

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

This guidance applies to meals and snacks served in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). For information on the SFSP meal patterns and crediting foods, visit the “[Meal Patterns for the SFSP](#)” and “[Crediting Foods in the SFSP](#)” sections of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) SFSP webpage.



Contents

- Overview of USDA’s CN Labeling Program..... 2
- Eligible Products 2
- Benefits of Using CN-labeled Products 2
- Considerations for CN-labeled Products 3
- Identifying CN Labels 3
 - Figure 1. Sample CN label 4
- Meal Pattern Contribution of CN Labels 4
 - MMA contribution 4
 - Grains contribution 4
 - Vegetables contribution 5
 - Fruits contribution..... 5
- Acceptable Documentation 6
 - CN labels with a watermark 6
 - Figure 2. Sample CN Label with a watermark..... 7
 - Figure 3. Sample bill of lading (invoice) for a CN-labeled product..... 7
- Authorized CN Labels and Manufacturers 8
- Resources..... 8



Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Overview of USDA's CN Labeling Program

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) CN Labeling Program is a voluntary federal labeling program for the Child Nutrition Programs. Food manufacturers have the option to include a standardized food crediting statement on their product labels, which the USDA approves prior to use. Manufacturers participating in the CN Labeling Program must have quality control procedures and inspection oversight that meet USDA's requirements.

The USDA does not require that manufacturers make CN-labeled products or that schools and institutions participating in the Child Nutrition Programs purchase foods with CN labels. Purchasing decisions are at the discretion of the local school or institution. If a CN-labeled product is required, the school or institution must clearly state this information in their purchasing specifications.

Eligible Products

CN labels are available only for main dish entrees that provide at least ½ ounce equivalent (oz eq) of the meat/meat alternates (MMA) component in the USDA's meal patterns for the Child Nutrition Programs. Examples include beef patties, cheese or meat pizzas, meat or cheese and bean burritos, egg rolls, and breaded fish portions.

CN labels also typically indicate the contribution of other meal components that are part of these products. For example, CN-labeled pizza may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates, grains, and vegetables components; and CN-labeled breaded chicken nuggets may list contributions to the MMA and grains components.

The SFSP meal patterns indicate the quantities for the MMA component in ounces instead of oz eq. The amount that credits as 1 oz eq or 1 ounce of MMA is the same.

Benefits of Using CN-labeled Products

A CN label statement clearly identifies the contribution of a commercial product toward the meal pattern requirements, based on the USDA's evaluation of the product's formulation. CN labeling provides a warranty that the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements, as printed on the label.

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Considerations for CN-labeled Products

CN labels do not indicate that the product is healthier, more nutritious, or of a higher quality than a similar non-CN labeled product. The CN crediting statement declares the quantities of the creditable food items in a processed food that can be used to meet the meal pattern requirements. While a CN-labeled product is guaranteed to contain a certain quantity of food, it does not indicate that the quality of the food is any different than a non-CN labeled food. Additionally, CN labels do not indicate that the product is safer to eat, or free of pathogens or allergens.

Identifying CN Labels

The CN label is found on the product packaging and will contain the required elements below.

- The CN logo, which is a distinct border with “CN” on each side surrounding the meal pattern contribution statement.
- The meal pattern contribution statement, which provides the specific crediting information for the serving.
- A six-digit product identification number, which is assigned by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the USDA.
- The USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) authorization statement: “Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.”
- The month and year of AMS approval (listed after the FNS authorization statement).
- Other required label elements, including the product name, ingredients statement, inspection legend, company signature/address line, and net weight.



Figure 1 shows an example of a CN label and the required elements. For detailed guidance on CN labels and the required elements, refer to 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](#).

