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### **CACFP MEAL PATTERN REQUIREMENTS**

Meals and snacks must meet CACFP meal pattern requirements with creditable foods in at least the minimum serving sizes per the CACFP meal pattern charts.

**CACFP Meal Pattern Charts:** Required food components and minimum serving sizes for meals/snacks

**CACFP E-Learning Course:** *CACFP Meal Pattern (1-18 years)* lesson reviews meal pattern requirements

Terms to Know:	
<b>Creditable Foods</b>	Foods that count toward meal pattern requirements
<b>Non-creditable Foods</b>	Foods that do not count toward meal pattern requirements
<b>Food Component</b>	A group of foods in a reimbursable meal. Food components include: Milk, Vegetable, Fruit, Meat/Meat Alternate, Grain
<b>Food Item</b>	A specific food offered within the <u>Food Component</u> (e.g. Broccoli is a food item in the vegetable food component)
<b>Minimum Serving Size</b>	Required amount of the <u>Food Component</u> that must be served
<b>Combination Food</b>	Contains a <u>Food Item</u> from different food components that cannot be separated (i.e. chicken nuggets contains breading (grain) and chicken (meat))

**FOOD COMPONENTS**

The following charts detail specific requirements for each food component.

<b><u>FLUID MILK</u></b>	
Required at breakfast, lunch, and supper	
Must be pasteurized and meet Grade A standards	
<p><b>Creditable:</b> Regular cow’s milk, lactose-free milk, lactose-reduced milk, kefir. The following requirements apply to all milks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <u>1 year olds:</u> must be served unflavored whole</li> <li>➤ <u>2-5 year olds:</u> must be served unflavored 1% or skim</li> <li>➤ <u>6-18 year olds:</u> must be served unflavored or flavored 1% or skim</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Non-dairy beverages</b> nutritionally equivalent to cow’s milk are creditable. When served for a non-disability special dietary need, a written statement from a participant’s family must be on file.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Currently only some soymilk products are creditable. The <a href="#">Creditable Non-Dairy Beverages</a> handout provides a list of creditable soymilks.</li> </ul>	
Goat’s milk may be creditable if it meets State and local standards	
Cannot be served to infants (less than 12 months of age)	
May be served as a beverage, on cereal, or both	
Not creditable when used in cooking (i.e. cooked cereals, soups, pudding, etc.)	
If served at snack, juice cannot be served as the other component	
<b>Milk and Foods not creditable to the Milk Component (Not an all-inclusive list)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2% (reduced-fat) milk</li> <li>• Almond Milk</li> <li>• Cheese (creditable as meat alternate, not as milk)</li> <li>• Coconut Milk</li> <li>• Cream Cheese</li> <li>• Cream Soup/Sauces</li> <li>• Evaporated Milk</li> <li>• Frozen Yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice cream, Ice Milk</li> <li>• Powdered Milk</li> <li>• Pudding</li> <li>• Raw Milk</li> <li>• Rice Milk</li> <li>• Reconstituted Dry Milk</li> <li>• Sour Cream</li> <li>• Yogurt (creditable as meat alternate, not as milk)</li> </ul>

**GRAINS**

Required at breakfast, lunch, and supper

- A M/MA may be served at breakfast, in place of grains, up to three days/week

The first ingredient, or second after water, must be whole grain or enriched grain

Veggie straws, chips, or sticks, and tortilla chips are only creditable as a grain when the first ingredient, or second after water, is a whole or enriched grain

For a list of common creditable grain items and how much to serve: [CACFP Grains Chart](#)

**Whole Grain Rich (WGR):** At least one serving of grains per day must be whole grain-rich (WGR)

- WGR foods contain 100% whole grains, or at least 50% whole grains and the remaining grains are enriched

If your program:

- Claims more than one meal/snack (breakfast, lunch and snack), you may choose the meal to serve the WGR food
- Only claims a snack, if one of the two components is a grain item, it must be WGR
- Only claims one meal (breakfast, lunch or supper), a grain is required to be served and must be WGR  
If breakfast is the only meal, then a WGR item does not need to be served if a meat/meat alternate is served in place of the grain (allowed up to 3 times/week)

**Identifying Whole Grain Rich (WGR):** There are six options to determine if a grain product meets the WGR criteria. Any one of the options may be used. They are detailed in the [CACFP Reference Guide](#) and in the PowerPoint presentation in the [CACFP E-Learning Course: CACFP Meal Pattern \(1-18 years\)](#) lesson.

