

Crediting **Meats/Meat Alternates** in the **Child Nutrition Programs** Tip Sheet



Meats/Meat Alternates (M/MA) are a required meal component for reimbursable lunches and suppers in Child Nutrition Programs (CNP), such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). They are also a required meal component for lunches served under the Preschool meal pattern. M/MA are not required for a reimbursable breakfast in CNP. M/MA may be offered in place of, or in combination with, grains in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and up to three times a week in the Preschool and CACFP Breakfast meal patterns. M/MA may also be served as one of the two required meal components for a reimbursable snack in CNP. When planning menus, remember:

- M/MA are measured in ounce equivalents (oz eq) of the edible portion as served. An oz eq of M/MA is the amount of the food that represents 1 ounce of edible portion of lean meat without the bone. See page 2 for a list of creditable M/MA commonly served in CNP and their 1 oz eq amounts.
- The M/MA amount offered **must provide a minimum of 0.25 oz eq per serving to be creditable in CNP.**
- The minimum creditable amounts do not apply to the CACFP infant meal pattern.

Specific Program Requirements

School Meals: SBP & NSLP

SBP has daily and weekly ounce equivalency requirements for the combined grains and M/MA component at breakfast that may be met with M/MA, grains, or a combination of both. **NSLP** has daily minimum requirements for M/MA as well as weekly minimums and maximums at lunch, depending on grade level. Schools may exceed the weekly maximum for M/MA, provided that meals (on average) meet the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.*

SBP Combined Grains and M/MA Daily and Weekly Requirements

Grades	Daily Min (oz eq)	Weekly Min (oz eq)	Weekly Max (oz eq)
K-5	1	7	10
6-8	1	8	10
9-12	1	9	10

NSLP M/MA Daily and Weekly Requirements

Grades	Daily Min (oz eq)	Weekly Min (oz eq)	Weekly Max (oz eq)
K-5	1	8	10
6-8	1	9	10
9-12	2	10	12

For more information, check out “Offering Meats and Meat Alternates at School Breakfast” at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offering-meats-and-meat-alternates-school-breakfast.

NSLP afterschool snack service: 1 oz eq M/MA for all ages until July 1, 2025 (then ½ oz eq M/MA for ages 1–5, 1 oz eq M/MA for ages 6–18), if served as one of the two components.

*Effective July 1, 2027, added sugars must be less than 10 percent of calories per week in SBP and NSLP.

More training, menu planning, and nutrition education materials can be found at TeamNutrition.USDA.gov.

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Specific Program Requirements (continued)

CACFP & Preschool Meals

CACFP has minimum M/MA requirements for children and adults that vary by meal/snack and age.

Preschool meals, served through NSLP and SBP, follow the same meal pattern as CACFP.

CACFP M/MA Minimum Requirements (oz eq)

Age (Years)	Breakfast* (When Served in Place of Grains)	Lunch & Supper	Snack** (When Served)
1-2	½	1	½
3-5	½	1½	½
6-12	1	2	1
13-18	1	2	1
Adult	2	2	1

SFSP: For all ages, 2 oz eq M/MA at lunch and supper; 1 oz eq, if offered, at snack; no requirement at breakfast.

For more information, check out “Serving Meats and Meat Alternates at Breakfast” at

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/serving-meats-and-meat-alternates-breakfast-cacfp

*M/MA is not required at breakfast but may be served in place of the entire grains requirement **up to three times per week**. 1 oz eq of M/MA replaces 1 oz eq of grains.

**M/MA is not required at snack but may be served as one of two required meal components.



What To Serve and How Much?

Below are common M/MA with the amount needed to provide 1 oz eq M/MA.

Common Creditable Meats* (oz eq)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beef • Canadian bacon • Chicken • Duck • Fish • Game meat** (bison, venison (deer)) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ham (fresh) • Lamb • Pork (fresh or mildly cured) • Pork sausage • Shellfish • Turkey 	1 oz cooked lean meat = 1 oz eq
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bologna • Frankfurter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knockwurst • Vienna sausage 	1 oz serving = 1 oz eq
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surimi seafood - Surimi seafood is pasteurized, ready-to-eat, restructured seafood usually made from pollock (fish). 		1.0 oz = 0.25 oz eq 3.0 oz = 1.0 oz eq 4.4 oz = 1.5 oz eq

*Not an exhaustive list

**All purchased game meat must meet applicable Federal, State, local, and Tribal food safety regulations and inspection requirements. Donated, uninspected wild game served by program operators which primarily serve Native Americans is creditable in Child Nutrition Programs.

