

Patricia Daniels
USDA, Director, WIC
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Dear Ms. Daniels:

Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide suggestions on "Revisions the WIC Food Packages." The WIC Program is very important and a critical need in many communities. Several mothers, infants and children would continue to experience nutritional deficiencies, which would lead to greater health and developmental complications if they didn't receive the guidance, education and food assistance from WIC.

With this in mind, WIC is a great program, but there is always room for improvement. It is important to identify and address ways WIC can fulfill its mission and meet the needs of the community it is designed to serve. The following are some recommendations for your consideration:

1) Expand Eligible Foods Available For Purchase

The current foods in the WIC package all provide essential vitamins, nutrients and minerals including iron, calcium, Vitamins A and C, and protein. These should not be compromised. There are however, additional nutrients that should also be included. Folate, for example is important for pregnant women as research supports its role in preventing birth defects.

A great source of folate is fruits and vegetables, which is absent from the current food package. While carrots are offered to breastfeeding mothers and fruit and vegetable juices are available to all, WIC clients should have access to fruits and vegetables in their original form. Vegetables and fruits provide many different nutritional contributions. A diet lacking these means that a person truly cannot achieve a state of nutritionally balanced health. Fresh produce is ideal, but even frozen vegetables and fruits would significantly improve the nutritional content of the WIC food package.

2) Expand Cultural Foods Available For Purchase

Many income-eligible women, infants and children do not participate in WIC because the supplemental foods are not suitable for their diet. If the WIC food package included options such as tofu and soy-milk, for example, more eligible Asian mothers and children would be more inclined to participate. The inclusion of cultural foods would not change the nutritional benefits of the WIC food package.

Soy milk as an option should also be included not only to respond to cultural preferences, but also to address certain health conditions. A study printed in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, stated that only one-third of the world population maintains the ability to digest lactose through adulthood. Several WIC eligible mothers and children are allergic to milk or lactose-intolerant and cannot digest milk. Even milk with the lactose removed is still unsuitable for people with this condition. Currently, soy based infant formula is available, but what happens once the infant stops drinking formula? Mothers may force their children to drink milk because it is the only option that WIC provides. Expanding cultural foods available for purchase will allow a greater community to be served.

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3) Retain the Size of the WIC Food Package and Expand the Options of Individual Products

Since WIC serves as a supplemental response to nutritionally at risk women, infants and children, the size of the package should not be reduced as some have suggested. An improvement to the WIC package, however, would be to include smaller sized **juices and cereals** for mothers on the go. Whether packing food for daycare or for a day filled with **appointments**, portable food options would greatly assist WIC clients. These smaller sized products would be obligated to meet the same nutritional requirements as other WIC foods. While there is a shortage of **portable foods** meeting the limitations on **sugar and fat** content, some do exist and these should be **eligible**.

4) Conduct a Comprehensive WIC Food Package Evaluation

Plenty of research exists regarding what is necessary for a healthy, **nutritionally balanced** diet. The review should take these studies into careful consideration, emphasizing an **evaluation of nutritional needs, dietary habits** and food preferences. The evaluation **should strive to maintain the purpose of WIC and maximize** nutritional food security for those at risk.

Thank you for taking time to consider our requests.

Sincerely,



Roxanne Caines