**Breakfast cereals** (ready-to-eat, instant & hot cereals) must be whole grain, enriched or fortified

Breakfast cereals must contain no more than **6 grams of sugar** per dry ounce

- Cereals on the [Cereals That Meet CACFP Requirements](#) meet sugar limits
- For cereals not in the above document, use the Nutrition Facts Label and the [CACFP Reference Guide](#) to determine if the cereal meets sugar limits

Programs cannot mix creditable cereals that meet sugar limits with non-creditable cereals that are above sugar limits to meet sugar limit requirements.

**Grain-Based Desserts (GBD)** are not creditable and cannot be served to meet the grains component

- Examples include granola bars, cookies, cake, cereal bars and toaster pastries. For a more extensive list, refer to the [Is it a Grain-Based Dessert?](#) handout or the *Foods not creditable to the Grains Component* box, below.
- Even if the GBD is homemade with healthy ingredients, whole grains or less sugar, it is not creditable

**Foods not creditable to the Grains Component (Not an all-inclusive list)**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grains not made with whole or enriched grain</li> <li>• Cereals not fortified or enriched</li> <li>• Cereals above sugar limits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potatoes (creditable as vegetable, not grain)</li> <li>• Potato chips</li> <li>• Tapioca</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

**Grain-Based Desserts (GBD)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bread/breadstick with sweet filling (such as pie filling)</li> <li>• Brownies</li> <li>• Cakes, including coffee cake and cupcakes</li> <li>• Carmel popcorn and kettle corn</li> <li>• Cereal bars, breakfast bars, granola bars, and marshmallow cereal treats</li> <li>• Cookies, including vanilla wafers and fruit-filled rolls/bars/cookies</li> <li>• Doughnuts</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gingerbread</li> <li>• Ice cream cones</li> <li>• Pie crusts of dessert pies, cobblers, and fruit turnovers</li> <li>• Sweet biscotti/scones with fruits, chocolate, icing</li> <li>• Sweet bread pudding and rice pudding</li> <li>• Sweet croissants (e.g. chocolate-filled)</li> <li>• Sweet pita chips (e.g. cinnamon-sugar flavored)</li> <li>• Sweet rolls (e.g. cinnamon rolls)</li> <li>• Toaster pastries</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

**MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE (M/MA)**

- Required at lunch and supper
  - Must be served in a main dish or in a main dish and one other menu item
  - A main dish may credit as the M/MA plus up to two other food components (3 total)
- A M/MA may be served at breakfast, in place of grains, up to three days/week

**Creditable M/MA:** Lean meat, poultry, fish, cheese, eggs, cooked dry bean or peas, peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts or seeds and their butters, yogurt, tofu, tempeh, soy products or alternate protein products

- Cooked dry beans or peas may not be served as a meat alternate and a vegetable in the same meal

**Yogurt (regular and soy)** must contain no more than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounces

- Use the Nutrition Facts Label and [CACFP Reference Guide](#) to determine if a yogurt meets sugar limits

**Creditable Cheese:** natural or processed, cottage, ricotta, cheese spread, cheese food

- Refer to [Creditable and Non-Creditable Cheeses](#) for examples

**Store-bought combination foods** (i.e. chicken nuggets, pizza, ravioli, fish sticks, corn dogs, etc.) and some processed meats (i.e. pepperoni, turkey bacon) must have a Child Nutrition (CN) label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS) from manufacturer on file prior to serving

**Processed meats** (i.e. hotdogs, bologna, sausage):

- 100% meat ingredients are creditable (may contain salt and seasonings)
- If item contains fillers (i.e. byproducts, cereals, binders, or extenders) it is not 100% meat and requires a CN label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS) on file prior to serving
  - Common binders and extenders: soy flour, starchy vegetable flour, calcium reduced dried skim milk, modified food and vegetable starch, soy protein concentrate, cereal, isolated soy protein, dried milk, carrageenan, and hydrolyzed milk protein

