

# Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

**School Year 2024-25 (July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025)**

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) 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. The SSO follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For information on the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal pattern and crediting requirements for grades K-12, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For information on the preschool meal pattern and crediting requirements, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



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# Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

## 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 schools and 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 school or 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 meats/meat alternates (MMA) component in 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 also typically indicate the contribution of other meal components that are part of these products. For example, CN-labeled pizza may list contributions to the MMA, 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.

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## Identifying CN Labels

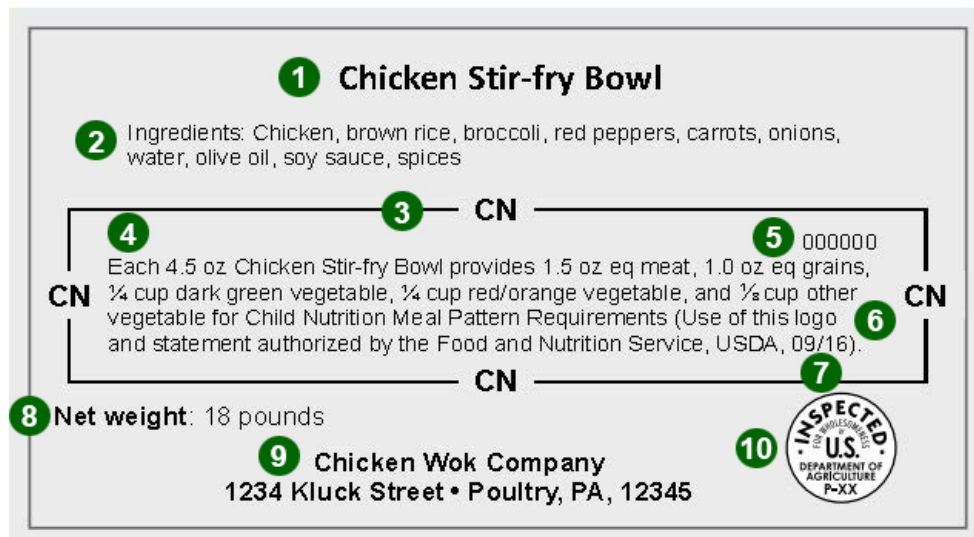
The CN label is found on the product packaging and will contain the required elements below.

- 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.



Figure 1 shows an example of a CN label and the required elements. For detailed guidance on CN labels and the required elements, refer to 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](#).

**Figure 1. Sample CN label**



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

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## 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. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns list the quantities for the MMA component in oz eq. The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 lists the quantities for the MMA component in ounces. The amount that credits as 1 oz eq or 1 ounce of MMA is the same.

Effective with school year 2025-26 (beginning July 1, 2025), the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), aligns the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 with the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) snack meal pattern. The serving size for MMA will change from ounces to oz eq.

### 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.

Effective with school year 2025-26 (beginning July 1, 2025), the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), aligns the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 with the CACFP snack meal pattern. The grains/bread component will change to the grains component and grain servings will change to grain oz eq.

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The WGR requirement applies to the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns. The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 does not have a WGR requirement.

Effective with school year 2025-26 (beginning July 1, 2025), the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, applies the NSLP weekly WGR requirement to ASP snacks: at least 80 percent of the grains offered weekly in NSLP snacks must be whole grain-rich, based on the offered oz eq of grains.

### 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, peas, lentils; starchy; and other. Only the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12 require the vegetable subgroups. However, SFAs are encouraged to offer the vegetable subgroups in other meals and snacks. For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*.

### Fruits contribution

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



# Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

## 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 [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

## CN labels with a watermark

Manufacturers may use a CN label with a watermark (refer to figure 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 Child Nutrition Programs. The watermarked CN label must be attached to a bill of lading (invoice) that contains the product name and CN number (refer to figure 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](#).


Additional guidance on CN label is available in the "CN Labels" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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**Figure 2. Sample CN Label with a watermark**



**Figure 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

<b>Bill to:</b>	<b>Ship to:</b>
ABC School District 1234 Anystreet Anytown, CT 01234	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
<b>Total:</b>				<b>\$300.00</b>

# Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

## 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.

## Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):  
[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/accepting\\_processed\\_product\\_documentation\\_snp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/accepting_processed_product_documentation_snp.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](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>

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 for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):  
<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs#CNlabels>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labels ("Related Resources" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage):  
<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/related-resources#CNlabels>

CN Labeling (USDA webpage):  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/child-nutrition-cn-labeling-program>

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

Updates to the School Nutrition Standards (USDA webpage):  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/school-nutrition-standards-updates>



## Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

Upcoming Meal Pattern Changes (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

[https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs#Upcoming\\_Meal\\_Pattern\\_Changes](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs#Upcoming_Meal_Pattern_Changes)

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):

<https://www.federalregister.gov/Documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/Child-Nutrition-Programs-Meal-Patterns-Consistent-With-The-2020-2025-Dietary-Guidelines-For>

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>

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>

## Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs

For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#), [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/cn\\_labels\\_snp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/cn_labels_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
3. email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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