

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

This guidance applies to the meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschoolers (ages 1-4) in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 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 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](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages. For information on the meal pattern and crediting requirements for preschoolers, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



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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 meat/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 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.

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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.

Table 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*.



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Table 1. Sample CN label

1 Chicken Stir-fry Bowl

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

3 CN

4 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 ½ 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).


5 000000

6 CN

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8 Net weight: 18 pounds

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

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- 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



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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 meal pattern for grades K-12 lists the quantities for the MMA component in oz eq. The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 and the NSLP and ASP meal patterns for preschoolers list the quantities for the MMA component in ounces. MMA are not required in the SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschoolers. 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.

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

The quantities for the grains component are in oz eq for the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and the NSLP, SBP, and the ASP meal patterns for preschoolers (refer to the CSDE's *Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* and *Grain Ounce Equivalents for Preschoolers in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*). The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 list the quantities for the grains/breads component in servings (refer to the CSDE's *Servings for Grains/Breads for Grades K-12 in the Afterschool Snack Program*). One grains/breads serving is slightly less than 1 oz eq. ASP sponsors may choose to use grain oz eq for grades K-12 to simplify menu planning and provide consistency across the school nutrition programs.

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. 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*.

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Fruits contribution

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

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 National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast 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 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 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.

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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

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Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

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

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 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

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>

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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>

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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 National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* 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.

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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

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