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Figure 1. Sample CN label



- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Product name | 6. FNS authorization statement |
| 2. Ingredients statement | 7. Month and year of AMS approval |
| 3. CN logo | 8. Net weight |
| 4. Meal pattern contribution statement | 9. Company signature/address line |
| 5. Six-digit product identification number | 10. Inspection legend |

Meal Pattern Contribution of CN Labels

CN labels indicate the meal pattern contribution of MMA and other components (such as grains, vegetables, and fruits) in one serving of the product. CN labels do not include milk component crediting. Guidance for each component on a CN label is summarized below.

MMA contribution

A CN-labeled product lists the serving’s MMA contribution in oz eq. The NSLP meal pattern for grades K-12 lists the quantities for the MMA component in oz eq. The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 and the NSLP and ASP meal patterns for preschoolers list the quantities for the MMA component in ounces. MMA are not required in the SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschoolers. The amount that credits as 1 oz eq or 1 ounce of MMA is the same.



Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Grains contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains a grain portion includes one of following crediting terms to indicate if the product credits as whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched.

- The term “oz eq grains” on the CN label indicates that the product meets the WGR criteria for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Child and Adult Care Food program (CACFP). The SFSP meal patterns do not have a WGR requirement. However, SFSP sponsors are encouraged to offer WGR foods in SFSP meals and snacks.
- The term “oz eq grains (enriched)” means the grain portion of the product is primarily made from enriched grains and credits toward the grains component but does not meet the WGR criteria.

The SFSP meal patterns indicate the quantities for the grains/breads component in servings instead of oz eq (refer to [Servings for Grains/Breads in the Summer Food Service Program](#)). One grains/breads serving is slightly less than 1 oz eq.

Vegetables contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains vegetables lists the serving’s contribution to the five vegetable subgroups in cups required in the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12. These subgroups are based on the recommendations of the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), and include dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other.

The SFSP meal patterns do not require vegetable subgroups. However, SFSP sponsors are encouraged to offer a variety of foods from the vegetable subgroups in SFSP meals and snacks. For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program](#).

Fruits contribution

A CN-labeled product that contains fruit lists the serving’s contribution to the fruits component in cups.

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Acceptable Documentation

Acceptable and valid documentation for a CN label includes:

- the original CN label from the product carton;
- or a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton.

CN labels that are photocopied or photographed must be visible and legible. Sponsors of the Child Nutrition Programs must maintain this documentation on file with all other menu records. The CSDE recommends maintaining original CN labels in a designated binder or folder for easy reference and storing digital photos and scans of CN labels in an easily accessible electronic folder. For additional guidance on accepting product documentation, refer to the CSDE's [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the Summer Food Service Program](#).

CN labels with a watermark

Manufacturers may use a CN label with a watermark (refer to figure 2) when the CN logo and contribution statement are on product information other than the actual product carton. Manufacturers may provide a watermarked CN label during the bidding process. Original CN labels on product cartons will not have a watermark.

If the original CN label or a photocopy or photograph of the original CN label is not available, a watermarked CN label is acceptable documentation for the Administrative Review of the Child Nutrition Programs. The watermarked CN label must be attached to a bill of lading (invoice) that contains the product name and CN number (refer to figure 3).