Common Creditable Meat Alternates* (oz eq)



Bean soup (Ready-to-Serve)

- Check the “Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs” (FBG) for specific items that are creditable. Some commercially prepared products, such as bean soup, are listed in the FBG.**

½ cup = 1 oz eq



Cheese

- Natural and processed cheese and cheese substitutes such as:
 - American, Cheddar, Mozzarella, Provolone, Swiss, Feta, Brie, Parmesan, Romano
- Cottage cheese, Ricotta cheese
- Cheese food, cheese food substitutes, cheese spread***

1 oz = 1 oz eq

2 oz (or ¼ cup) = 1 oz eq

2 oz = 1 oz eq



Eggs, whole (fresh, frozen, dried)

½ large egg = 1 oz eq



Beans, peas, and lentils cooked

- Beans, peas, and lentils may credit as a meat alternate or vegetable, but not as both for the same item at the same meal. However, schools have the option to count beans, peas, and lentils offered as a M/MA at lunch toward the weekly beans, peas, and lentils vegetable subgroup requirement.

¼ cup = 1 oz eq



Nuts & seeds



Serve with caution to children under age 4 and older adult participants in the CACFP. See: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/reducing-risk-choking-young-children-mealtimes>

1 oz = 1 oz eq



Pasta or noodles made from 100 percent bean/legume flour

- To credit as a M/MA, it must be served with an additional visible M/MA of at least 0.25 oz eq per serving. For example, 0.25 oz eq cheese sprinkled over the pasta.
- It can also credit as a vegetable, but not as both a vegetable and M/MA in the same meal. Schools have the option to count beans, peas, and lentils offered as a M/MA at lunch toward the weekly beans, peas, and lentils vegetable subgroup requirement.

¼ cup cooked = 1 oz eq



Peanut butter & other nut or seed butters

2 tablespoons = 1 oz eq



Tempeh (commercially prepared)

- Crediting applies to tempeh with ingredients limited to soybeans, other legumes, water, or tempeh culture, but may also contain vinegar, seasonings, and herbs.
- Documentation needed for other formulations.**

1 oz = 1 oz eq



Tofu (commercially prepared)

- 1 oz eq serving must contain at least 5 grams of protein.
- Must be visually recognizable.

2.2 oz or ¼ cup = 1 oz eq



Yogurt or soy yogurt (commercially prepared): plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened

- Yogurt served in CACFP and Preschool must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6 ounces of yogurt.****
- Yogurt drinks that meet the Food and Drug Administration's Standard of Identity for yogurt.
- Yogurt is the only creditable M/MA allowed in a smoothie. Smoothies can be prepared in-house or commercially (documentation required).

½ cup (4 oz) = 1 oz eq

*Not an exhaustive list ** See page 4 for Items That May Be Creditable With Proper Documentation ***Not creditable in the infant meal pattern. ****Effective July 1, 2025 in NSLP, SBP, Preschool, and NSLP afterschool snacks, and October 1, 2025 in CACFP, yogurt is limited to no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces. 3

Foods Not Creditable as Meats/Meat Alternates

- ✗ Canned, pressed luncheon meat (potted/deviled)
- ✗ Peanut butter “spreads” (a mixture of peanut butter and other ingredients)
- ✗ Ceviche or home pickled fish
- ✗ Pig’s feet and ham hocks
- ✗ Cream Cheese/Neufchatel Cheese
- ✗ Pork bacon and imitation bacon products/salt pork/scrapple
- ✗ Egg yolks only; egg white only; liquid egg substitutes
- ✗ Powdered cheese (such as in boxed macaroni and cheese)
- ✗ “Imitation” Cheese & Cheese “products”
- ✗ Tofu, silken or soft, added to smoothies or baked into desserts for texture/nutrition enhancement
- ✗ Frozen yogurt, yogurt bars, probiotic drinks
- ✗ Nut flour

Items That May Be Creditable With Proper Documentation

Some commercial food items containing M/MA may not be listed in the FBG; however, they still may be creditable with proper documentation, such as a Child Nutrition (CN) label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS). Examples of these foods are:

- ✓ Combination foods, such as pizza, corn dogs, chicken nuggets, and meat sauce
- ✓ Dried meat, poultry, and seafood
- ✓ Luncheon meat that is not listed in the FBG
- ✓ Turkey bacon/sausage that is not listed in the FBG
- ✓ Pepperoni
- ✓ Hummus

Note: Foods listed in the FBG are creditable in CNP. A limited number of combination foods are listed in the FBG (e.g., beef stew, chili, fish sticks), so check the FBG first!



