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**Food Purchasing:  
A Summary of First Choice  
and Choice Plus**

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## The Purchasing Process: A Summary of *First Choice* and *Choice Plus*

The *Food Buying Guide (FBG) for Child Nutrition Programs* is designed to help you determine how much food to buy and prepare to ensure that the meals you serve under the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) meet program requirements. However, in addition to knowing how much food to buy, the purchasing process involves a methodical, step-by-step process beginning with menu planning and ending with the meal service. The tasks are the same whether purchasing for the private or public sectors. Regardless of the setting in which you operate, all of the steps must be completed by someone in the organization. You may operate a single site with no support from a central administrative office or work in a larger school district where tasks are divided among several staff persons.

The Food and Nutrition Service encourages you to learn as much as you can about the purchasing process by consulting two (2) publications available from the National Food Service Management Institute.

The first publication, *First Choice: A Purchasing Systems Manual for School Food Service* Publication number EX 59-02, covers the management of the entire purchasing process in 14 Chapters, and includes appendices with sample forms, reference materials and a glossary. Topics include:

- ethics of purchasing and the expenditure of public funds;
- the marketplace environment, its language, relationships and food distribution chain;
- regulations governing labeling, standards, grading, inspection, imports, and antitrust;
- product movement and warehousing, inventory control and various menu systems;
- pricing, pre-bid conferences, pricing requests, and bid opening/awards;
- determination of bid units to control cost per serving;
- developing product specifications and the use of “approved brands”;
- researching and selecting a purchasing system;
- monitoring costs;
- laboratory product testing;

- receiving and quality control procedures; and
- purchasing cooperatives.

The second publication, *Choice Plus: A Reference Guide for Foods and Ingredients* Publication number FCS-297, is more narrowly focused than *First Choice*.

The *Choice Plus Manual*:

- concentrates on food and ingredient specifications/product sheets for a wide variety of products;
- helps you develop clear specifications and make more informed decisions when purchasing products commonly served in the Child Nutrition Programs;
- provides tips on buying fresh, canned and frozen fruits and vegetables; and
- includes several appendices that include information about food laws, standards and regulations, resources, and the Nutrition Facts panel.

Both of these publications contain information that may change frequently based on changing purchasing specifications and on a changing marketplace. To order the most recent version of one or both of these publications, contact the National Food Service Management Institute, University of Mississippi:

Phone: 800-321-3054

Fax: 800-321-3061

E-mail: [nfsmi@olemiss.edu](mailto:nfsmi@olemiss.edu)

Internet: [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org)

Order # FCS-297 (Choice Plus)

Order # EX 59-02 (First Choice)

