

Background

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides supplemental foods to over 9 million participants. The WIC food packages provide supplemental foods designed to meet the special nutritional needs of low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, non-breastfeeding postpartum women, infants and children up to five years of age who are at nutritional risk.

In 2009, USDA introduced a new set of food packages based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine. The new food packages align with the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The food packages better promote and support the establishment of successful, long-term breastfeeding, provide WIC participants with a wider variety of foods including fruits and vegetables and whole grains, and provide WIC State agencies greater flexibility in prescribing food packages to accommodate the cultural food preferences of WIC participants.

The WIC program is administered by 90 WIC State agencies, including 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 (ITO's). Each is responsible for identifying food items eligible for each food package; assigning food packages to participants consistent with their eligibility category; and issuing foods or food instruments to participants.

This study describes some of the choices State agencies made as they exercised the flexibility offered during the implementation and describes the resulting food packages.

Objectives

Research questions defined for this study include:

- How did WIC State agencies respond to optional provisions of the interim rule?
- What specific foods did WIC State agencies include in the revised food packages?
- How did the included foods change with implementation of the interim rule?

Findings

Many, but not all, of the optional provisions of the interim rule were widely adopted by WIC State agencies. For example, of the 90 WIC State agencies for which data are available:

Whole Grain Alternatives to 100% Whole Wheat Bread (see Map 1):

- 81 authorize brown rice (47 States, 34 ITO's/Territories)
- 74 authorize tortillas (43 States, 31 ITO's/Territories)
- 39 allow three types of whole grains (26 States, 13 ITO's/Territories)

Foods Authorized:

- 38 authorize processed forms of vegetables (i.e. frozen and canned) in addition to fresh (21 States, 17 ITO's/Territories)
- 35 authorize processed forms of fruits (i.e. frozen and canned) in addition to fresh (21 States, 14 ITO's/Territories)
- 27 allow 3 types of canned fish (17 States, 10 ITO's/Territories)

Cash Value Voucher Redemption Policies:

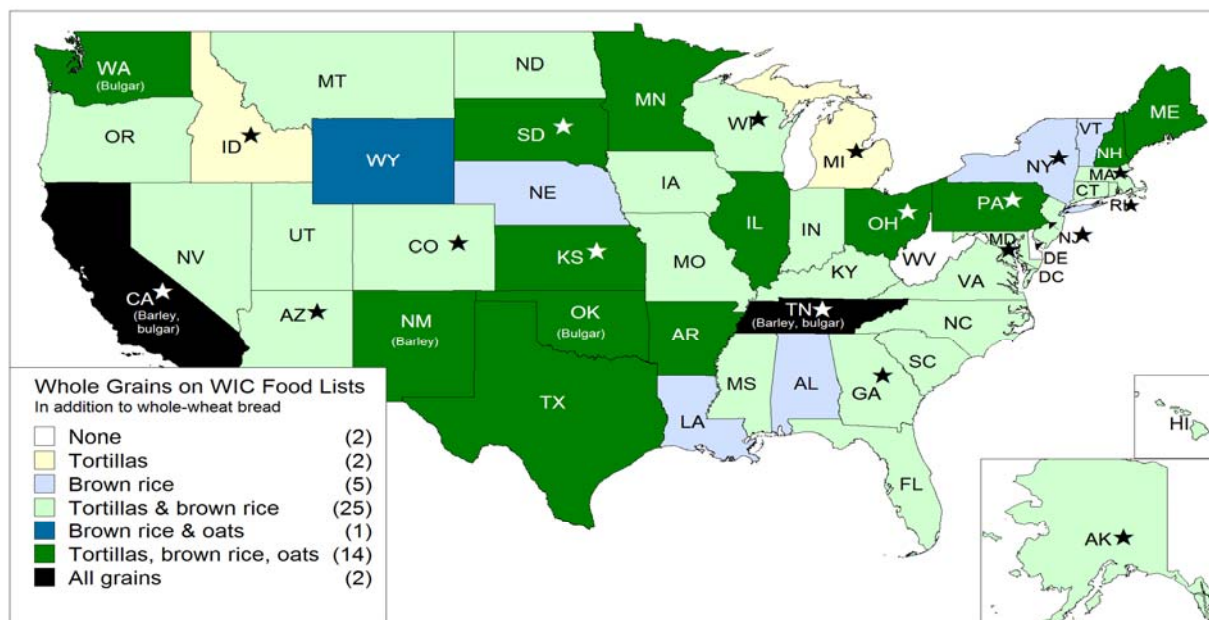
- 55 authorize clients to pay the difference if fruits and vegetables exceed the Cash Value Voucher (38 States, 17 ITO's/Territories)

- ## Summary

The WIC food packages implemented in October 2009 are substantially different from those of earlier years. WIC State agencies now have the ability to offer a variety of food options to better meet the needs and health of WIC participants. The addition of fruits, vegetables, whole grains (which were widely implemented), and elimination of whole milk for women and older children is expected to have a large impact on WIC participants' dietary intakes.

- 74 allow all milk fat contents except for whole milk for women and children age 2+ (44 States and 30 ITO's/Territories)
- 62 allow 10 to 25 whole grain breakfast cereals (37 States, 25 ITO's/Territories)

Map 1—Whole Grain Alternatives to Whole-Wheat Bread, October 2009



Notes: A star indicates that whole-wheat rolls and/or buns are authorized on the WIC food list.
Bulgur and barley are authorized in the States where noted.

Download full report at www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/WIC/WIC.htm and public use data files at www.fns.usda.gov/ora/menu/Published/WIC/WIC.htm.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, *WIC Food Packages Policy Options Study* by Nancy Cole, Jessica Jacobson, Ira Nichols-Barrer, and Mary Kay Fox.
Project Officer, Dr. Joseph F. Robare. Alexandria, VA: June 2011.

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