



WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION **IN A NUTSHELL**

USDA Foods in Schools: A Food Distribution Program

The USDA Foods Program

School Food Authorities (SFAs) that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) have the added benefit of ordering donated USDA Foods products for use in meal service. In Wisconsin, the USDA Foods Program is administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Program Description

The U.S. Department of Agriculture purchases food to support the U.S. agricultural market. These USDA Foods are 100 percent American grown and produced. USDA Foods are distributed to federal nutrition assistance programs, including NSLP.

SFAs are given an annual entitlement value balance (in dollars) to spend on USDA Foods. The amount of donated USDA Foods that SFAs can order each year is based on the number of reimbursable lunches served in the previous school year.

USDA Foods Products

Products ordered include a variety of fruits, vegetables, meats, cheeses, and grains. USDA offers products that meet dietary guidelines, meet Buy American program requirements, have nutritional value, and taste good.

SFAs have options of ordering:

- end products, by the case, such as canned peaches, frozen mixed vegetables, beef crumbles, pasta, and sliced cheese (see Direct Delivery and State Processing),
- bulk products, by the pound, to be shipped to vendors for further processing into finished end products such as pizza, nuggets, breakfast wraps, and fruit cups, (see Direct Diversion and Cheese Processing) and
- fresh fruit and vegetables such as bags of fresh spinach, apples, and baby carrots (see USDA DoD Fresh Produce)

Ordering USDA Foods

SFAs have a three-week ordering window (in February and March) to submit their USDA Foods orders to DPI for the next school year. Most SFAs spend their entire entitlement balance during the Annual Order Survey.

Annual Order Survey

- In November, USDA posts entitlement values for USDA Foods products based on actual costs. SFAs start planning their USDA Foods orders for the next school year and evaluate how to efficiently spend their entitlement balance when the Annual Order opens in February.

- In February, DPI distributes entitlement balances to SFAs based on reimbursable lunches served in the previous school year. SFAs review their entitlement balances in the *Wisconsin USDA Foods Ordering System*.
- In mid-February, DPI opens the Annual Order Survey in the online *Wisconsin USDA Foods Ordering System*, and SFAs submit their USDA Foods orders for the next school year. SFAs can keep ordering USDA Foods until their entitlement balance is spent down or until the Annual Order closes in early March.
- Learn more about entitlement spending options on these webpages:
 - [Direct Delivery](#) and [State Processing](#) ordered by the case.
 - [Direct Diversion](#) and [Cheese Processing](#) ordered by the pound and shipped to vendors for further processing and received through commercial distributor.
 - [USDA DoD Fresh Produce](#)
- Almost all USDA Foods orders are submitted by SFAs during the Annual Order Survey in February and March. From time to time, DPI may open a few more limited ordering opportunities via small surveys, fair share, or surplus offers.

Receiving USDA Foods

How SFAs receive USDA Foods depends on which entitlement spending options were selected during the Annual Order. Review the [Commercial Distributor](#) and [Storage and Delivery](#) webpages for more information about how USDA Foods arrive at SFAs during the school year.

Fees for USDA Foods

USDA Foods fees may include administrative, processing, storage, and delivery fees. Delivery fees depend on whether SFAs opted to have USDA Foods delivered by DPI's state contracted distributor or by an eligible contracted commercial distributor.

DPI's fees are automatically deducted from the National School Lunch Claim as "Commodity Charges Recovered" in the Wisconsin School Nutrition Online Services system.

Budgeting: Comparing USDA Foods to Commercial Products

On average, USDA Foods make up 15 to 20 percent of the products served, translating to significant savings on school meals budgets. SFAs do not pay for the value of the donated USDA Foods ordered. It is important that SFAs understand the value and fees associated with USDA Foods and compare costs to commercial options to receive the best value from USDA Foods.

Resources

- [Wisconsin USDA Foods Program Timeline](#)
- [Wisconsin USDA Foods Program Quick Reference Guide for New Programs](#)
- [USDA Foods Financial Information](#)
- [Wisconsin USDA Foods Homepage](#)