Example CN Label – Whole Grain Pizza

The CN Labeling Program is a voluntary Federal labeling program for CNP. A CN label identifies the contribution of a product toward the meal pattern requirements. Main dishes that contribute at least 0.50 oz eq per serving to the M/MA meal component are eligible for a CN label. For more information visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling-program>.

When a food item with a CN label is served according to directions, the label is sufficient documentation and provides a warranty against audit claims.

Whole Grain Cheese Pizza

Ingredient Statement: White whole wheat flour, part skim mozzarella cheese, tomatoes, tomato paste, water, salt.

CN XXXXXX

CN **CN**

Each 5.00 oz. slice Whole-Grain Cheese Pizza provides 2.00 oz. equivalent meat alternate, 2.00 oz. equivalent grains, and 1/8 cup red/orange vegetable for Child Nutrition Meal Pattern Requirements. (Use of this logo and statement authorized by the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA mm/yy).

CN

Net Wt.: 20.0 pounds

INSPECTED BY THE
U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE
IN ACCORDANCE WITH
FNS REQUIREMENTS

STV Foods, Inc
1234 Indigo Ave Birchtree, PA 12345

Each 5.00 oz slice contributes 2.00 oz eq MA per serving, as well as 2.00 oz eq grains and 1/8 cup red/orange vegetable.



Example PFS – Honey Lime Chopped Chicken

When a CN label is not available, Program operators may request that the manufacturer provide a PFS to show how the creditable ingredients in the product contribute toward the meal pattern requirements for M/MA, fruits, vegetables (including subgroups), and grains.

 USDA does not approve Product Formulation Statements. Program operators are responsible for verifying and keeping records of the PFS. Always evaluate the PFS using the USDA's PFS Tip Sheet before adding it to your menu. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/tips-evaluating-pfs>)



Product Name: Honey Lime Chopped Chicken		Product Code: X345		
Serving Size: 2 oz		Date: 9/22/2021		
Meat				
Description of Creditable Ingredients per FBG	Ounce per Raw Portion of Creditable Ingredient (A)	FBG Yield (B)	Creditable Amount (A x B)	
Chicken Parts, fresh or frozen, Thighs, With backs, With bone, With skin, (about 8.7 oz each), cooked poultry without skin	3.84 oz	0.33 lb	1.2672 oz	
Total Meat Creditable Amount:			1.2672 oz	
Fruit				
Description of Creditable Ingredients per FBG	Ounce per Raw Portion of Creditable Ingredient (A)	FBG Yield (B)	Purchase Unit (C)	Creditable Amount (A x B / C)
Juices, canned, Single strength (100% fruit juice such as apple, grape, grapefruit, grapefruit- orange, lemon, lime, orange, pineapple, prune, tangerine), fruit juice	0.16 oz	48.00	96.00 oz	0.0800 1/4 cups
Total Creditable Fruit Amount:			0.0200 cups	
Meal Pattern Contribution Statement				
I certify that the above information is true and correct and that a 2 oz ounce serving of the above product (ready for serving) provides 1.25 ounces of equivalent meat/meat alternate when prepared according to directions.				

2 oz of Honey Lime Chicken provides 1.25 oz eq of Meat.

Other Special Considerations

 **Enriched Macaroni Products with Fortified Protein:** May be used in school meals and SFSP to meet part of the M/MA requirement or the grains requirement, but not as both in the same meal. If used to meet the M/MA requirement, 1 ounce (28.35 grams) of dry product may meet up to half of the M/MA requirement when served with 1 ounce cooked meat, poultry, fish, or cheese. More details can be found in 7 CFR Part 210 Appendix A (l)(1)(2) (<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210#Appendix-A-to-Part-210>) and 7 CFR 225.16(e)(3) ([https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-225#p-225.16\(e\)\(3\)](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-225#p-225.16(e)(3)))

