

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
FOOD PACKAGES POLICY OPTIONS STUDY II (SUMMARY)**

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves to safeguard the health of low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to health care and social services.

WIC is administered by 90 State agencies (SAs) in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, four territories (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Island, and U.S. Virgin Islands), and 34 Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs). Each WIC SA is responsible for identifying food products consistent with program requirements for each food package and assigning and issuing food packages to participants consistent with their eligibility category and nutrition needs.

In 2007, USDA introduced a new set of food packages via an Interim Rule based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine, which were implemented by October 2009. The contents of the food packages were finalized via a Final Rule in 2014. The Final Rule clarified some provisions in the Interim Rule and allowed some additional options and substitutions.

This study describes some of the choices WIC SAs made as they exercised the flexibility offered during the implementation of the Final Rule, describes the resulting food packages, and examines the main differences in the food packages between the Interim and Final rules.

Objectives and Methodology

The research questions for this study include:

1. How did WIC SAs respond to the policy options in the Final Rule?

2. For policy options in both the Interim and Final Rules, how did WIC SA responses vary between 2010 and 2015?
3. What specific foods did WIC SAs include in their food lists when implementing the final food packages? How did WIC food lists, and the choices available to WIC participants, compare across WIC SAs?
4. What were the observed changes to WIC food lists, pre- and post-implementation of the Final Rule?
5. Which cost-containment measures did WIC SAs select?

Data for this study were drawn from WIC SA policy documents (State plans, State plan appendixes, and policy manuals) and WIC SA food lists effective at the beginning of FY 2015. This study also compared current data to those collected during an earlier analysis of WIC policy options and allowed foods.¹

Findings

WIC participants had more options available to them after the implementation of the Final Rule.

- Twenty-nine percent of WIC SAs offered whole-wheat pasta as an additional alternative to whole-wheat bread.
- Thirty-nine percent of WIC SAs provided fresh fruits and vegetables to older infants in lieu of jarred infant food, when developmentally appropriate.
- The proportion of WIC SAs offering frozen, canned, and dried fruits and vegetables increased by 9, 8, and 5 percentage points, respectively. The map below details the processed forms of fruits and vegetables allowed by SAs.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, *WIC Food Packages Policy Options Study*, by N. Cole, J. Jacobson, I. Nichols-Barrer, and M. K. Fox, Project Officer: Dr. J. Robare (Alexandria, VA: June 2011).

- The proportion of WIC SAs offering soy-based beverage and tofu as alternatives to milk increased by 21 and 23 percentage points, respectively.

Changes made to the WIC food packages have aligned the food packages even more closely with the recommendations for healthy diets made in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- The proportion of WIC SAs that allowed low-sodium canned beans, peanut butter, and canned vegetables increased.
- Almost three-quarters of WIC SAs (72 percent) adopted the option provided in the Final Rule to allow WIC competent professional authorities to prescribe fat-reduced milks to children aged 12 to 24 months who were at risk of overweight or obesity.

WIC SAs employed a variety of strategies to control costs while increasing options for participants.

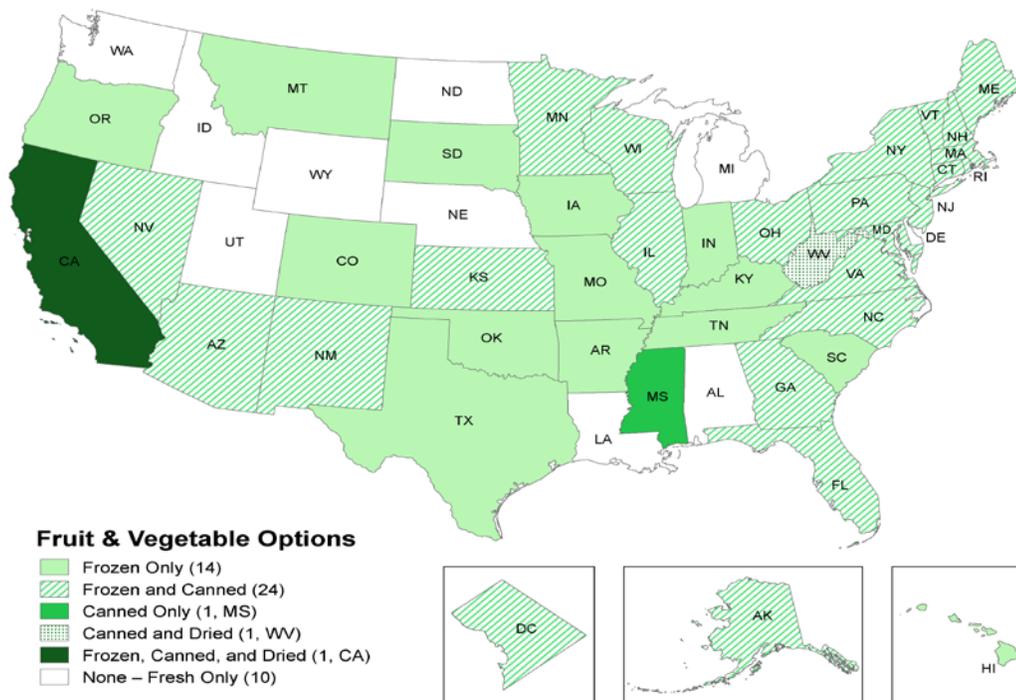
- More than a third of WIC SAs required participants to select the least expensive brand of milk (43 percent), cheese (35 percent), and eggs (38 percent).
- More than half of WIC SAs (67 percent) did not allow purchase of any organic WIC-eligible foods other than fruits and vegetables.

Summary

Although the Final Rule’s changes to the WIC food packages were not as substantial as those changes made by the Interim Rule, the Final Rule gave WIC SAs additional flexibility in food package implementation and in meeting WIC participants’ cultural needs and dietary preferences. The Final Rule also aligned the food packages even more closely with the latest available dietary science while continuing to focus on cost containment.

Processed Forms of Fruits and Vegetables Authorized by WIC State Agencies, FY 2015

(Note: All WIC State Agencies must authorize fresh fruits and vegetables.)



U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *WIC Food Packages Policy Options Study II*, by B. Thorn, N. Huret, D. Bellows, E. Ayo, R. Myers, and E. Wilcox-Cook. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA: October 2015.

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