**Alternate Protein Products:** Foods made from alternate protein and/or textured vegetable protein ingredients must meet the requirements in [Appendix A](#) to Part 226 and may only credit to the CACFP meal pattern with a Child Nutrition (CN) Label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS)

**Soup:**

- Commercial Bean or Pea: ½ cup of soup is 1 oz. meat alternate
  - Credit as a meat alternate or vegetable, but not both in the same meal
- Commercial Other (i.e. chicken noodle): Does not credit as a M/MA because there is not a sufficient amount of M/MA per serving
- Homemade with M/MA: Only creditable if there is at least ¼ oz. M/MA per serving. Another M/MA may need to be served to meet the minimum serving size requirements. Must be identified and documented by a recipe.

**Tofu:** Creditable for participants ages 1 and older. Must be commercially prepared firm, extra firm, soft, or silken.

- 2.2 oz. (1/4 cup) of tofu containing at least 5 grams of protein = 1.0 oz. meat alternate

Use the Nutrition Facts Label and the calculation below to determine if tofu is creditable:

$$\text{Protein (g)} \div \text{Serving Size (oz.) or (g)} = \text{Threshold for ounces: 2.27 or more}$$

$$\text{Threshold for grams: 0.08 or more}$$

- Tofu products such as links and sausages can only credit when the product has a Child Nutrition (CN) label or Product Formulation Statement (PFS) from manufacturer to document how item meets CACFP requirements

**Local Foods:** For information on wild and domesticated game animals and birds: [Local Meats, Poultry, and Eggs](#)

**Foods not creditable to the Meat/Meat Alternate Component (Not an all-inclusive list)**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bacon</li> <li>• Cheese Products</li> <li>• Cream Cheese</li> <li>• Imitation Cheese</li> <li>• Imitation Seafood</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nut Butter Spreads</li> <li>• Powdered Cheese (ex. macaroni and cheese, boxed)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tofu incorporated into drinks, such as smoothies, or other dishes to add texture, such as in baked desserts</li> <li>• Velveeta™</li> <li>• Yogurt above sugar limits</li> <li>• Yogurt products (frozen yogurt, drinkable yogurt, yogurt bars, yogurt-covered fruit or nuts)</li> </ul> |
|---|--|---|

**FRUIT AND VEGETABLES (TWO SEPARATE COMPONENTS)**

One serving of vegetable, fruit or both is required at breakfast

One serving of fruit and one serving of vegetable (or two different vegetables) is required at lunch and supper

One fruit and one vegetable may be served at snack as two components

Cooked dry beans or peas may not be served as a vegetable and a meat alternate in the same meal

Fresh, frozen, canned, or dried may be served

The following vegetable and fruit serving sizes vary from the meal pattern chart:

- 1 cup raw leafy greens (e.g. lettuce) = ½ cup vegetable
- ¼ cup dried fruit (e.g. raisins) = ½ cup fruit

**Juice** must be full strength (100%) fruit or vegetable juice and must be pasteurized

- If served at snack, milk cannot be served as the other component
- Can only be served once per day. This applies to all meals and snacks, even when served to different groups of participants. For example:
  - Program serves one group breakfast and lunch, and another group lunch and PM snack. If breakfast includes juice, the program cannot serve juice at lunch or PM snack.
  - Program serves the same food items at multiple snacks (AM and PM snack) to different groups of children, juice may only be served at one of those snacks.

**Smoothies:** Pureed fruits and vegetables served in a smoothie are considered juice. This counts as serving juice once per day. For more information, refer to: [Smoothies in CACFP](#)

**Soup**

- Commercial Bean or Pea: ½ cup of soup is ¼ cup of heated vegetable
  - Can credit as a meat alternate or vegetable but not both in the same meal
- Canned, Condensed, or Ready-To-Serve (minestrone, tomato, tomato with other basic components such as rice and vegetable, and vegetable with basic components such as meat and poultry): 1 cup of reconstituted or ready-to-serve soup will yield ¼-cup vegetable
- Homemade: Must contain at least 1/8 cup vegetable per serving. Another vegetable may need to be served to meet the minimum serving size requirements. Must be identified and documented by a recipe.

