Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

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, SBP, and ASP meal patterns.

For information on the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs, 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 the "Meal Patterns and Crediting" section of the 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.

Contents

Required Crediting Documentation for Commercial Processed Products 2
Storing crediting documentation 3
MMA Servings in Commercial Products 3
Requirement for Recognizable MMA 4
Crediting Dried Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Products 5
Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children 5
Resources 6



Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

Required Crediting Documentation for Commercial Processed Products

To credit in the school nutrition programs, commercial processed products require appropriate crediting documentation that states the ounce equivalents (oz eq) of the meats/meat alternates (MMA) component per serving. Some examples of commercial processed products include pizza, chicken nuggets, deli meats, hummus, hotdogs, and cheese ravioli. The acceptable types of documentation for commercial products include 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. CN labels are available only for main dish entrees that contribute at least ½ ounce equivalent (oz eq) of the MMA component. 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 on CN labels, 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 resource, *Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs*. For guidance on how to review a PFS, visit the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs: Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement webpage.

Commercial processed products without a CN label or PFS cannot credit in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks unless they are listed in the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG).

> A PFS is required for all commercial processed products without a CN label that are not listed in the FBG. The USDA requires that school food authorities (SFAs) must verify the PFS for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the food product in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

For more information on crediting documentation, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs*, and USDA Memo SP 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, SFSP 02-2025: *Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements*. 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 8: Meal Pattern Documentation for Crediting Commercial Processed Products of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.

Storing crediting documentation

SFAs must maintain all CN labels, PFS forms, and other crediting documentation on file in accordance with the records retention requirements for the school nutrition programs. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *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.

MMA Servings in Commercial Products

Commercial processed products must contain at least ¼ oz eq of MMA to credit in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. The MMA quantities in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs refer 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;
- 2 ounces of cottage or ricotta cheese, cheese food/spread, or cheese substitute;
- ¼ cup of cooked beans, peas, and lentils (refer to the CSDE's resource, *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 that does not exceed 2 grams of added sugars per ounce (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Yogurt in the School Nutrition Programs*); 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 School Nutrition Programs*).

Commercial processed products must document the oz eq of MMA per serving with a CN label or PFS (refer to "Required Crediting Documentation for Commercial Processed Products" in this document). For more information on MMA, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Requirement for Recognizable MMA

The MMA in commercial processed products must be recognizable (visible) to credit toward the MMA component. MMA that are not recognizable do not credit. Some examples include peanut butter in a muffin or smoothie, soft tofu blended in a soup, and pureed beans in a muffin. The USDA's intent for this requirement is to ensure that SFSP menus offer MMA in a form that is recognizable to children.

The USDA allows exceptions to this requirement for yogurt blended in fruit/vegetable smoothies and pasta made with 100 percent bean, pea, or lentil flour.

- **Yogurt blended in smoothies** credits as MMA. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Smoothies in 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** credits as MMA 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*, and USDA Memo SP 26-2019, CACFP 13-2019, and SFSP 12-2019: *Crediting Pasta Products Made of Vegetable Flour in the Child Nutrition Programs*.

These are the only two unrecognizable commercial products that may credit toward the MMA component. All other MMA must be recognizable.

Crediting Dried Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Products

Jerky, dried meat sticks, and similar products require a CN label or PFS to document their MMA contribution. SFAs must evaluate the product's PFS to ensure it complies with the USDA's three crediting principles for dried meat products below.

1. The creditable meat, poultry, or seafood ingredient listed on the product's PFS must match or have a similar description as the ingredient listed in the product's ingredients statement.
2. The creditable meat, poultry, or seafood ingredient listed on the product's PFS match or have a similar description to a food item in the FBG.
3. The creditable amount cannot exceed the finished weight of the product, i.e., the cooked weight ready for serving.

> The fat content must be 30 percent or less for ground beef or ground pork to credit in Child Nutrition Programs. Dried meat products that do not indicate the fat percentage do not credit.

The requirements for crediting dried meat are summarized in 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*. For additional guidance on crediting dried meat products, refer to the USDA's webinar, *Moving Forward: Update on Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs with Guidance for Dried Meat Products*.

Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Consider children's age and developmental readiness when deciding what types of commercial processed MMA 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.

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 Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs/accepting-product-documentation

Alternate Protein Products (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/cnp/food-industry-toolkit/app

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

Child Nutrition Programs: Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/labeling/tips-evaluating-pfs

Commercial Processed Products (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Program 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 Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School 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

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/fbg

Meats and Meat Alternates Component (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

Moving Forward: Update on Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs with Guidance for Dried Meat Products (USDA webinar):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/moving-forward-update-food-crediting-dried-meat-products

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/cn/labeling/qas-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

USDA Memo SP 02-2024, CACFP 02-2024, and SFSP 02-2024: Revised: Crediting Tofu and Soy Yogurt Products in the School Meals Programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/crediting-tofu-soy-yogurt-products-school-meals-cacfp

USDA Memo SP 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, and SFSP 02-2025: Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/labeling/guidance-accepting-processed-product-documentation

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs

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.fna.usda.gov/cn/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.fna.usda.gov/cn/crediting-surimi-seafood-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Memo SP 25-2019, CACFP 12-2019, and SFSP 11-2019: Crediting Tempeh in the Child Nutrition Programs: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/crediting-tempeh-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Memo SP 26-2019, CACFP 13-2019, and SFSP 12-2019: Crediting Pasta Products Made of Vegetable Flour in the Child Nutrition Programs. https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/crediting-pasta-products-made-vegetable-flour-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Memo SP 40-2019, CACFP 17-2019, and SFSP 17-2019: Smoothies Offered in Child Nutrition Programs: https://www.fna.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 8: Meal Pattern Documentation for Crediting Commercial Processed Products (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module8

What's in a Meal Module 10: Meats/Meat Alternates Component (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs: https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module10

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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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2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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