
New CACFP Meal Pattern and Best Practices Promote Local and Seasonal May 2016

In April, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service released the final Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal pattern rules along with best practice recommendations. Several of these changes and best practices create great opportunity to increase awareness and implementation of farm to school activities in CACFP programs. See below for a summary of the final rule and details about opportunities for farm to early care and education.

Summary of CACFP Meal Pattern Revisions [Final Rule](#)

The CACFP meal pattern final rule includes many of the fruit and vegetable, whole grain, and sodium requirements of the proposed rule. The new rule does have stricter rules regarding the use of sugar in foods and beverages. The final chart outlining the changes can be found [here](#) on page 71. CACFP providers have until October 1, 2017 to comply with the new regulations.

Background: As a part of the Healthy, Hunger-free Kids Act of 2010 the USDA was directed to evaluate the CACFP meal pattern and realign the standards to match the Dietary Guidelines for Americans' recommendations. The National Academy of Medicine was commissioned to review the compliance of these meal patterns, and as a result FNS released a proposed rule in 2015, which included fruit and vegetable requirements, increased whole grains, and limits on sugar for CACFP meals.

Farm to School: In March 2015, the National Farm to School Network submitted comments to FNS highlighting the benefits of farm to school in CACFP and suggesting that these activities be included as a potential best practice.

FNS ultimately removed the [Best Practices](#) section from regulatory language and will instead create a policy guidance document to be released this summer that will include utilizing seasonal and local foods and nutrition education as best practice strategies. This is a great opportunity to raise awareness of farm to school activities in early care and education settings. See the below paragraph from the "public comment and response analysis" section of the [final rule document](#). In addition, the modified fruit and vegetable requirements also serve as an entry point for seasonal produce.

Local foods: Local foods can play an important role in creating and promoting a healthy environment. A growing body of research demonstrates several positive impacts of serving local foods and providing food education through CNPs, including increased participation and engagement in meal programs; consumption of healthier options, such as whole foods; and support of local economies. There is also well-established public interest in supporting local and regional food systems, and a growing interest in aligning local food sources with CACFP. In light of this, FNS is adding a best practice to encourage centers and day care homes to incorporate seasonal and local products into meals, when possible, as a way of enhancing CACFP operations.

We are encouraged by this inclusion of local foods in the CACFP Best Practices policy guidance. Thank you to all of our Core Partners and Network members that helped us provide feedback on the proposed rule. If you have questions about CACFP or farm to early care and education, please contact Lacy Stephens (lacy@farmtoschool.org), Farm to Early Care and Education Associate. For more information about CACFP policy or the regulatory process, contact Natalie Talis (natalie@farmtoschool.org), NFSN Policy Associate.