**Foods not creditable to the Fruit and Vegetable Components (Not an all-inclusive list)**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Ade’ drinks (e.g. Lemonade)</li> <li>• Cranberry Juice Cocktail</li> <li>• Frozen Fruit Flavored Bars</li> <li>• Fruit Butters (e.g. Apple Butter)</li> <li>• Fruit in Quick Breads (e.g. Banana Bread)</li> <li>• Fruit in Muffins (e.g. Blueberry Muffins)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fruit in Commercial Yogurt (e.g. Strawberry Yogurt)</li> <li>• Fruit Snacks</li> <li>• Home Canned Products</li> <li>• Jam/Jelly</li> <li>• Gelatin/Jell-O™</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potato Chips</li> <li>• Snack Chips (e.g. Banana or other FV chips)</li> <li>• Soy Nuts</li> <li>• Veggie straws, chips or sticks</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|

**PRODUCT DOCUMENTATION**

**Product Information**

To credit the following items to the CACFP meal pattern, product labels (or picture/copy of label) that include the name and brand of item, the Nutrition Facts and Ingredients, must be kept on file:

- Breakfast Cereals
- Whole grain rich foods
- Yogurt
- Tofu

**Child Nutrition (CN) labels or Product Formulation Statements (PFS)**

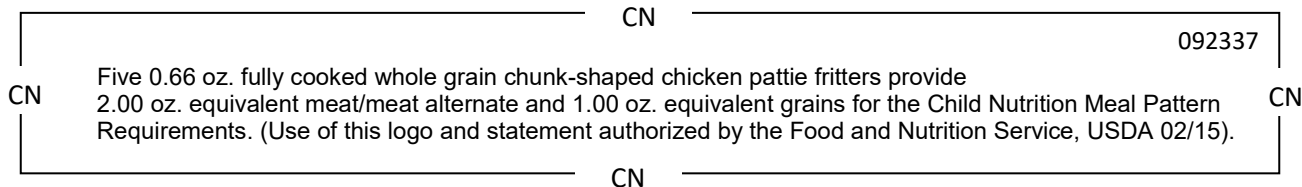
To show store-bought combination foods meet CACFP requirements, CN labels or PFS must be on file.

- Store-bought combination foods include items such as chicken nuggets, fish sticks, meatballs, pizza, frozen casseroles, and pre-cooked foods containing fillers, etc.

The CN label or PFS provides information on how the food item contributes to the meal pattern, most commonly the meat/meat alternate and grain components. Obtain the CN label or PFS **prior** to preparing the item. Use the CN label or PFS to determine how much to prepare and serve. Refer to the *Crediting Store-Bought Combination Foods* handout for information on how to use this documentation.

[Crediting Store-Bought  
Combination Foods](#)

CN Label: If a store-bought combination food item has a CN label, it will be on the product packaging. Not all foods will have a CN Label. The Nutrition Facts Label on the package is not the CN label nor does it provide the required information. Here is an example of a CN label:



- When a store-bought combination food item contributes to the grains component, the CN Label will state “oz. equivalent grains” when the item is **whole grain rich**, and “bread” or “bread alternate” when the item is **not whole grain rich**.

Product Formulation Statement (PFS): If a store-bought combination food item does not have a CN label, you may contact the manufacturer and request a PFS. Keep in mind that a PFS may not be available. A PFS must include a signature from the manufacturer.

- When a store-bought combination food item contributes to the grains component, the PFS will indicate if the item is whole grain rich.

➤ **If a CN label or PFS cannot be obtained, the item cannot be served as part of a reimbursable meal.**

**MEAL PLANNING AND DOCUMENTATION**

**Menus**

Menus must be maintained for all meals and snacks served to participants 1 year and older. They must be dated, and all food items served to meet the meal pattern must be documented. Meal substitutions must be recorded on the menu kept on file with monthly claim documentation. Refer to the *Menu Checklist* to ensure menus comply with CACFP requirements. DPI has *Menu Templates* that may be used and can be found under GM 12.