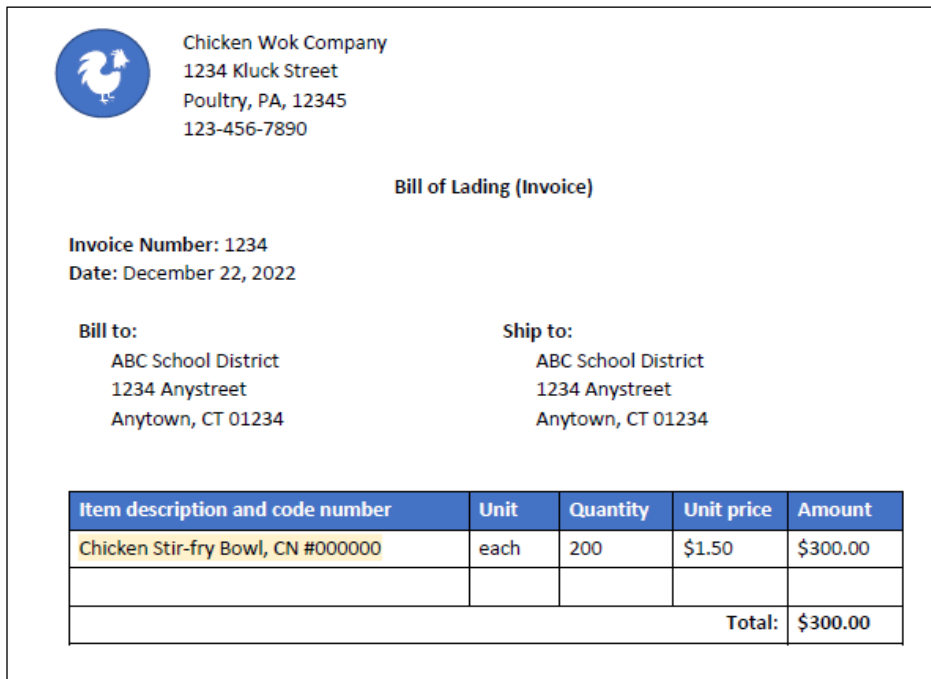
For more information, refer to the USDA's policy memos, [SP 11-2015 \(v2\)](#), [CACFP 10-2015](#), and [SFSP 13-2015: CN Labels Copied with a Watermark Acceptable Documentation](#), and [SP 27-2015](#), [CACFP 09-2015](#), and [SFSP 12-2015: Administrative Review Process Regarding the Child Nutrition \(CN\) Label, Watermarked CN Label and Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#).

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Figure 2. Sample CN Label with a watermark



Figure 3. Sample bill of lading (invoice) for a CN-labeled product



Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Authorized CN Labels and Manufacturers

The AMS publishes a list of manufacturers approved for CN labels and a list of products with CN labels. These lists are updated monthly. For more information, visit the USDA's [Authorized Labels and Manufacturers](#) webpage.

Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the Summer Food Service Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/sfsp/creditingfsp/accepting_processed_product_documentation_sfsp.pdf

Appendix C: The USDA Child Nutrition Labeling Program (USDA's Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs):

https://foodbuyingguide.fns.usda.gov/Content/TablesFBG/USDA_FBG_Appendix_C.pdf

Authorized Manufacturers and Labels (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/usdausdc-authorized-labels-and-manufacturers>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Manual (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/child-nutrition-labeling-manual.pdf>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labels ("Documents/Forms" section of CSDE's SFSP webpage):

<https://portal.ents#CNlabels>

CN Labeling (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/child-nutrition-cn-labeling-program>

Crediting Commercial Processed Products in the SFSP ("Documents/Forms" section of CSDE's SFSP webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/summer-food-service-program/documents#CreditingCommercialProcessedProducts>

Meal Patterns for the SFSP ("How To" Section of CSDE's SFSP webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/summer-food-service-program/how-to#MealPatterns>

Presentation: CN Labels and Product Formulation Statements (USDA):

<https://theicn.org/resources/930/march-2016/109876/manufacturers-product-formulation-statement-pfs03-31-16.pdf>

Servings for Grains/Breads in the Summer Food Service Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/-/media/sde/nutrition/sfsp/mealpattern/servings_grains_breads_sfsp.pdf

USDA Memo SP 11-2015 (v2), CACFP 10-2015, and SFSP 13-2015: CN Labels Copied with a Watermark Acceptable Documentation:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn-labels-copied-watermark-acceptable-documentation>

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):

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

What's in a Meal Module 6: Meal Pattern Documentation (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>

Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the Summer Food Service Program

For more information, visit the [Meal Patterns for the SFSP](#) and [Crediting Foods in the SFSP](#) sections of the CSDE's SFSP webpage, or contact the [Summer Meals 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/sfsp/creditingfsp/cn_labels_sfsp.pdf.

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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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