# Crediting Nuts and Seeds 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.

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# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

## Overview of Crediting Requirements

Nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters may credit as the full serving of the meats/meat alternates (MMA) component at any meal or afterschool snack in the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs. For more information on MMA, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Some examples of creditable nuts and seeds include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, soy nuts, and sunflower seeds. Roasted or dried soybeans credit the same as soy nuts. However, fresh soybeans (edamame) credit as the vegetables component (beans, peas, and lentils subgroup). For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*.

Some examples of creditable nut and seed butters include almond butter, cashew nut butter, peanut butter, sesame seed butter, soy nut butter, and sunflower seed butter. Reduced-fat peanut butter must meet the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) standard of identity for peanut butter (21 CFR 164.150), which requires that products contain at least 90 percent peanuts.

> The quantities for the MMA component are in ounce equivalents (oz eq). One oz eq of MMA equals 1 ounce of nuts/seeds or 2 tablespoons of nut/seed butter.

## Serving Size for Nut and Seed Butters

The serving for nut and seed butters is based on volume (tablespoons). Two tablespoons credit as 1 oz eq of the MMA component. This crediting is the same for all types of nut and seed butters, e.g., smooth, crunchy, and natural.

The required volume measure (tablespoons) for nut and seed butters is not the same as weight (ounces). For example, a 1-ounce serving of peanut butter does not provide 1 oz eq of the MMA component.

Nut and seed butters that are portioned by weight instead of volume must use the appropriate weight conversion in the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG). The FBG indicates that a 1.1-ounce serving of a nut or seed butter credits as 1 oz eq (2 tablespoons) of the MMA component.



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The table below shows the MMA contribution of different serving sizes of nut and seed butters. The scoop (disher) size equivalents are from the Institute of Child Nutrition's *Basics at a Glance Portion Control Poster*. The weight equivalents are from the FBG.

**Table 1. Serving size for nut and seed butters**

| Serving size | Scoop (disher) size | Meal pattern contribution | Weight equivalent |
|---|---|---|---|
| ½ tablespoon (1½ teaspoons) | Closest is No. 100 (2 teaspoons) | ¼ oz eq (minimum creditable amount) | 0.275 ounces |
| 1 tablespoon (3 teaspoons) | Closest is No. 60 (3¼ teaspoons) | ½ oz eq | 0.55 ounces |
| 1½ tablespoons | Closest is No. 40 (1⅔ tablespoons) | ¾ oz eq | 0.825 ounces |
| 2 tablespoons (⅛ cup) | No. 30 (2 tablespoons) | 1 oz eq | 1.1 ounces |
| 3 tablespoons | Closest is No. 20 (3⅓ tablespoons) | 1½ oz eq | 1.65 ounces |
| 4 tablespoons (¼ cup) | No. 16 (¼ cup) | 2 oz eq | 1.2 ounces |

## Serving size considerations for nut/seed butters

Menu planners should consider the appropriateness of the required serving for each grade group. It may be unreasonable to provide the full serving of a nut or seed butter in one menu item, such as a peanut butter sandwich. For example, the lunch meal pattern for grades 9-12 requires 4 tablespoons (¼ cup) of peanut butter to credit as 2 oz eq of the MMA component. This is a large amount for two slices of bread.

The CSDE recommends providing a smaller portion of peanut butter and supplementing it with another MMA to provide the full serving. For example, a lunch menu could provide 2 oz eq of the MMA component from a sandwich containing 2 tablespoons of peanut butter (1 oz eq of MMA) served with 1 oz eq of another MMA, such as ½ cup of yogurt. Another option is providing the required 4 tablespoons of peanut butter in three half-sandwiches that each contain 4 teaspoons of peanut butter.

# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

## Must Be Recognizable in Commercial Products

Nuts and seeds and their butters used as ingredients in commercial products must be visible and easily recognizable as meat substitutes to credit toward the school meal patterns. Commercial products that are not easily recognizable as meat substitutes do not credit. Some examples of noncreditable products include peanut butter blended into other foods (such as muffins or smoothies), peanut butter granola bars, and chopped nuts in muffins.

The USDA's intent for this requirement is to ensure that school food authorities (SFAs) offer foods from the MMA component in a form that is recognizable to children. The USDA emphasizes the importance of the nutrition education aspect of the school nutrition programs, which includes the goal of helping children easily recognize the key food groups that contribute to a healthy meal.

## Noncreditable Nuts and Seeds

Acorns, chestnuts, and coconuts do not credit as the MMA component.

## Considerations for Reducing Choking Risks for Young Children

Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. Nuts, seeds, chunky peanut butter, and chunks or spoonfuls of nut or seed butters are choking hazards. Consider children's age and developmental readiness when deciding how to offer nuts, seeds, and their butters in preschool menus and modify foods and menus as appropriate.

Preparation techniques to reduce the risk of choking include grinding or finely chopping peanuts, nuts, and seeds before adding to prepared foods, and using only creamy nut or seed butters and spreading them 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.



# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

## Required Crediting Documentation

SFAs must be able to document that all menu items in reimbursable meals and snacks meet the school meal patterns. The guidance below summarizes the required documentation for commercial processed products and foods made from scratch that contain nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters. Documentation must be based on the food yields and crediting information in the FBG.

### Documentation for commercial products

Commercial processed products that contain nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters (such as packaged peanut butter sandwiches and trail mixes with nuts/seeds and dried fruits) require documentation stating the oz eq of the MMA component per serving. For example, to credit a commercially packaged peanut butter sandwich product as 1 oz eq of the MMA component, the product's CN label or PFS must state that one serving contains 2 tablespoons of peanut butter.

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 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 resources, *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.

# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

Commercial processed products that contain nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters cannot credit in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks without a CN label or PFS.

> A PFS is required for all commercial processed products without a CN label that contain nut butters, nuts, or seeds as an ingredient. The USDA requires that SFAs must verify the PFS for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the food product in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

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*.

## Documentation for foods made from scratch with nuts and seeds

SFAs must have standardized recipes on file that document the oz eq of MMA per serving for all foods prepared from scratch that contain nuts, seeds, or nut/seed butters. For information on standardized recipes, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs* and the Institute of Child Nutrition's USDA Recipe Standardization Guide for School Nutrition Programs, and visit the "Standardized Recipes" section of the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Training on the requirements for standardized recipes is available in Module 7: Meal Pattern Documentation for School Menus 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, standardized recipes, 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.

# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

## 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

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

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

Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Standard of Identity for Peanut Butter (21 CFR 164.150):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-164/subpart-B/section-164.150

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

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

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

# Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs

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_nuts_seeds_snp.pdf.

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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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