Preschoolers-in-School-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 Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Menu\\_Planning\\_Guide\\_Preschool.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Menu_Planning_Guide_Preschool.pdf)

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>



## Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP

Product Formulation Statement (Product Analysis) for Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA) Products in Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

[https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS\\_Meats-Meat\\_Alternates\\_Fillable\\_508.pdf](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Meats-Meat_Alternates_Fillable_508.pdf)

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 NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/APP\\_Requirements\\_SNP.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/APP_Requirements_SNP.pdf)

Resources for the Preschool Meal Patterns (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Resources\\_Preschool\\_Meal\\_Patterns.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/Resources_Preschool_Meal_Patterns.pdf)

Resources for the School Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/Resources\\_School\\_Meal\\_Patterns\\_grades\\_K-12.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/Resources_School_Meal_Patterns_grades_K-12.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](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 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>

Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Product\\_Formulation\\_Statements.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Product_Formulation_Statements.pdf)

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>

## Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP

USDA Memo SP 53-2016 and CACFP 21- 2016: Crediting Tofu and Soy Yogurt Products in the School Meal Programs and the CACFP:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/crediting-tofu-and-soy-yogurt-products-school-meal-programs-and-cacfp>

USDA Memo SP 53-2016 and CACFP 21- 2016: Crediting Tofu and Soy Yogurt Products in the School Meal Programs and the CACFP:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/crediting-tofu-and-soy-yogurt-products-school-meal-programs-and-cacfp>

USDA Webinar: Additional Meat/Meat Alternates Options for CNPs: Crediting Tempeh and Surimi:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/additional-meat-meat-alternate-tempeh-and-surimi>

USDA Webinar: Moving Forward: Update on Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs with Guidance for Dried Meat Products:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/moving-forward-update-food-crediting-dried-meat-products>

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 NSLP and SBP



For more information, refer to the CSDE's guides, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and *Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP and SBP*, 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](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Commercial_MMA_SNP.pdf).

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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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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