[Menu Checklist](#)

Menus must also document the following:

- Milk types (fat content specified by age group and if flavored)
- Cereal names (if served)
- Whole Grain-Rich items (e.g. WW Bread, WGR Bagels)
- Specific fruits and vegetables

## Meeting Serving Size Requirements

Enough food must be prepared so that each participant is served at least the minimum serving size of each component according to the CACFP meal pattern. To help ensure enough food is prepared, use the following tools:

- [Meal Requirements Calculator](#): Determine the minimum amounts to serve for each component
- [Food Buying Guide Calculator](#): Determine the right amount of food to purchase and prepare so that the minimum amounts for each component are met

## Production Records

All programs, except emergency shelters, must complete production records to document the amount of food prepared. Production records may be completed prior to the meal service to help with purchasing and preparing the correct amount of food, or may be completed when the meal is prepared or immediately after. Refer to the [Production Record Instructions](#) for how to complete these records.

- The [CACFP E-Learning Course](#) *Production Records* lesson also provides specifics on how to complete production records

For combination foods made from scratch, a recipe should be used to ensure that each ingredient crediting as a meal component provides enough to meet the CACFP meal pattern.

- A standardized recipe provides exact amounts of ingredients and meal pattern contribution information for a specified portion size. This information enables you to determine the amount that must be served to each participant. For these recipes go to: [USDA MyPlate Kitchen](#).

## Purchasing Meals through a Vendor

If a program purchases meals from a vendor or Food Service Management Company, refer to [Guidance Memo #4](#) for information on meal records that must be completed and kept on file.

## Cooking Methods

Foods that are deep-fat fried onsite cannot count toward a reimbursable meal in the CACFP. Deep-fat frying means cooking by fully covering (submerging) food in hot oil or other fat. "Onsite" means at your program or your program's central or satellite kitchen. Packaged par-fried or flash-fried foods purchased from a grocery store (such as par-fried frozen potatoes) or from a restaurant or vendor is creditable if heated or reheated onsite by baking, microwaving, or another method that is not deep-fat frying.

## Leftover Food

Meals should be planned so that the amount of food prepared is enough to provide one meal/snack per participant. However, there may be food leftover after meals. You may do the following with leftovers:

- Leftover food that has not been served must be labeled, dated, refrigerated promptly or frozen immediately for later use. When serving leftovers for a meal, document the amount of leftover food served on the production record.
- Donate to eligible food banks or charitable organizations that are tax exempt.
- **Leftover food CANNOT be sent home with staff or participants' families.**

If programs find they have leftovers frequently:

- Review Production Records, Meal Requirements Calculator and Food Buying Guide Calculator to ensure too much food is not being prepared
- Train staff on how much food must be provided to each participant to meet the minimum CACFP Meal Pattern serving size requirements

## MEAL SERVICE

Meals and snacks eaten by participants while under the program's supervision, either on-site or during outings, can be claimed. Meals and snacks eaten by participants when not under the program's care, including when food is sent home with the participant, cannot be claimed.



**Meal Service Times**

Meals must be served at regularly scheduled times as indicated in the CACFP contract.

**Serving all Meal Components Together**

All required meal components must be served together at the same time during a meal or snack. A food or beverage cannot be withheld until the end of the meal. Children should be encouraged to try different foods but cannot be forced to try all foods or to finish one food prior to receiving additional servings of other foods.

**Meal Service Methods**

Refer to the *Meal Service Styles* handout for the definition, requirements and best practices of each meal service style below.

