

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

This guidance applies to meals for preschoolers (ages 1-4) and grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.



School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that commercial products (such as pizza, chicken nuggets, and cheese ravioli) provide the required amount of the meat/meat alternates component for each grade group in the USDA's meal patterns for the NSLP, SBP, SSO, and ASP. For example, to credit commercial chicken nuggets as 2 ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component for grades K-12 in the NSLP, the SFA must obtain a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) from the manufacturer to document that one serving of the product contains 2 ounces of cooked chicken.

Serving Size

The meal patterns for grades K-12 in the NSLP and SSO list the meat/meat alternates component in ounce equivalents. The meal patterns for grades K-12 in the ASP and preschoolers in the NSLP (including the SSO and ASP) list the meat/meat alternates component in ounces. The amount of a food that provides 1 ounce equivalent or 1 ounce of the meat/meat alternates component is the same.



The SBP meal patterns do not require the meat/meat alternates component. For grades K-12 at breakfast, SFAs may substitute 1 ounce equivalent of the meat/meat alternates component for 1 ounce equivalent of the grains component, after offering the minimum daily 1 ounce equivalent of grains. For preschoolers at breakfast, SFAs may substitute the meat/meat alternates component for the entire grains component up to three times per week. For more information, see the USDA's handout, [*Serving Meat and Meat Alternates at Breakfast in the CACFP*](#).

The amount of the meat/meat alternates component refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. A 1-ounce equivalent serving of the meat/meat alternates component is sometimes more than a measured ounce. A 1-ounce equivalent serving of the meat/meat alternates component equals:

- 1 ounce of lean meat, poultry, or fish;
- 1 ounce of cheese (low-fat recommended);

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- 2 ounces of cottage or ricotta cheese, cheese food/spread, or cheese substitute (low-fat recommended);
- ¼ cup of cooked beans and peas (legumes), e.g., kidney beans, chick peas (garbanzo beans), lentils, and split peas (see the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) handout, [Crediting Legumes in the NSLP and SBP](#));
- ½ large egg;
- 2 tablespoons of nut or seed butters, e.g., peanut butter, almond butter, cashew butter, and sunflower seed butter (see the CSDE’s handout, [Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the NSLP and SBP](#));
- 1 ounce of nuts or seeds, e.g., almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, soy nuts, and walnuts (see the CSDE’s handout, [Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the NSLP and SBP](#));
- ¼ cup (2.2 ounces) of commercial tofu containing at least 5 grams of protein (see the CSDE’s handout, [Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP](#));
- 1 ounce of tempeh (**Note:** Ingredients must be limited to soybeans (or other legumes), water, tempeh culture, and for some varieties, vinegar, seasonings, and herbs. If a tempeh product contains other ingredients, SFAs must obtain a CN label or PFS to document crediting.);
- 3 ounces of surimi;
- ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt (for preschoolers, yogurt and soy yogurt must meet the sugar limit of no more than 3.83 grams per ounce; see the CSDE’s handout, [Crediting Yogurt for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP in the NSLP and SBP](#)); and
- 1 ounce of alternate protein product (APP) that meets the USDA’s APP requirements (see the CSDE’s handout, [Requirements for Alternate Protein Products](#)).

For more information on the NSLP and SBP meal patterns, visit the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages. For more information on the ASP meal patterns, visit the CSDE’s [ASP](#) webpage.

Required Documentation

Menu planners cannot determine the amount of the meat/meat alternates component in a commercial food by reading the Nutrition Facts label or ingredients statement. Protein content is not an indicator that a commercial product credits as the meat/meat alternates component because the grams of protein listed on the product’s Nutrition Facts label do not correspond to the ounce equivalents of the meat/meat alternates component contained in the product. In addition to protein, meat and meat alternates contain other components such as water, fat, vitamins, and minerals.

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Protein is also found in varying amounts in other ingredients (such as cereals, grains, and many vegetables) that may be part of a commercial meat or meat alternate product.

