

Crediting Juice in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) preschool meal patterns (ages 1-5) for 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 preschool meal patterns. The requirements for the preschool meal patterns are the same as the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns for children. For information on the preschool meal patterns and crediting foods, refer to the CSDE’s [Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs](#) and visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



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Overview of Crediting Requirements

Juice served in the preschool meals and snacks must be pasteurized full-strength (100 percent) fruit juice, vegetable juice, or a combination of fruit and vegetable juices. Fruit juice credits toward the fruits component and vegetable juice credits toward the vegetables component.

Juice limit

Juice credits as either the vegetables component or the fruits component at only one meal or snack per day. Menu planners must count all sources of 100 percent juice toward the juice limit (refer to “[Allowable Types of Juice](#)” in this document).

If a preschool meal or ASP snack includes any type of juice as the fruits component or vegetables component, juice cannot credit as the fruits component or vegetables component at any other meal or snack that same day.

The examples below illustrate how the juice limit applies to preschool menus.

- Lunch cannot contain a smoothie and juice as the only servings of the fruits component and vegetables component. For example, the lunch menu cannot offer a strawberry smoothie as the fruits component and vegetable juice as the vegetables component because both credit as juice.
- If the breakfast menu includes juice as the fruits component, canned fruit in juice cannot credit as the fruits component at lunch, supper, or snack.
- If the lunch menu includes a frozen 100 percent fruit juice pop as the fruits component, juice cannot credit as either the fruits or vegetables component at breakfast or snack.
- If the snack menu includes a mango smoothie as the fruits component, juice cannot credit as either the fruits or vegetables component at breakfast or snack.



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Juice at snack

The preschool snack meal pattern requires any two of the five meal components (milk, meat/meat alternates, vegetables, fruits, and grains). A reimbursable snack could include a serving of vegetable and a serving of fruit, a serving of vegetable and a serving of fruit juice, or a serving of fruit and a serving of vegetable juice.

Reimbursable snacks cannot include a serving of vegetable juice (including pureed vegetables in smoothies) and a serving of fruit juice (including pureed fruits in smoothies, juice in canned fruit, and frozen juice pops) as the only two snack components. For example, a snack that contains a vegetable smoothie and apple juice is not reimbursable because both components credit as juice.

In addition, juice cannot be served when milk is the only other snack component. For example, a snack that contains milk and a mango-peach smoothie is not reimbursable.

Offering juice as an extra menu item

Menu planners may choose to offer juice as an extra menu item that does not credit toward the preschool meal patterns. However, the USDA encourages school food authorities (SFAs) to limit juice in preschool menus to ensure that meals and snacks meet children's nutrition needs.

USDA's CACFP best practices

Juice does not provide the same nutritional benefits as whole fruits and vegetables. The USDA's [CACFP best practices](#) recommend serving a variety of fruits and choosing whole fruits (fresh, canned, dried, or frozen) more often than juice; and serving a fruit or vegetable as at least one of the two required snack components.

For guidance on serving and crediting fruits and vegetables in preschool meals and ASP snacks, visit the "[Fruits Component](#)" and "[Vegetables Component](#)" sections of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



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Allowable Types of Juice

Any type of pasteurized full-strength (100 percent) juice credits in the preschool meal patterns. Juice may be fresh, frozen, or made from concentrate. The name of the full-strength fruit juice on the label must include one of the following terms: “juice,” “full-strength juice,” “100 percent juice,” “reconstituted juice,” or “juice from concentrate.” The statements “natural” and “organic” do not indicate that a juice is full strength. Products that credit as 100 percent juice include:

- 100 percent juice including fresh, frozen, and made from (refer to “[Crediting Juice Concentrates](#)” in this document);
- frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice (refer to “[Crediting Frozen Juice Products](#)” in this document);
- pureed fruits and vegetables in fruit/vegetable smoothies (refer to “[Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies](#)” in this document); and
- juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice (refer to “[Crediting Juice in Canned Fruit](#)” in this document).

Juice products that are less than full strength, or that contain juice concentrates that are not fully reconstituted, do not credit in the preschool meal patterns. Except for juice in smoothies, juice cannot credit when it is used as an ingredient in another food or beverage (refer to “[Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies](#)” in this document).

Juice ingredients

The ingredients in juice can vary among manufacturers and products. The Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) labeling regulations allow 100 percent juice to contain added ingredients and still be labeled “100% juice.” Some 100 percent juices contain added ingredients such as artificial flavors, artificial colors (e.g., red 40, blue 1, yellow 5 and 6, and titanium dioxide), preservatives (e.g., sodium potassium sorbate), flavor enhancers (e.g., ethyl maltol), and emulsifiers or thickeners (e.g., glycerol esters of wood rosin and xanthan gum). The CSDE encourages menu planners to read the product’s ingredients statement and choose 100 percent juices without these added ingredients.

Crediting Juice Concentrates

Juice concentrates credit only when reconstituted with water to 100 percent full-strength juice and served in the form of juice. Juice concentrates do not credit when used as an ingredient in another food or beverage product, such as gelatin or sherbet made with juice concentrates.

