

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)  
PARTICIPANT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS 2016: FOOD PACKAGE REPORT (SUMMARY)**

**Background**

The United States Department of Agriculture Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to other health, welfare, and social services to women, infants, and children up to age 5. Biennially, the *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics Report* describes a census of all participants in WIC. The most recent report (PC 2016) reflects State management information systems data from April 2016, and this Food Package Report is a supplemental analysis of that data. While PC 2016 summarizes participant characteristics, this report summarizes the food packages, or prescriptions, that State agencies (SAs) issued to these participants.

**The WIC Food Package**

WIC offers seven food packages that vary in the types and amounts of foods they contain. These foods are designed to supplement participants' diets with specific nutrients and foods consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Different foods are prescribed for each participant category. To meet the nutritional needs of each WIC participant, food packages may be individually tailored based on a thorough nutrition assessment.

Federal regulations prescribe minimum nutritional requirements and maximum monthly allowances (MMA) for supplemental foods that vary by participant and food category. Within these parameters, SAs have some discretion in selecting the types and forms of foods prescribed to participants in their State. For example, while the MMA for whole grains is 2 pounds for a child participant, SAs may select which whole-grain alternatives beyond whole-grain bread, including brown rice, bulgur, oats, whole-wheat barley, corn or whole-wheat tortillas, or whole-wheat macaroni products to authorize in participant food packages (see Figure 2).

This report summarizes the foods prescribed to participants and how SAs used the flexibilities available to them in the foods that are prescribed.

**Findings**

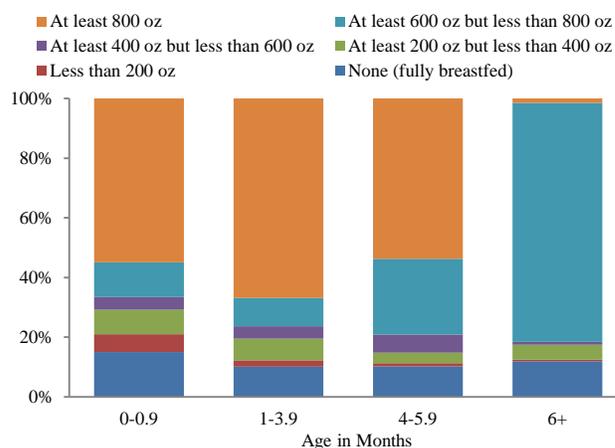
**Formula**

The amount of infant formula prescribed to infants varies by age, breastfeeding status, and formula form, e.g., ready-to-feed, liquid concentrate, or powder. Additionally, formula amounts for partially breastfed infants are individually tailored based on an assessment of nutritional needs and breastfeeding intensity. To allow flexibility in meeting WIC's nutritional and health goals, formula has both an MMA and a full nutritional benefit (FNB). The FNB serves as a common denominator that ensures all participants receive a similar amount of formula regardless of the form issued to them.

Figure 1 shows the quantities of formula prescribed to infants up to 12 months of age. More than half of infants under 6 months are prescribed at least 800 ounces of formula per month; most infants between 6 and 12 months are prescribed between 600 and 800 ounces.

**Figure 1: Quantity of Formula (Ounces) Prescribed to WIC\* Infants by Age, 2016**

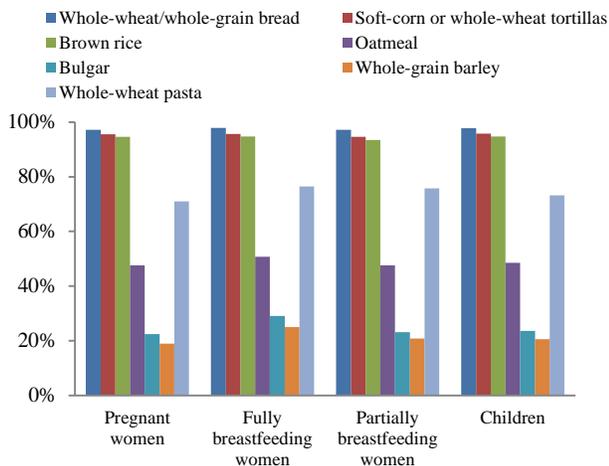
\*The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)



## Whole-Wheat/Grain Products

As part of individually tailoring food packages, women and children participants may choose among the whole-wheat/grain options a State agency allows. Figure 2 describes the share of WIC prescriptions that include each type of whole-wheat/grain product by WIC participant category. Whole-wheat or whole-grain bread, brown rice, and soft corn or whole-wheat tortillas were allowed in the majority of food packages prescribed across participant categories while oatmeal, bulgur, and whole-grain barley were offered less frequently.

**Figure 2: Percent of Food Packages Including Whole-Wheat/Grain Alternatives by Participant Category, 2016**



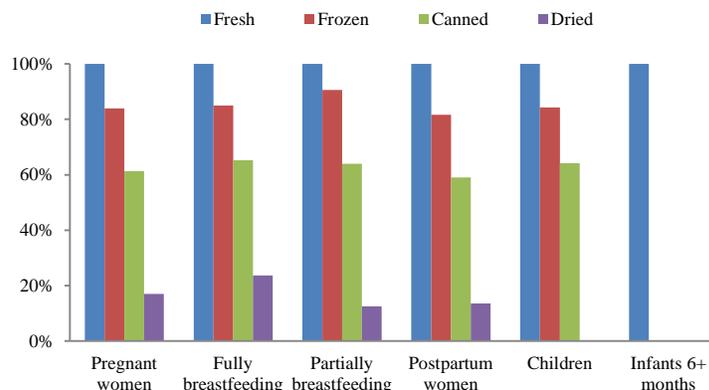
## Fruit and Vegetable Cash-Value Vouchers

WIC issues cash-value vouchers (CVVs) to participants for the purchase of authorized fruits and vegetables. At the time of data collection, the value of the CVVs included in WIC monthly prescriptions was \$8 for children and \$11 for women. State agencies have the option to issue CVVs for infants 9 months or older in place of a portion of infant fruits and vegetables. Partially (mostly) breastfed and fully formula-fed infants may receive a \$4 voucher each month; fully breastfeeding infants may receive an \$8 voucher each month.

In 2016, among those receiving a CVV, the average monthly amount was approximately \$11 for women, \$8 for children, and \$6 for infants. State agencies could allow for CVV purchases of frozen, canned, or dried fruits and vegetables for non-infant packages, in addition to fresh varieties. As shown in Figure 3, most vouchers for women and children allowed for canned or frozen fruits and vegetables

in addition to fresh, and some vouchers also allowed for dried products.

**Figure 3: Percent of Food Packages Including Alternative Forms of Fruits and Vegetables by Participant Category, 2016**



## Changes in WIC Food Prescriptions Since 2012

This report reflects the first WIC PC data to be collected after final implementation of revisions to the food packages. Therefore, the report summarizes comparisons across food prescriptions in 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Key findings include:

- The proportion of infants prescribed formula has continued to decline since 2012. The proportion of infants prescribed any formula fell 0.7 percentage points between 2012 and 2014, and then fell by 0.2 percentage points between 2014 and 2016. These trends may reflect the increasing breastfeeding rate among WIC participants reported in PC 2016.
- The mean quantities of milk prescribed were similar for all categories in 2012 and 2014, but were lower by approximately 4 to 5 percent, or about 1 quart, in 2016.

## For More Information

Patlan, K. L. & Mendelson, M. (2018). *WIC Participant and Program Characteristics 2016: Food Package Report*. Prepared by Insight Policy Research. Alexandria, VA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Project Officer: Anthony Panzera. Available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).