[Meal Service Styles](#)

- **Pre-plated:** The minimum serving size of each component, as listed on the CACFP meal pattern for the participant’s age, is served to participants on their plate and in their cup.
- **Family Style Dining:** Participants serve themselves from common dishes of food and small pitchers with the assistance of supervising adults, as needed.
  - Foods and beverages should be provided in age-appropriate serving dishes and small pitchers, and placed on each table. The amounts of food in the serving dishes must be enough to provide the minimum required CACFP serving sizes for each participant seated at the table, including the supervising adults if they eat.
  - Participants determine how much food and beverage they want to take, if any.
  - As participants serve themselves, they should be encouraged to take the minimum serving size.
  - Any component served solely by an adult must be provided in the minimum serving size.

[Family Style Dining Handout](#)

When a complete family style meal service is not practical, programs may offer one or more components using the family style method, and staff may serve the other components. For foods being served family style, quantities in common serving dishes must provide the minimum serving size for each participant seated at the table. For foods served by staff, the minimum serving sizes of each food must be placed on the participant’s plate or in their cup.

- **Cafeteria-Style (from a line, table, or cart):** All required meal components in the minimum serving sizes are taken by each participant when going through a serving line or selected from a cart, counter or table.
- **At-Risk Afterschool Programs Only:** Refer to the [At-Risk Afterschool Programs](#) handout for requirements on meal service options including:
  - Serving meals using Offer Versus Serve
  - Sharing tables
  - Taking one component off site

School Food Authorities administering at-risk afterschool programs may choose to use the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns or the CACFP meal pattern.

For more information, view the following lessons in the E-Learning Courses:

- [CACFP E-Learning Course: Meal Service Styles](#) lesson
- [CACFP At-Risk Afterschool E-Learning Course: Meal Service Requirements](#) lesson



### Serving Meals to Adults

When staff or other adults are served meals, the number of adults must be included when planning the amounts of food to prepare. This is to assure enough food is prepared so the minimum serving sizes are provided to all participants and adults. Record the number of adults on the *Production Records* in the *Projected Participants* column in the space titled "Adult." **Meals served to staff and other adults cannot be claimed.** The cost of the food served to adults may or may not be paid for with CACFP reimbursement, depending on if the adult is a program or non-program adult.

- **Program Adults:** an adult employee or volunteer who **performs CACFP labor** on the day the meal is eaten. This includes meal preparation, serving meals, assisting during meal service, cleaning before and after meals, and performing administrative tasks related to the CACFP operation. **The cost of meals served to program adults is an allowable CACFP expense;** i.e. the food consumed by the adult can be paid for with CACFP funds.
- **Non-program Adults:** an adult who **does not perform CACFP labor** on the day the meal is eaten. This includes van drivers, maintenance employees, volunteers or parents not involved with meal preparation or meal service, administrative staff not performing CACFP labor, and people of the community and visitors such as DPI or USDA officials. **The cost of meals served to non-program adults is an unallowable CACFP expense;** i.e. the food consumed by the adult cannot be paid for with CACFP funds. Financial records must show other program funds used to cover these costs (e.g. tuition or charging a fee).

### Field Trips

To claim a meal or snack served on a field trip, the following must occur:

- All required meal components must be served to all participants (this includes milk for breakfast, lunch and supper meals)
- Procedures are in place for the food to be transported and maintained at proper temperatures (perishable food at 41°F or lower) (e.g. coolers with ice packs)
- The number of meals served are recorded on a Meal Count Form at the time of service; i.e. when the meals are distributed to participants. The meal count cannot be recorded before the meal is served, or based off the number of meals sent, number of meals leftover, or from the number of participants signed in on the attendance sheet.

### Drinking Water

Drinking water must be available and offered to participants throughout the day, including at meal times. However, water is not part of a reimbursable meal and may not be served in place of milk. Serve water with snacks when two creditable food components are served with no other beverage. Younger children must be asked frequently, throughout the day, if they want water. Water can be made available in a variety of ways: cups next to a sink, assigned water bottles, pitchers of water with cups set out, and scheduled water breaks, etc. For more information, visit this [website](#).

### Food Safety

Follow state and local health and sanitation requirements applicable to your program. Licensed group child care centers must follow the Department of Children and Families food safety and sanitation requirements.

- The following handouts provide more information about general Food Safety: [Food Safety & Sanitation](#), [Safe Food Storage](#), and [CACFP Food Storage Chart](#).