



INTRODUCTION

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a Federal program that provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks served to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. The CACFP also provides reimbursements for meals served to children and youth participating in at-risk afterschool care programs, children residing in emergency shelters, and adults over the age of 60 or living with a disability and enrolled in day care facilities. CACFP contributes to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children and adults in the United States.

This revision to the “Crediting Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program,” referred to as the Crediting Handbook, reflects updates to nutrition standards which became effective July 1, 2024¹. The meal patterns reflect recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*², the National Academy of Medicine and the American Academy of Pediatrics. The meal patterns focus on providing a variety of nutrient-dense foods such as whole grains, vegetables, fruits, protein, and fluid milk, while reducing the amount of added sugars, sodium, and highly processed foods. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reimburses CACFP operators for the meals served to children or adult participants, not for individual foods. A meal is reimbursable if it contains creditable foods (foods which credit toward the meal components) in the required

amounts outlined in the CACFP meal patterns. The CACFP meal patterns are shown on pages 9-11 of this handbook.

The “Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs,” commonly referred to as the Food Buying Guide (FBG), is the primary resource used to determine the contribution that foods make toward the meal pattern requirements. The Crediting Handbook is a supplementary resource to the FBG and contains additional information on creditable foods served in CACFP settings. The Crediting Handbook provides information on a wide variety of foods but does not include all foods that can be served in the CACFP. Contact your sponsoring organization or State agency if you need assistance with determining if a food is creditable in the CACFP. Understanding how to credit foods served in the CACFP is a critical component of program integrity. To ensure institutions understand Program requirements and potential consequences of noncompliance, State agencies should prioritize sponsor training in how to credit foods and other technical assistance topics.

The Crediting Handbook does not cover the infant meal pattern requirements. For information on infant feeding, please see the Team Nutrition resource, “Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.” Please note minimum creditable amounts do not apply to the infant meal pattern. Contact your State agency or sponsoring organization with questions regarding infant meal pattern requirements.

¹ While this rulemaking is effective July 1, 2024, USDA is gradually phasing in required changes over time. See <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524>

² *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*

GETTING STARTED: WORDS TO KNOW



Words to Know

Child Nutrition Programs (CNP)

Federal nutrition assistance programs administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) that provide healthy food to participants. These include the **Child and Adult Care Food Program** (CACFP), **National School Lunch Program** (NSLP), **School Breakfast Program** (SBP), **Summer Food Service Program** (SFSP), **Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer** (Summer EBT), **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** (FFVP), and **Special Milk Program** (SMP). Administered by State agencies, each of these programs helps promote nutrition security by reimbursing organizations such

as CACFP centers, day care homes, schools, and at-risk afterschool programs for providing healthy meals and snacks to participants.

Combination Food

A single serving of a food item that contains two or more meal components. Common examples of combination foods are pizza, chef salads, and a hamburger on a bun with lettuce and tomatoes.

Example: Hamburger on a bun with lettuce and tomatoes

Meats/Meat Alternates	Hamburger patty
Grains	Hamburger bun
Vegetables	Lettuce and tomatoes