

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
PARTICIPANT AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS 2018 FOOD PACKAGES AND COSTS
(REPORT SUMMARY)**

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) safeguards the health of low-income, nutritionally at-risk women, infants, and children up to age 5 by providing supplemental foods, nutrition education that includes breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health and other social services. In fiscal year (FY) 2018, the period covered by this analysis, total Federal WIC expenditures reported in FNS administrative data were \$5.4 billion, \$3.4 billion of which were post-rebate food costs.

This report supplements FNS administrative data on total food costs by estimating the average monthly food costs for each WIC participant category and food package type. It also estimates total pre- and post-rebate dollars spent on 18 major categories of WIC-eligible foods in FY 2018. This report is an update to the previous WIC Food Package Report for FY 2016 and WIC Food Package Costs Report for FY 2014.¹

Methodology

Total WIC food expenditures per participant category and food package type were estimated by summing the estimated average monthly expenditures for each WIC-eligible food category across each participant category or food package type. Estimated food costs associated with Food Package III, including infant formulas, WIC-eligible nutritionals, and all other supplemental foods were not included in the calculation of food costs for this report. Report estimates were derived from four data sources:

- FY 2018 FNS administrative data on participation and total food costs;
- Food price data from FY 2018 Information Resources Incorporated (IRI) data; and
- Average quantity redeemed per participant per month (calculated from 2018 WIC Participant and Program Characteristics data and WIC Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) study data).

Estimated food costs were calculated for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Results

In FY 2018, participants were issued quantities of foods generally consistent with the maximum monthly allowance (MMA) for each food. Aside from issuance for milk, average issuance quantities were consistent with the MMA for all participant categories except partially breastfeeding women. These women were issued about 70 percent of the MMA for legumes and about 80 percent of the MMA for juice. Among all women and children, issuance for fluid milk was about three-quarters of the MMA because of allowed substitutions for milk (i.e., soy-based beverage, tofu, yogurt, and cheese).

In FY 2018, average monthly post-rebate food package cost across 52 State agencies, excluding total costs for Food Package III, was \$35.79. Without rebates from infant formula and infant food manufacturers, average monthly food package costs would have been \$57.60.

Examining post-rebate average monthly food costs by participant category, infant food costs were the highest at \$44.97, followed by breastfeeding women (\$37.76), pregnant women (\$37.33), children (\$31.78), and postpartum women (\$30.72). See Table 1 for the pre- and post-rebate food package costs for all participant categories.

Consistent with previous studies and FNS administrative data, this report finds that rebates for infant formula and infant foods provide significant cost savings. In FY 2018, rebate contracts with infant formula and infant foods manufacturers reduced the estimated average monthly cost per person for infants from \$138.64 (pre-rebate) to \$44.97 (post-rebate).

Fruits and vegetables made up the largest share of post-rebate food costs in FY 2018 (19.5 percent) followed by infant formula (18.2 percent) and cow's milk (15.3 percent). Remaining food items each contributed less than 10 percent of total post-rebate food costs. See Table 2 for a complete breakdown of food costs by food item category.

¹ Because of key methodological differences between this report and the previous Food Cost Report (using FY 2014

data), comparison between the two reports should be made with caution (see the full report for details).

Table 1: Estimated Average Monthly WIC Pre- and Post-Rebate Food Package Costs per Participant by Participant Category, FY 2018¹

Participant Category	Percent of Participants	Pre- Rebate Food Package Cost	Post- Rebate Food Package Cost
Total Participants	100.0	\$57.60	\$35.79
Pregnant women	9.4	\$37.33	\$37.33
Breastfeeding women	8.2	\$37.76	\$37.76
Postpartum non-breastfeeding women	7.0	\$30.72	\$30.72
Infants	23.3	\$138.64	\$44.97
Children	52.1	\$31.78	\$31.78

¹ Total Food Package III costs are not included in these estimates (see appendix D of the report for additional detail on the calculation of total estimated Food Package III costs).

WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Table 2: Estimated Annual Contribution to WIC Food Costs by WIC-Eligible Food Category, FY 2018, in Millions of Dollars¹

WIC- Eligible Food Category	Unit for Price Analysis	Pre- Rebate Contribution (percent)	Pre- Rebate Contribution (\$ millions)	Post- Rebate Contribution (percent)	Post- Rebate Contribution (\$ millions)
Total Estimated Amount	–	100.0	\$4,544.1	100.0	\$2,823.4
Fruits and vegetables ²	Dollars	12.1	\$550.2	19.5	\$550.2
Infant formula	Fluid ounces	49.1	\$2,230.5	18.2	\$514.5
Cow's milk	Fluid ounces	9.5	\$432.1	15.3	\$432.1
Breakfast cereal	Ounces	5.3	\$242.7	8.6	\$242.7
Juice	Fluid ounces	5.2	\$234.3	8.3	\$234.3
Cheese	Ounces	4.5	\$206.0	7.3	\$206.0
Infant fruits and vegetables	Ounces	3.6	\$165.0	5.8	\$162.9
Whole-wheat/whole-grain bread	Ounces	3.1	\$139.4	4.9	\$139.4
Eggs	Dozens	2.0	\$90.3	3.2	\$90.3
Yogurt	Ounces	1.5	\$69.4	2.5	\$69.4
Legumes	Ounces	0.9	\$42.8	1.5	\$42.8
Peanut butter	Ounces	0.9	\$39.7	1.4	\$39.7
Infant cereal	Ounces	0.8	\$38.6	1.3	\$36.2
Soy-based beverage	Fluid ounces	0.5	\$24.5	0.9	\$24.5
Other whole grains	Ounces	0.3	\$14.3	0.5	\$14.3
Infant food meat	Ounces	0.3	\$12.4	0.4	\$12.3
Canned fish	Ounces	0.2	\$10.5	0.4	\$10.5
Tofu	Ounces	< 0.1	\$1.1	< 0.1	\$1.1

¹ Total Food Package III costs are not included in these estimates (see appendix D of the report for additional detail on the calculation of total estimated Food Package III costs).

² Estimated costs for fruits and vegetables are based on CVVs/CVBs (cash-value vouchers/cash-value benefits) of \$8 for children and \$11 for women.

WIC = Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

For More Information

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. *Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Participant and Program Characteristics 2018 Food Packages and Costs Report*, by Nicole Kline, Kevin Meyers Mathieu, and Jeff Marr. Project Officer: Grant Lovellette. Alexandria, VA., November 2020. Available online at: www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis.