



DATE: March 30, 2026

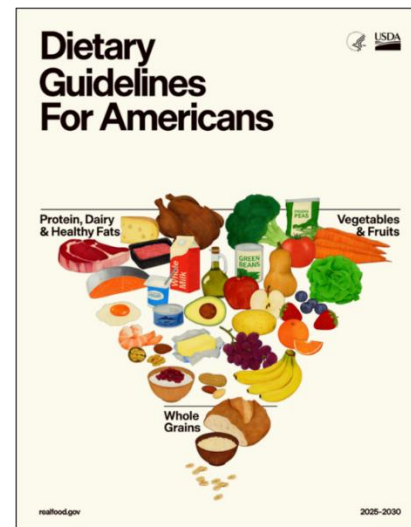
SUBJECT: WIC Policy Memorandum #2026-4
Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030 – Eat Real Food

TO: Regional Directors, Special Nutrition Programs, All Regions
WIC State Agency Directors, All State Agencies

On January 7, 2026, the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030](#) (*Guidelines*). These *Guidelines* call on every American to eat more real food. Farmers, ranchers, health care professionals, insurers, educators, community leaders, industry, and lawmakers across all levels of government are encouraged to join in this critical effort. America's future depends on what we grow, what we serve, and what we choose to eat. These *Guidelines* place whole, nutrient-dense food back at the center of our diets. You can access the new edition, the *New Pyramid*, and the [daily servings guide](#) at <https://realfood.gov/>.

In summary, these *Guidelines* have been updated by:

- Prioritizing a variety of high quality, nutrient-dense protein foods at every meal from animal sources, including eggs, poultry, seafood, and red meat, as well as a variety of plant-sourced protein foods including beans, peas, lentils, legumes, nuts, seeds, and soy.



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- Encouraging a variety of dairy fat options, including whole and reduced-fat milk.
- Promoting the consumption of vegetables and fruits of all types, including fresh, frozen, canned, juiced, and dried, throughout the day.
- Incorporating healthy fats from whole foods such as meats, poultry, eggs, seafood, nuts, seeds, full-fat dairy, olives, and avocados.
- Prioritizing fiber-rich whole grains while significantly reducing refined grains, especially those high in added sugars.
- Limiting highly processed foods, added sugars, and refined carbohydrates.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) plays an important role in supporting healthy development during the critical life stages of pregnancy, postpartum, breastfeeding, infancy, and childhood. While release of the new *Guidelines* does not immediately impact program requirements, USDA is actively identifying opportunities to further align the WIC food packages with the key recommendations in the *Guidelines* and will use the rulemaking process to propose any changes to program requirements. The *Guidelines* will also inform the review of the WIC food packages, which is required by Congress at least every 10 years.¹

Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins strongly encourages WIC State agencies to familiarize themselves with the *Guidelines* and consider how the key recommendations can be incorporated into program operations to promote healthy outcomes and healthy families.

WIC State Agency Flexibilities

While all WIC-eligible foods must align with program requirements, State agencies have

¹ Section 17 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, as amended (42 U.S.C. 1786).

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significant flexibility to determine which brands, types, and forms to authorize for their WIC food lists. The historic release of the *Guidelines* offers State agencies the opportunity to critically evaluate how they can update their WIC authorized food lists to prioritize options that promote whole, nutrient-dense protein foods, dairy, vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, and whole grains while limiting added sugars and refined carbohydrates.

State agencies can also establish criteria in addition to Federal minimum specifications. Attachment A outlines examples of flexibilities State agencies can implement to further align the WIC food packages with the goals of the updated *Guidelines*. State agencies and local WIC staff are invited to share their creative ideas with their Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Offices, as they could become the model for other WIC programs.

Substitution Options

State agencies are encouraged to offer substitution options that support the goals of the *Guidelines* and best support healthy outcomes for WIC participants. [WIC Policy Memorandum #2025-5, Implementing Revisions to the WIC Food Packages: Flexibilities to Support Healthy Choices, Healthy Outcomes, and Healthy Families](#), outlines substitution options and requirements for State agencies.

Nutrition Education

WIC nutrition education is a program benefit that should be leveraged to reinforce the goals of the *Guidelines* to help participants make lasting changes to improve their long-term health. State agencies are reminded that the [WIC Works Resource System](#) is a tool for WIC staff that supports their nutrition education efforts. Resources available include staff training, healthy recipes, and other educational materials like [nutrient infographics](#) that highlight the importance of iron, choline, folate, vitamin D, iodine, and zinc as part of a healthy diet during pregnancy, postpartum, breastfeeding, infancy, and

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childhood. USDA is reviewing and will update, as needed, WIC nutrition education resources to ensure alignment with the new *Guidelines*.

