



## **ACTION ALERT**

### **Help Kids! Help Farmers!**

**Submit your comments supporting USDA's proposed new nutritional guidelines for the WIC food program which will allow millions of WIC program participants to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets. Urge USDA to make these revisions even stronger by (a) incorporating the Institute of Medicine's full recommendations for the amount of fruits and vegetables necessary for a nutritionally adequate children's food package, and (b) coordinating the proposed new, expanded use of the WIC "cash-value food instrument" with the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), including automatically allowing WIC FMNP-qualified markets and farmers to redeem the new WIC cash-value food instrument.**

**November 6<sup>th</sup> Deadline—Please Respond Now!**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) serves more than 8 million nutritionally-insecure women, children, and infants through the provision of food, nutrition counseling, and access to healthcare services. For the first time in more than 25 years, the USDA is proposing to update the nutritional guidelines of the WIC food program. The changes advocated by USDA would make significant improvements in the variety of healthy foods available to families that might otherwise not be able to afford them, and allow millions of families to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at their local farmers' markets.

However, while the new guidelines proposed by USDA add much-needed servings of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to WIC food packages, the proposal reduces the monthly allowances for fruits and vegetables originally recommended by the Institute of Medicine. In addition, the proposal leaves unanswered numerous questions about how the WIC "cash value food instrument" will be redeemed in farmers' markets.

*Your letter or e-mail is crucial to ensuring that USDA adopts healthy new WIC food package standards consistent with all the important nutritional guidelines set forth by the IOM, and implements the new rule in a manner that facilitates qualified farmers' market participation.*

## **Key Points:**

(1) USDA's proposed revisions to the WIC nutritional guidelines will vastly improve the availability of a variety of healthy foods to the more than 8 million WIC program participants.

Overall, the proposed rule would make WIC nutritional guidelines more consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. For the first time, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains would be made available under the packages. In addition, the revisions would reduce participants' consumption of saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol, while providing for increased uptake of important nutrients like iron and calcium. Tofu and soy milk are also approved as substitutes for dairy products under the new guidelines, providing alternatives to participants who eschew cheese or milk for cultural or medical reasons.

(2) While the USDA's proposed rule would make significant positive changes in the current WIC nutritional guidelines, the agency's insistence on ensuring that these changes must be "cost neutral" (not increase the overall cost of the program) led to the reduction or elimination of certain important foods included in the food packages developed by IOM at USDA's request.

The IOM recommended that children receive \$8 per month for fruits and vegetables and mothers \$10, while the USDA is proposing only \$6 and \$8, respectively. In addition, the IOM recommendations specifically cited yogurt as a nutrient-dense food that should be included in the revised guidelines, but USDA eliminated its availability under the program due to its slightly higher cost as dairy substitute. While USDA's proposed voucher levels are an excellent beginning, the IOM recommended cash-level values should be secured as soon as possible, and USDA should work with Congress to secure additional funding for the reinstatement of the healthy foods that would be eliminated in the new WIC packages.

(3) The proposed program revisions would allow participants to purchase fruits and vegetables at local farmers' markets, but provide scant detail about how this aspect of the program would be facilitated or administered.

Farmers' markets play an increasingly pivotal role in bringing fresh, locally produced fruits and vegetables to the nation's communities, including places that have been traditionally under served by other forms of affordable, retail food outlets. Through local programs and the federal-state WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), many WIC recipients already have access to fresh produce from local farmers. The new proposal will expand access, but should be closely coordinated with the successful delivery of WIC benefits through the WIC FMNP. Farmers' markets already qualified as vendors under WIC FMNP should be automatically able to redeem the new WIC benefits.

## **Further Background**

Established in the 1966 Child Nutrition Act and fully implemented in the early 1970's, the WIC program was created to "safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk." Through federal grants to states, WIC provides supplemental

food, nutritional counseling, and healthcare referrals more than 8 million clients at a current estimated cost of a little more than \$37 a month per individual. Pregnant women, nursing and non-nursing postpartum women, and children up to five years of age who meet federal poverty guidelines are eligible for program participation.

The USDA uses science-based nutrition data to establish “food packages” intended to serve the specific nutritional needs of children and women in different stages of development. The current food packages used to provide supplemental food have not been revised since 1980, prompting Congress, the medical and scientific community, and interest groups to call for updated WIC nutritional guidelines. In response, USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) contracted with the IOM in 2003 to independently review the WIC food packages and make recommendations for changes to the program’s nutritional guidelines.

Following completion of the 22-month study, the IOM published its findings and a revised set of recommended WIC food packages in April of 2005. Incorporating most of these recommendations, USDA published its proposed rule in the Federal Register on August 7, 2006 (<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/06-6627.htm>).

The WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program was established by Congress in 1992 to provide WIC participants with increased access to fresh, unprocessed fruits and vegetables. The program currently operates in 45 states and 5 Tribal Territories, and served approximately 2.6 million children in 2005. In addition to food benefits, the program provides nutrition education about the health benefits of incorporating fresh fruits and vegetables into a balanced diet, and practical instruction concerning the preparation and storage of fresh produce. Individual farmers, roadside stands, and farmers markets are eligible to become vendors subject to state agency approval.

**Comments should be addressed to:**

**Letters:** Director Patricia N. Daniels, Supplemental Food Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Services, USDA, 3101 Parke Center Drive, Room 528, Alexandria, VA 22302.

**Email:** Send comments to [WICHQ-SFPD@fns.usda.gov](mailto:WICHQ-SFPD@fns.usda.gov). Include “Docket ID Number 0584-AD77, WIC Food Packages Rule” in the subject line of the message.

**Web site:** Go to <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments through the link at the Supplemental Food Programs Division Web site.

**A template for your letter or e-mail follows.**

<Date>

Director Patricia N. Daniels  
Supplemental Food Programs Division  
Food and Nutrition Services, USDA  
3101 Parke Center Drive, Room 528  
Alexandria, VA 22302

RE: Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children  
(WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages; Proposed Rule, published in the Federal Register  
on August 7, 2006 [Docket No. 0584-AD77]

Dear Director Daniels,

<<Introduction: Include your name and state your strong general support for the proposed revisions to the WIC food packages and your specific strong support for inclusion of vouchers to purchase fruits and vegetables and the ability to use them at farmers' markets.>>

<<Body of the e-mail or letter: Discuss any changes you think USDA should make to the proposed rule, including:

(a) incorporating the Institute of Medicine's full recommendations for the amount of fruits and vegetables necessary for a nutritionally adequate children's food package as soon as possible,

(b) coordinating the proposed new, expanded use of the WIC "cash-value food instrument" with the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), including automatically allowing WIC FMNP-qualified markets and farmers to redeem the new WIC cash-value food instrument,

And (c) any other points you may wish to make.>>

Sincerely,  
<Name>  
<Address>

***Please help ensure adoption of the new WIC food package with improvements that will include increased fruit and vegetable allowances and facilitate full participation by local farmers' markets.***

***Remember to submit your comments to USDA on or before November 6<sup>th</sup>!***