 Products formulated with **Alternate Protein Product (APP)** may credit toward all or part of the M/MA requirement in all CNP. Examples of APPs include soy flours, soy concentrates, soy isolates, whey protein concentrate, whey protein isolate and casein. Products containing APPs must be documented with a CN label or a PFS. Details for completing this documentation can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/food-manufacturersindustry>



Test Your Knowledge

1. A family day care home is low on inventory and has the following to serve for the children’s lunch. Which of these choices could be served to fulfill the M/MA requirement for a CACFP lunch? (Select all that apply)

- Smoothie made with silken tofu
- Venison that was donated by a parent
- A mixture of almonds and pumpkin seeds
- Grilled cheese sandwich
- Egg white omelet

2. High school students have been requesting more food in their breakfast menus. The cafeteria manager decides to add ½ cup yogurt to a menu that has mixed fruits (1 cup), pancakes (1 oz eq grains), and milk (1 cup). Can the yogurt be part of a reimbursable breakfast in the SBP?

- Yes
- No

Chart 1A: School Breakfast Program (SBP)

Meal Components	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Amount of Food¹ Per Week (Minimum Per Day)			
Fruits (cups) ²	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) ²	0	0	0
Grains or Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq) ³	7–10 (1)	8–10 (1)	9–10 (1)
Fluid Milk (cups) ⁴	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)

3. A SFSP operator has found a turkey luncheon meat that has received high acceptability ratings from program participants, and the operator has an opportunity to purchase it in bulk for a good price. However, this product is not listed in the FBG. What should the Program operator do **prior** to purchasing the product to determine how the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements? (**Select all that apply.**)

- Go ahead and use it, since the children enjoy it and will consume this meal.
- Do not use it. If it’s not in the FBG, it cannot be creditable.
- Check the CN labeling website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling-program>) to determine if this product has a CN label.
- Ask the manufacturer to provide a PFS for the product. Evaluate the PFS using USDA’s PFS Tip Sheet. (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/tips-evaluating-pfs>).





Answers

1. A family day care home is low on inventory and has the following to serve for the children’s lunch. Which of these choices could be served to fulfill the M/MA requirement for a CACFP lunch? (Select all that apply)

- Smoothie made with silken tofu
No: Tofu in smoothies is not creditable.
- Venison that was donated by a parent
Maybe: Only donated, uninspected wild game served by Program operators which primarily serve Native Americans is creditable in Child Nutrition Programs.
- A mixture of almonds and pumpkin seeds
Yes: This is creditable.
- Grilled cheese sandwich
Yes: This is creditable.
- Egg white omelet
No: Egg whites are not creditable, only whole eggs.

2. High school students have been requesting more food in their breakfast menus. The cafeteria manager decides to add ½ cup yogurt to a menu that has mixed fruits (1 cup), pancakes (1 oz eq grains), and milk (1 cup). Can the yogurt be part of a reimbursable breakfast in the SBP?

- Yes: A M/MA can be offered as part of the combined grains and M/MA component in the SBP.**
- No

Chart 1A: School Breakfast Program (SBP)

Meal Components	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Amount of Food¹ Per Week (Minimum Per Day)			
Fruits (cups) ²	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) ²	0	0	0
Grains or Meats/Meat Alternates (oz eq) ³	7-10 (1)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)
Fluid Milk (cups) ⁴	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)

3. A SFSP operator has found a turkey luncheon meat that has received high acceptability ratings from program participants, and the operator has an opportunity to purchase it in bulk for a good price. However, this product is not listed in the FBG. What should the Program operator do **prior** to purchasing the product to determine how the product contributes to the meal pattern requirements? (Select all that apply.)

- Go ahead and use it, since the children enjoy it and will consume this meal.
- Do not use it. If it’s not in the FBG it cannot be creditable.
- Check the CN labeling website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling-program>) to determine if this product has a CN label.**
- Ask the manufacturer to provide a PFS for the product. Evaluate the PFS using USDA’s PFS Tip Sheet (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/tips-evaluating-pfs>).**

It is important to make sure the product being served is creditable. First check the FBG. However, if the product is not listed in the FBG, it still may be creditable. In this case, check the CN labeling website to determine if the product has a CN label. If it does, you can use the product. If it doesn’t have a CN label, ask the manufacturer for a PFS that shows how the product credits toward the meal pattern requirements in CNP. Please see the Tip Sheet for Accepting Processed Product Documentation (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/tips-accepting-processed-product-documentation>) for more information on how a product not listed in the FBG can contribute toward a reimbursable meal.