

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products 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), and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. The Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For information on the school meal patterns, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage, [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage, and [ASP](#) webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



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Required Meal Pattern Quantities for Meats/Meat Alternates (MMA)

The quantities for the MMA component are indicated as ounce equivalents (oz eq) in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns; and as ounces in the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12. 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 “[Meats and Meat Alternates](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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.

Required Crediting Documentation

SFAs must obtain appropriate crediting documentation that states the amount of the MMA component per serving for all commercial products that are processed or contain added ingredients, such as pizza, chicken nuggets, deli meats, hotdogs, and cheese ravioli. Acceptable documentation includes any of the documents below.

- **Child Nutrition (CN) label:** A CN label is a USDA-approved statement that clearly identifies the contribution of a commercial product toward the meal pattern requirements. Allowable CN label documentation includes 1) the original CN label from the product carton; 2) a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton; or 3) a CN label copied with a watermark displaying the product name and CN number provided by the vendor and the bill of lading (invoice). For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [Using Child Nutrition \(CN\) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Product formulation statement (PFS):** A PFS is a document developed by manufacturers that provides specific information about how a product credits toward the USDA meal patterns for the Child Nutrition Programs. The PFS must be signed by an official of the manufacturer and state the amount of each meal pattern component contained in one serving of the product. For more information on PFS forms, refer to the CSDE’s resources, [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#). For guidance on how to review a PFS, refer to the USDA’s [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer’s Product Formulation Statement](#) and [Reviewer’s Checklist](#)

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for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements (Product Analysis) for Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA) Products.

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.

SFAs must obtain a PFS from the manufacturer for all commercial processed products without a CN label that are not found in the USDA's [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs](#) (FBG). This documentation must be obtained and verified for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the food product in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Commercial products without a CN label or PFS cannot credit in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

SFAs must maintain all crediting documentation on file in accordance with the records retention requirements for the school nutrition programs (refer to the CSDE's [Records Retention Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs](#)). This documentation must be current and will be reviewed by the CSDE during the [Administrative Review](#) of the school nutrition programs.

For more information on crediting documentation, refer to the CSDE's resources, [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#), [USDA Memo SP 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, SFSP 02-2025: Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements](#), and the USDA's resources, [Product Formulation Statement \(Product Analysis\) for Meat/Meat Alternate Products](#) and [Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#).

Additional guidance is available on the CSDE's [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training on the requirements for CN labels and PFS forms is available in Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation Part B – Crediting Commercial Processed Products, 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.

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Menu planners cannot use the Nutrition Facts label or ingredients statement to determine the amount of the MMA component in a commercial product. Except for commercial tofu and tofu products (refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#)), 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.

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, peas, and lentils (refer to the CSDE's [Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils 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 beans, peas, and lentils), 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

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- 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 ($\frac{1}{4}$) oz eq is the smallest amount that credits toward the MMA component. If a menu item provides less than the full meal pattern 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 oz eq of MMA) served with soup that contains $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of lentils (1 oz eq of MMA). SFAs cannot serve the daily MMA component at lunch in more than two food items.

When implementing OVS, SFAs should consider how these menu-planning decisions affect students' selection of reimbursable meals. 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 that meats and meat alternates 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 bean, pea, or lentil flour.

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- **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 bean, pea, or lentil flour** may credit as a meat alternate if the menu also includes an additional MMA such as tofu, cheese, or meat. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils 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 preschool 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.

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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

Accepting Product Documentation (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/accepting-product-documentation>

Child Nutrition Labels (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Program webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/child-nutrition-labels>

Commercial Processed Products (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs#Commercial>

Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_beans_peas_lentils_snp.pdf

Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_deli_snp.pdf

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs>

Crediting Foods 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 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

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

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Meats and Meat Alternates (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs/meats-and-meat-alternates>

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Product Formulation Statements (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/product-formulation-statements>

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 (Product Analysis) for Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA) Products (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>

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

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 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 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, SFSP 02-2025: Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/guidance-accepting-processed-product-documentation>

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>

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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>

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 Part B – Crediting Commercial Processed Products (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>

What's in a Meal Module 8: Meats/Meat Alternates Component (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, visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage 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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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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