State agencies should distribute this information to local WIC agencies and may direct any questions to their respective [FNS Regional Office](#). We look forward to continuing our work together to support healthy choices, healthy outcomes, and healthy families.

Sincerely,

Sarah Widor
Acting Associate Administrator
Supplemental Nutrition and Safety Programs
Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture

ATTACHMENT A

**State Agency Flexibilities to Further Align the WIC Food Packages
with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030***

WIC food packages should be tailored to each WIC participant's individual needs following a nutrition assessment.

Prioritize Protein Foods at Every Meal

High-quality, nutrient-dense protein foods should be consumed with every meal as part of a healthy dietary pattern. The WIC food packages provide protein-rich foods like milk, eggs, beans, legumes, and canned fish. WIC staff should offer information to participants about the amount of protein foods they need each day and encourage full redemption of protein foods offered through their WIC benefit.

Consume Dairy

Dairy is an excellent source of protein, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. Milk is included in the WIC food packages for women and children. Depending on the participant's age and nutritional needs, they may be prescribed whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, or non-fat milk. WIC staff should:

1. Prescribe milk with higher fat content, when allowable in accordance with WIC requirements at 7 CFR 246.10.
2. Offer information to participants about the important nutrients dairy provides and encourage dairy consumption through full redemption of their WIC benefit for dairy.

Focus on Whole Grains

Whole grains contain a variety of nutrients, including fiber, and are an important part of a healthy diet. Whole wheat or whole grain bread and whole grain breakfast cereal are

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included in the WIC food packages for women and children. WIC State agencies are encouraged to:

- Require that more than the Federal minimum of 75 percent of the breakfast cereals on their food list meet whole grain criteria (i.e., must contain whole grain as the first ingredient).
- Establish criteria that go beyond the minimum Federal requirement of a whole grain listed as the first ingredient for breakfast cereal and only authorize cereals that are 100 percent whole grain.
- Authorize a variety of whole grain options to offer as a substitute to whole wheat or whole grain bread such as whole grain oats, brown rice, pita, and naan.²

Eat Vegetables and Fruits Throughout the Day

Vegetables and fruits are rich in important nutrients, such as vitamin C, potassium, and fiber, and vary in the amounts of nutrients they provide. The WIC food packages' cash-value benefit (CVB) provides participants with access to a variety of colorful, nutrient-dense produce. For participants with juice in their food package, they have the option of substituting an additional CVB in place of their full juice amount. WIC agencies should:

- Authorize all forms of fruits and vegetables (fresh, canned, frozen, dried) with no added sugars for women and children.
- Encourage families to eat vegetables and fruits in their original form by making the \$3 CVB substitute for juice the default, with juice issued upon request in the food packages for women and children.^{3,4}

² For a full list of allowable whole grain options, see 7 CFR 246.10 (1)(12), Table 4

³ See [Revisions in the WIC Food Packages Final Rule](#).

⁴ In accordance with 7 CFR 246.10 and 246.11, WIC State agencies must inform participants about the standard foods in their food package, including juice.

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- Exercise the option for older infants (6 months through 11 months) to allow a CVB substitution for at least half the maximum monthly allowance of infant fruits and vegetables. If exercising this option, State agencies should authorize fresh, canned, and frozen forms with no added sugars.

Limit Highly Processed Foods, Added Sugars, and Refined Carbohydrates

WIC provides a variety of whole, nutrient-dense foods for participants to prepare at home. Most WIC-eligible foods have no added sugars.

- WIC-eligible foods include breakfast cereals containing ≤ 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce and, as a substitute for milk based on an individual nutrition assessment, yogurt containing ≤ 16 grams of added sugar per 8 ounces and plant-based milk alternatives containing ≤ 10 grams of added sugar per 8 ounces. State agencies are strongly encouraged to further restrict added sugars in these and other WIC-eligible foods by establishing lower added sugars limits.
- WIC regulations do not prohibit artificial flavors, petroleum-based dyes, artificial preservatives, and low-calorie and non-nutritive sweeteners in WIC-eligible foods. However, State agencies are strongly encouraged to establish criteria that exclude or limit specific WIC-eligible foods that contain these ingredients from their list of authorized foods.

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