

## **New WIC Food Packages: FRAC Statement**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued their regulations for the new and improved WIC food packages on December 6, 2007. The new WIC food packages improve the health and nutritional quality of the foods in the program, increase participants' choices, and expand cultural food options by offering fruits and vegetables, whole grain bread (with the option to substitute whole grain tortillas, rice or other grains) and the option of soymilk and tofu.

The addition of whole grains, a move to low-fat milk and the choice of a full range of fruits and vegetables strengthen WIC's role in reducing obesity and improving nutrition. These reforms in the packages will empower mothers to choose healthy foods not only by providing resources but also by improving the availability of healthy foods in low-income communities. Farmers' Markets can be allowed as WIC vendors for fruits and vegetables using WIC Farmers' Market procedures or other special vendor rules.

USDA also included important related changes that ensure clients have access to the full amounts of appropriate WIC foods. In addition, new food package enhancements will better promote breastfeeding and expand support for medically fragile participants.

One shortcoming is that, by continuing to use self-imposed cost restraints, the Administration left the recommendations short of the full amount of fruits and vegetables and the option of yogurt recommended by the Institute of Medicine (IOM). Women will receive \$8 and children \$6 in fruits and vegetables each month, \$2 less than IOM recommended. Only the small category of exclusively breastfeeding women will receive the full \$10 in fruit and vegetable vouchers.

The **next step** is to make sure that the new WIC food package changes work "on the ground," including in communities where accessing healthy food often raises unique challenges. States will have until October 2009 to plan and implement the new WIC food packages. It is important to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to help implement these changes in each state. The development of [state WIC advisory councils](#), for example, can provide information and recommendations that ensure clients benefit fully from the new food package.

### **History of the Changes**

Since the WIC food packages were last revised in 1980, there has been an explosion of knowledge related to nutrition and health, as well as a growing obesity problem in this country. Over a decade ago, USDA, FNS staff began the process of revising the WIC food packages. In 2005, at USDA's request, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) issued a report with cost-neutral recommendations for updating the WIC food package based on evolving nutritional science, including the government's revised dietary guidelines, and cultural eating patterns. Many of the IOM proposed changes were consistent with recommendations made by FRAC and others in public comment letters and meetings, including: adding fruits and vegetables, yogurt, tofu and soymilk to the food package; retaining strong nutritional standards and the current types of foods; increasing participant choices; and expanding culturally appropriate food choices.

In August 7, 2006, USDA published proposed new WIC Food Package regulations for comment. USDA received an unprecedented 47,000 comment letters from a broad array of individuals and organizations. In December 2007, USDA released the final regulations. States now have up to October 2009 to implement the changes.

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