



United States Department of Agriculture

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# Evaluation and Approval Process for Software Approved by USDA for Certification of Compliance

**USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Meal Pattern Requirements**

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## USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Meal Pattern Requirements

All software approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for use in Certification of Compliance with the NSLP meal pattern requirements will undergo testing and evaluation by USDA.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) conduct the testing and evaluation of commercially available software systems designed to assess menus against the NSLP meal pattern requirements. School meal programs can then use approved software to certify compliance to obtain the additional reimbursement available for schools meeting the meal pattern requirements. Commercially available certification tools (software) will not be evaluated or approved for the breakfast meal pattern. State agencies may authorize the use of the breakfast functionality of software currently approved for Certification of Compliance with the NSLP meal pattern requirements.

Certification of Compliance (menu planning) software is submitted voluntarily by software developers. Evaluators test the submitted Certification of Compliance (menu planning) software to verify that the specifications and requirements have been met. Before software can be approved by USDA, all required functions must be incorporated and working correctly in the software. The evaluators also make recommendations for improvements.

To expedite the approval process, USDA encourages developers to incorporate all requirements during product development, including:

- add test food items, recipes, and menus provided by FNS
- test software before submission, and
- address suggested improvements or modifications quickly between evaluations.

Software is reviewed in the order received. Software developers should plan accordingly as the testing and evaluation process for new software can take one to two years. Evaluations may be delayed when a large numbers of software have been submitted at the same time. There are two parts to the Certification of Compliance (menu planning) software evaluation; the Menu Worksheet Module (meal pattern assessment) and the Simplified Nutrient Assessment (SNA). Software submitted for evaluation may include one or both of these parts. The SNA part is an option for School Food Authorities (SFAs) instead of submitting a full nutrient analysis, using USDA-approved nutrient analysis software, as part of their certification application.

The Menu Worksheet Module (meal pattern assessment) functionality allows the user to enter menus and compare the crediting of the menu items against the current requirements for the lunch meal pattern. The meal pattern assessment should follow the specifications of the FNS certification worksheets.

The software may include the SNA or the full nutrient analysis functionality. Software that is already approved by USDA for nutrient analysis required in the school meal programs may submit with the meal pattern assessment functionality. A SNA does not need to be added to an approved nutrient analysis software.

## Support materials

Support materials for Certification of Compliance (menu planning) software are provided on the FNS Certification of Compliance website. Before submitting for evaluation, software developers must evaluate their software using the evaluation checklist.

The Software Evaluation Coordinators are available to answer questions and address concerns as the software developer moves through the evaluation process.

## Checklist evaluation

When the software developer is ready to submit their software, the developer first completes a preliminary evaluation using the evaluation checklist and sample test menu available from the software support page on the FNS Certification of Compliance website. The developer must provide written documentation that the preliminary checklist evaluation was completed. The developer must add brief text to the evaluation checklist that points the evaluator to the program functionality that meets each requirement.

After completing the preliminary checklist evaluation on the software, the software developer sends the completed evaluation checklist to the software evaluation coordinators and provides access to the software. The software program may be provided via Web access, remote desktop connection, or installation on the FNS testing computers. The evaluators have limited capabilities to install software on their computers. If the developer cannot provide the software by Web access or remote desktop connection, the developer must contact the software evaluation coordinators to discuss options for installation. The developer is responsible for shipping costs for all software and hardware sent to and returned from the evaluators.

The evaluators will begin the process by reviewing the same preliminary checklist evaluation on the software. All required changes and corrections will be emailed to the software developer. The time frame for making the corrections is at the discretion of the developer. After the developer updates the software, the evaluation team will check for the corrections and after all have been made, begin the more in-depth full evaluation.

After the full evaluation, the software developer may have additional corrections to make. When the software is resubmitted, the evaluators will check to ensure the corrections have been made. When the evaluators have determined that the requirements have been met in the software, the software evaluation coordinators will begin the process of obtaining approval.

After the approval letter has been signed by the head of the CNP's Nutrition Education, Training, and Technical Assistance Division the developer will be notified by email message and the software will be added to the [list](#) of software approved for Certification of Compliance with the NSLP meal requirements. A hard copy of the signed approval letter will be sent to the software developer.

## Marketing of Approval Status

Software developers may not market their software as approved by USDA for Certification of Compliance (menu planning) until the email message granting approval has been received. Developers are discouraged from selling or distributing their products for Certification of Compliance (menu planning) purposes until the software is approved.

USDA highly recommends that State agencies or School Food Authorities (SFA) do not purchase software until it is on the approved certification software list on the HMRS website.