Juice made from concentrate is reconstituted with a volume of water that is several times the amount of the juice concentrate. A typical reconstitution ratio might be three parts water to one part concentrate, but this ratio may vary for different juice products. Commercial juice products made from concentrate will list “water” as the first ingredient followed by the type of juice

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concentrate, for example, “water, orange juice concentrate” and “filtered water, grape juice concentrate.” Juice made from concentrate that is labeled “100 percent juice” credits when the SFA follows the manufacturer’s specific instructions for reconstituting.

Crediting Juice Blends

Juice blends must be a combination of 100 percent fruit juices, vegetable juices, or fruit and vegetable juices. Fruit and vegetable juice blends credit based on the first juice ingredient. If the first juice ingredient is fruit juice, the product credits toward the fruits component. If the first juice ingredient is vegetable juice, the product credits toward the vegetables component. The ingredients statement below shows an example of a vegetable and fruit juice blend.

- Ingredients: **Reconstituted vegetable juice blend** (water and concentrated juices of sweet potatoes, purple carrots, carrots), reconstituted fruit juices (water and concentrated juices of apples, white grapes, cranberries, blackberries), contains less than 2% of: natural flavoring, citric acid, lemon juice.

This product credits as the vegetables component because the first ingredient is a reconstituted vegetable juice blend.

Crediting Frozen 100 Percent Juice Products

Frozen 100 percent fruit juice products (such as frozen juice pops) credit toward the fruits component based on the fluid volume prior to freezing. SFAs must request a product formulation statement (PFS) from the manufacturer to document this information. Frozen fruit juice counts toward the juice limit (refer to “[Juice Limit](#)” in this document).



For information on PFS forms, refer to the CSDE’s resources, [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and the USDA’s PFS form, [Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Vegetables and Fruits in School Meal Programs](#). For additional guidance, visit the “[Crediting Commercial Processed Products](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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Crediting Apple Cider

Apple cider must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice to credit toward the fruits component. Pasteurized juice has been heat-treated to kill harmful bacteria. Menu planners must check labels, as some brands of apple cider are not pasteurized. SFAs cannot serve apple cider or any other type of juice that is not pasteurized. Apple cider counts toward the juice limit (refer to [“Juice Limit”](#) in this document).

Crediting Coconut Water

Coconut water labeled as 100 percent juice credits toward the fruits component based on the volume served. Coconut water must meet the same requirements as juice and counts toward the juice limit (refer to [“Juice Limit”](#) in this document).

Crediting Juice in Canned Fruit

A serving of canned fruit may include the 100 percent juice in which the fruit is packed but cannot include water or syrup. For example, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned peaches with juice credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component. However, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned peaches with syrup does not credit as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component because the serving does not contain $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit. The menu planner can only credit the amount of peaches without the syrup.

The juice from canned fruit counts toward the juice limit if the menu planner credits the juice toward the fruits component. For example, if canned pears in juice credit as the fruits component at lunch, juice cannot credit as the fruits component or the vegetables component at any other meal or snack that same day.

Juice from canned fruit does not count toward the juice limit if the juice is planned as an extra noncreditable food. An example is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of canned fruit portioned in a 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce container with the juice added after measuring the full $\frac{1}{2}$ -cup serving of fruit. For more information, refer to [“Offering Juice as an Extra Menu Item”](#) in this document.

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Crediting Pureed Fruits and Vegetables in Smoothies

Pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies credit only as juice in the preschool meal patterns. Crediting is based on the volume (cups) of pureed fruits and vegetables per serving. For example, a smoothie that contains $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of pureed strawberries credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit juice. Pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies count toward the juice limit (refer to “[Juice Limit](#)” in this document).

Concentrated fruit puree and concentrated juice are added sugars. They do not credit as juice unless they are reconstituted to full-strength fruit puree or full-strength juice.

SFAs must document the amount of pureed fruits and vegetables per serving with a standardized recipe for smoothies made from scratch. Commercial products require a PFS. For information on standardized recipes and PFS forms, visit the “[Crediting Foods Made from Scratch](#)” and “[Crediting Commercial Processed Products](#)” sections of the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Training on the requirements for standardized recipes and PFS forms is available in 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*.

The CSDE’s resource, [Crediting Smoothies in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs](#), summarizes the requirements for crediting smoothies in preschool meals and ASP snacks.



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Resources

Crediting Smoothies in the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs:

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

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

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

Fruits Component (“Related Resources” section of 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#Fruits>

Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/preschool/menu_planning_guide_preschool.pdf

Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Vegetables and Fruits in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and NSLP Afterschool Snacks (USDA):

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

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp>

USDA Memo CACFP 25-2016: Vegetable and Fruit Requirements in the Child and Adult Care Food Program; Questions and Answers:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/vegetable-and-fruit-requirements-child-and-adult-care-food-program-questions-and-answers>

USDA Memo SP 40-2019, CACFP 17-2019, and SFSP 17-2019: Smoothies Offered in Child Nutrition Programs:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/smoothies-offered-child-nutrition-programs>

Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

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

Vegetable Subgroups in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/vegetable_subgroups_cacfp.pdf

Vegetables Component (“Related Resources” section of 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#Vegetables>

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers 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_juice_snp_preschool.pdf.

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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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