The terms “protein” and “meat/meat alternate” are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. The USDA’s meal patterns require a specific amount of the meat/meat alternates component, not a specific amount of protein. The only exceptions are commercial tofu and tofu products, which must contain at least 5 grams of protein in a 2.2-ounce serving by weight. For more information, see the CSDE’s handout, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP*.

To credit as the meat/meat alternates component, commercial products that are processed or contain added ingredients require documentation stating the amount of the meat/meat alternates component per serving. This documentation must be:

- an original CN label from the product carton or a photocopy or photograph of the CN label shown attached to the original product carton; or
- a PFS signed by an official of the manufacturer stating the total weight of meat/meat alternates contained in one serving of the product.

Commercial products cannot credit as the meat/meat alternates component without this documentation. For more information, see the CSDE’s handouts, *Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program*, *Product Formulation Statements*, and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation*.

Main Dish Requirement

Foods that are not a main dish do not credit toward the meat/meat alternates component. Examples include soup made with blended soft tofu, pasta made with legumes, and muffins made with peanut butter or yogurt. The USDA’s intent for this requirement is to ensure that SFAs offer meat/meat alternates in a form that is recognizable to students. The USDA emphasizes the importance of the nutrition education aspect of school nutrition programs, which includes the goal of helping children easily recognize the key food groups that contribute to a healthy meal.

Note: The USDA allows an exception to the main dish requirement for yogurt or soy yogurt blended in fruit or vegetable smoothies. Yogurt and soy yogurt credit as the meat/meat alternates component when served in smoothies made on site by the SFA. Other meat/meat alternates, such as peanut butter, cannot credit when served in smoothies. For more information, see the CSDE’s handouts, *Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Smoothies for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP in the NSLP and SBP*.

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Resources

Accepting Processed Product Documentation (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/AcceptDoc.pdf>

Afterschool Snack Program Handbook (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/ASP/ASPHandbook.pdf>

Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling Program (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CNlabel.pdf>

Choose Yogurts That Are Lower in Added Sugars (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tn/cacfp-chooseyogurts.pdf>

Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Creditdeli.pdf>

Crediting Foods for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Crediting-Foods-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditTofu.pdf>

Crediting Yogurt for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/CreditYogurtPreschool.pdf>

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents>

Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-Preschoolers-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Preschool/MPGpreschool.pdf>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

Product Formulation Statement for Meat/Meat Alternates (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Documenting_Meat_Meat_Alternate_Nov_2019.pdf

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Product Formulation Statements (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/PFS.pdf>

Questions and Answers on Alternate Protein Products (APP) (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/questions-and-answers-alternate-protein-products-app>

Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/APPReq.pdf>

Reviewer's Checklist for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements for Meat/Meat Alternates (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/reviewer_checklist.pdf

Serving Meat and Meat Alternates at Breakfast in the CACFP (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/tn/CACFPMeatAlt.pdf>

Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/manufacturerPFStipsheet.pdf>

USDA Memo SP 24-2019, CACFP 11-2019 and SFSP 10-2019: Crediting Surimi Seafood in the Child Nutrition Programs:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/crediting-surimi-seafood-child-nutrition-programs>

USDA Memo SP 25-2019, CACFP 12-2019 and SFSP 11-2019: Crediting Tempeh in the Child Nutrition Programs:

<http://https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/crediting-tempeh-child-nutrition-programs>

USDA Memo SP 53-2016 and CACFP 21- 2016: Crediting Tofu and Soy Yogurt Products in the School Meal Programs and the CACFP:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/crediting-tofu-and-soy-yogurt-products-school-meal-programs-and-cacfp>

USDA Webinar: Additional Meat/Meat Alternates Options for CNPs: Crediting Tempeh and Surimi:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/additional-meat-meat-alternate-tempeh-and-surimi>

USDA Webinar: Moving Forward: Update on Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs with Guidance for Dried Meat Products:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/moving-forward-update-food-crediting-dried-meat-products>

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For more information, review the CSDE's guides, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*, *Menu Planning Guide for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP*, and *Afterschool Snack Program Handbook*, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditMMA.pdf>.

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- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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