The only marketing language permitted by FNS for both print and electronic product literature is as follows: “[Software name] is USDA-approved for Certification of Compliance with the National School Lunch Program meal pattern requirements.” The developer may refer to the approval as “approved by USDA” instead of “USDA-approved” or use “lunch” instead of “National School Lunch Program”. The marketing language may not imply that programs or modules other than the Certification of Compliance (menu planning) software are approved by USDA. Please consult with software evaluation coordinators if you need assistance with acceptable marketing language.

USDA symbols or logos are intended for the official use of the USDA only and must not be used for software marketing materials or websites; logos are expressly excluded from use to imply endorsement of a commercial product or service. The USDA symbol or logo may not be used by anyone outside of USDA without permission. Modified logos that have the appearance of an endorsement made by the Department are also not permitted.

Please ensure that all product literature for software approved by USDA for use in Certification of Compliance with the National School Lunch Program meal pattern requirements is compliant with the marketing language and use of logos requirements.

## Key Changes in the Approved Software

The software developer must resubmit the software if there is a significant change in the software; such as a change in platform, operating system, major upgrade, or new software. Additional examples of significant changes include phasing out old software and introducing new software, change to a Web-based software, creation of a scaled-down or enhanced software for use by selected customers, or modifying a program for use by a specific audience. The software evaluation coordinators will help the software developer determine if the software must be re-evaluated and re-approved.

## How to Submit Certification of Compliance Software for Evaluation

After the developer has completed the checklist and in-house testing, please contact the following Software Evaluation Coordinators to indicate that you are ready to submit software by emailing Natalie Partridge ([Natalie.Partridge@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Natalie.Partridge@fns.usda.gov)), Kaushalya Heendeniya ([Kaushalya.Heendeniya1@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Kaushalya.Heendeniya1@fns.usda.gov)), and Bethany Showell ([Bethany.Showell@fns.usda.gov](mailto:Bethany.Showell@fns.usda.gov)).

## Resources for Developers of Approved Software Programs

### Approved Certification of Compliance Software Programs

<https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/menu-planning/nutrition-standards-school-meals/menu-planning-tools-approved-certification-six-cent>

This is the list of software currently approved by the USDA for Certification of Compliance with the National School Lunch Program meal pattern requirements.

### Approved Nutrient Analysis Software Programs

<https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/menu-planning/nutrient-analysis-software-approved-usda/nutrient-analysis-software-approved-usda>

This is the list of nutrient analysis software currently approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for nutrient analyses required in the school meal programs.

### Certification of Compliance

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/certification-compliance>

The Certification of Compliance website provides information and tools for schools to document compliance with the meal pattern.

### Food Buying Guide for School Meal Programs

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-school-meal-programs>

The Food Buying Guide for School Meal Programs, with yield data for more than 1,200 food items, is designed to help 1) determine the right amount of food to buy, and, 2) for the food-based meal pattern requirements, the specific contribution each food makes toward the meal pattern requirements.

### Food Distribution: Schools/CN USDA Foods Programs

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/schoolscn-usda-foods-programs>

This website provides information about the USDA Foods Program which provides USDA-purchased food to the following nutrition programs: National School Lunch Program; Child and Adult Care Food Program; and the Summer Food Service Program.

## **Nutrition Standards for School Meals**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

This page on the FNS website provides information and support materials about the regulations for school meals in the Final Rule: Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (1/26/12). Included on this page is SP 10-2012: ***Questions & Answers on the Final Rule, “Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs”***, which is often updated.

## **Recipes for Healthy Kids**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/recipes-healthy-kids-cookbook-schools>

The *Recipes for Healthy Kids* is a set of 30 production recipes submitted for the Recipes for Healthy Kids Competition. Inclusion in the approved software is optional.

## **Smart Snacks in School**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/smart-snacks-school>

This website provides information and support materials about the Smart Snacks in School.

## **Software Approval Material for Alternates to USDA Certification Worksheets**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/software-approval-material-alternates-usda-certification-worksheets>

Software approval material was compiled to assist companies who are developing or revising Certification of Compliance/menu planning software for USDA to approve for use in Certification of Compliance with the National School Lunch Program meal pattern requirements.

## **USDA Meal Pattern Requirement Certification Specifications**

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP34-2012specs.pdf>

This specification document for the FNS Certification of Compliance worksheets provides methodology to use to assess the meal pattern. The same specifications apply to software or other alternates to the FNS certification worksheets.

## **USDA Standardized Recipes for School**

The USDA production recipes are found on the FNS Websites:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-standardized-recipe>

The USDA Standardized Recipes for Schools are quantity recipes developed by USDA for use in the CNP.

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