

Crediting Deli Meats 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.

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.

For more information, visit the “[Meats and Meat Alternates](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Overview of Crediting Requirements

Deli meats (such as turkey, chicken, ham, roast beef, salami, and bologna) credit as the MMA component. The serving of deli meat that provides 1 oz eq of the MMA component depends on the product’s ingredients. These servings vary greatly between different brands and types of deli meats depending on the ingredients they contain.



- **100 percent meat:** Products that are 100 percent meat without added liquids (e.g., water or broth), binders, and extenders credit on an ounce-per-ounce basis (actual serving weight). For example, 1 ounce of deli meat that is 100 percent meat credits as 1 oz eq of the MMA component.
- **Added liquids, binders, and extenders:** Products that contain added liquids, binders, and extenders credit based on the percentage of meat in the product formula. A 1-ounce serving of these products does not credit as 1 oz eq of the MMA component. The crediting depends on the amount of meat per serving, excluding added ingredients. For example, to credit as 1 oz eq of the MMA component might require 1.6 ounces of one brand of deli meat and 2.3 ounces of another brand of deli meat.

School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that the serving of deli meat provides the amount of the MMA component being credited toward the reimbursable meal or ASP snack.

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Required Crediting Documentation

SFAs must obtain appropriate crediting documentation that states the amount of the MMA component per serving for all deli meats that contain added liquids, binders, and extenders. Acceptable documentation includes any of the documents below. This documentation must be obtained and verified for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the food product in school meals and afterschool snacks.

- **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 for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements \(Product Analysis\) for Meat/Meat Alternate \(M/MA\) Products](#).

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 product in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Deli meats 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.

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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](#).

Liquids, Binders, and Extenders

Products with added liquids, binders, and extenders cannot credit as the MMA component without a CN label or PFS that states the amount of the MMA component per serving. Menu planners must review product labels and ingredients to determine if commercial products contain added liquids, binders, and extenders. Binders and extenders are defined by the USDA's regulations for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) ([9 CFR 318.7](#)).

Table 1. Examples of binders and extenders ¹

Agar-agar	Isolated soy protein (APP) ¹
Algin (a mixture of sodium alginate, calcium carbonate and calcium gluconate/lactic acid)	Locust bean gum
Bread	Methyl cellulose
Calcium-reduced dried skim milk	Modified food starch
Carrageenan	Reduced lactose whey
Carboxymethyl cellulose (cellulose gum)	Reduced minerals
Cereal	Sodium caseinate
Dried milk	Soy flour (APP) ²
Dry or dried whey	Soy protein concentrate (APP) ¹
Enzyme (rennet) treated calcium-reduced dried skim milk and calcium lactate	Starchy vegetable flour
Gums, vegetable	Tapioca dextrin
	Vegetable starch
	Wheat gluten
	Whey
	Whey protein concentrate (APP) ¹
	Xanthan gum

¹ Products may contain these ingredients if they meet the USDA's requirements for alternate protein products (APPs). For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

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Examples of commercial products

The ingredients statements below show some examples of turkey breast products that contain added liquid, binders, and extenders (indicated in *italics*).

- Ingredients: Turkey breast, *water*, *modified cornstarch*, contains less than 2% of sodium lactate, salt, sugar, sodium phosphates, *carrageenan*, natural flavor, sodium diacetate, potassium chloride, sodium ascorbate, sodium nitrite, caramel color.
- Ingredients: Turkey breast meat, *turkey broth*, contains 2% or less salt, sugar, *carrageenan*, sodium phosphate, sodium acetate, sodium diacetate, flavoring.

To credit these products in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks, SFAs must obtain a CN label or PFS indicating the oz eq of MMA per serving.

Developing Recipes for Deli Meats

Different brands and types of deli meat credit differently. To ensure proper crediting, SFAs should develop standardized recipes for menu items that contain deli meats, such as sandwiches and other entrees.

These standardized recipes should indicate the deli meat's contribution to the MMA component based on a specific weight of a specific brand. To make portioning simple for food service staff and ensure that the serving provides the proper crediting amount, round up the weight of the deli meat in the standardized recipe to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce. For example, the standardized recipe should list 1.2 ounces of deli meat as 1.25 ounces and 1.6 ounces of deli meat as 1.75 ounces.

If the SFA makes the same food item using different brands of deli meats that credit differently, the standardized recipe should include the specific weight of each brand. For example, if a school makes a turkey sandwich using either ABC brand turkey breast or XYZ brand turkey breast, the standardized recipe should include the required weight of ABC brand for 1 oz eq and the required weight of XYZ brand for 1 oz eq. Alternatively, the SFA could also choose to develop a separate standardized turkey sandwich recipe for each brand of deli meat.

For information on standardized recipes, visit the "[Standardized Recipes](#)" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training on standardized recipes is available in "Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation Part A – School Menus" 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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Comparing Cost

Determining the cost per oz eq of MMA helps SFAs decide if the required meal pattern serving for a specific brand of deli meat is reasonable and cost effective. The deli product with the lowest cost per pound might not be the least expensive. Considering the cost per oz eq of the MMA component instead of the cost per ounce of meat provides a more accurate reflection of the product's cost in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Table 2 shows a sample cost comparison of two deli meat products.

Table 2. Cost comparison of sample deli meats

Food Item	Price per pound	Price per ounce	1 oz eq of MMA ¹	Cost of 1 oz eq of MMA
Sample product A: Deli meat with liquids, binders, or extenders	\$4.99	\$.31	1.7 ounces ²	\$.53
Sample product B: Deli meat without liquids, binders, or extenders	\$6.99	\$.44	1 ounce	\$.44

- ¹ Products with added liquids, binders, extenders require a CN label or PFS to document the amount of the MMA component per serving (refer to "[Required Crediting Documentation](#)" in this document).
- ² SFAs must obtain the oz eq contribution of the deli meat from its PFS.

Sample product A (deli meat with liquids, binders, or extenders) costs \$2 less per pound than sample product B (deli meat without liquids, binders, or extenders). However, when the SFA compares the cost based on 1 oz eq of the MMA component, a serving of sample product A costs 53 cents and a serving of sample product B costs 44 cents. Sample product A requires almost twice the weight of sample product B to provide 1 oz eq of the MMA component because of the added liquids, binders, and extenders.

Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Large chunks or cubes of deli meats are choking hazards. Consider children's age and developmental readiness when deciding how to offer deli meats in preschool menus and modify foods and menus as appropriate. 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 Program webpage):

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

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

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

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

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>

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>

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

https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/reviewer_checklist.pdf

Standardized Recipes (CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

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

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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 05-2025, CACFP 04-2025, and 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>

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_deli_snp.pdf.

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