Identifying Products that Meet USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs

This document indicates how to determine if commercial nondairy beverage products credit as fluid milk substitutes in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) in the school nutrition programs. The school nutrition programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, Special Milk Program (SMP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-risk Supper Program implemented in schools. The guidance in this document applies to all public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that participate in the school nutrition programs.

> This document does not apply to fluid milk substitutes for children whose disability restricts their diet. For detailed guidance on the meal modification requirements for disability reasons, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs*.

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The USDA allows school food authorities (SFAs) to offer optional fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for children who do not consume regular cow's milk due to non-disability reasons. Fluid milk substitutes are plant-based beverages like fortified soy milk that are intended to replace cow's milk. SFAs may choose, but are not required, to offer one or more nondairy beverages to all students.

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes (Nondairy Beverages)

Nondairy milk substitutes for non-disability reasons must meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes defined in 7 CFR 210.10(d)(2)(ii) of the NSLP regulations and must be fortified in accordance with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) fortification guidelines. . In addition, fluid milk substitutes offered in public schools must also meet the state beverage requirements for nondairy milk substitutes under Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.); they cannot exceed 4 grams of sugar per ounce, 35 percent of calories from fat, or 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.

Only certain brands of fluid milk substitutes meet these standards. List 17: Dairy Alternative Beverages of the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage identifies commercial nondairy beverage products that meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes and the requirements of the state beverage statute.

Nondairy beverages that do not meet these requirements cannot be served in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks unless the child has a medically documented disability that specifically requires this substitution. For detailed guidance on the USDA's requirements for fluid milk substitutes, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs*.

Required documentation for fluid milk substitutes

With the implementation of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025, effective January 14, 2026, a written statement is not required to request a fluid milk substitute for non-disability reasons for the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12.

Milk substitutes for non-disability reasons continue to require a written statement for the SBP and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12; the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns; and the SMP. This statement must identify the need for the milk substitute and may be submitted by

the parent/guardian, a state licensed healthcare professional, or a registered dietitian. Written requests for fluid milk substitutes must be maintained on file with the student's medical records.

Instructions for Identifying Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes

For beverages that are not include on List 17: Dairy Alternative Beverages of the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage, use the chart on page 3 (Comparison Chart: Meeting the USDA's Nutrition Standards) to enter the product's information in column 4, then complete column 5 to determine if the fluid milk substitute complies with each standard.

- **Column 1** indicates the minimum nutrients per cup (8 fluid ounces) for the eight required nutrients of the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes.

- **Column 2** indicates the unrounded Daily Value (% DV) for each nutrient. The unrounded % DV is the current daily value for each nutrient indicated in the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) *Reference Guide: Daily Values for Nutrients*.

- **Column 3** indicates the rounded percent % DV for each nutrient. The rounded % DV is based on the FDA labeling laws (refer to Appendix H of the FDA's *A Food Labeling Guide: Guidance for Industry*). It is listed on the Nutrition Facts label and indicates how each nutrient in the serving contributes to a daily diet of 2,000 calories.

- **Column 4:** Enter the nutrients per cup or % DV from the Nutrition Facts label or manufacturer's nutrient analysis. **Note:** Product information might list nutrient values, % DV (unrounded or rounded), or both. If any nutrient values are missing, the SFA must obtain this information from the manufacturer.

- **Column 5**: Check "yes" or "no" to indicate if the product meets each nutrient standard (either the nutrients per cup in column 1 or the unrounded % DV in column 2 or the rounded % DV in column 3). If all "yes" boxes are checked, the product is an allowable fluid milk substitute. Submit information to the CSDE so compliant products may be added to the list of allowable products (refer to list 17 of the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage).

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Additional requirements

In addition to meeting the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes, fluid milk substitutes must also comply with the applicable requirements below.

- Fluid milk substitutes for the preschool meal patterns (ages 1-5) must be unflavored.
- Fluid milk substitutes sold in public schools must meet the state beverage requirements for nondairy milk substitutes under Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes. They cannot contain artificial sweeteners and cannot exceed 4 grams of sugar per ounce, 35 percent of calories from fat, or 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.

To be an allowable fluid milk substitute, a commercial product must meet each nutrient standard (either the nutrients per cup in column 1 or the unrounded or rounded % DV in column 2). Check that the product also meets the additional requirements for the preschool meal patterns and public schools indicated above.



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Comparison Chart: Meeting the USDA's Nutrition Standards

Column 1: USDA requirements: Minimum nutrients per cup (8 fluid ounces)	**Column 2: Unrounded % DV [1]**	**Column 3: Rounded % DV [2]**	**Column 4: Product information [3]**	**Column 5: Meets nutrient standard in column 2 or 3**
Calcium: 276 milligrams (mg)	21.23%	20%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Protein: 8 grams (g)	16%	16%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Vitamin A: 150 micrograms (mcg) retinol activity equivalent (RAE)	16.67%	20%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Vitamin D: 2.5 micrograms (mcg)	12.5%	15%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Magnesium: 24 mg	5.71%	6%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Phosphorus: 222 mg	17.76%	20%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Potassium: 349 mg	7.43%	10%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Riboflavin: 0.44 mg	33.85%	35%		☐ Yes ☐ No
Vitamin B12: 1.1 mcg	45.83%	45%		☐ Yes ☐ No

[1] The unrounded % DV is the minimum nutrients per cup divided by the current daily value for each nutrient (refer to the FDA's *Reference Guide: Daily Values for Nutrients*).

[2] The rounded % DV is based on the FDA labeling laws and is listed on the Nutrition Facts label (refer to Appendix H of the FDA's *A Food Labeling Guide: Guidance for Industry*).

[3] Indicate the product's nutrients per cup or % DV (either unrounded or rounded). The manufacturer's product information might list nutrient values, % DV, or both.

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Resources

A Food Labeling Guide: Guidance for Industry (FDA):
https://www.fda.gov/media/81606/download

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/milk_substitutes_snp.pdf

FDA Final Rule (81 FR 33742): Food Labeling: Revision of the Nutrition and Supplement Facts Labels:
https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/05/27/2016-11867/food-labeling-revision-of-the-nutrition-and-supplement-facts-labels

Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/guide_meal_modifications_snp.pdf

List 17 Beverages – Dairy Alternatives (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/fblist/acceptablefoodslist17.pdf

Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons (CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs/milk-substitutes-for-non-disability-reasons

What's in a Meal Module 9: Milk Component (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs K-12):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module9

NSLP regulations 7 CFR 210.10(d)(2): Fluid milk substitutes for non-disability reasons (USDA):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-210#p-210.10(d)(2)

Reference Guide: Daily Values for Nutrients (FDA):
https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-facts-label/daily-value-nutrition-and-supplement-facts-labels

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Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs

USDA Final Rule: Fluid Milk Substitutions in the School Nutrition Programs (73 FR 52903):
https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-091208

USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/wmfhka-implementation

USDA Memo SP 02-2009: Final Fluid Milk Substitution Rule:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/final-fluid-milk-substitution-rule

USDA Memo SP 07-2010, CACFP 04-2010, and SFSP 05-2010: Questions and Answers: Fluid Milk Substitutions:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/qas-milk-substitution-children-medical-or-special-dietary-needs

Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025:
https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/222/text

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For more information, visit the CSDE's Special Diets 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/ specdiet/identify_allowable_nondairy_milk_substitutes_snp.pdf.

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