

10:15 a.m. EDT, July 28, 2021
Subcommittee Hearing:
Food for Thought: Examining Federal Nutrition Programs for Young Children and Infants

Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee
House Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Mr. Trevor Farrell
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Thank you, Chairwoman Bonamici and Ranking Member Fulcher, for inviting me to participate in this important hearing regarding the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, better known as WIC.

At Schreiber Foods, we strive to do good through food every day. We're a customer-brand leader in shelf-stable beverages and yogurt, natural, process, and cream cheese. With more than 9,000 employees and annual sales of more than \$5 billion, we partner with the best retailers, restaurants, distributors and food manufacturers around the globe. That includes providing safe, delicious food – like natural cheese, American cheese and yogurt – through WIC. We do all of this recognizing our responsibility to do good in the world and are driven to make a difference in everything we do.

As the House Education and Labor Committee begins to draft a Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill, yogurt companies like Schreiber Foods and other makers of dairy products ask you to ensure that WIC's Supplemental Food Package includes varieties and package sizes that reflect preferences of WIC participants and market availability within allowed food categories, such as milk and dairy.

Specifically, Congress should allow WIC participants to choose yogurt package sizes and flavor varieties that better match current consumer preferences. Congress should also affirmatively enable all WIC participants to choose reduced fat (2%) milk, to ensure that pregnant women, mothers and children redeem milk vouchers and receive milk's nutritional benefits.

Schreiber Foods, and the dairy products industry as a whole, are proud of the role our products play in contributing to improved health outcomes for WIC families.

Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt and cheese, provide a number of essential nutrients and are core components of diets recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.¹ Milk, yogurt, and cheese provide high-quality protein and 13 essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, and potassium—which, according to the Dietary Guidelines, are “dietary components of public health concern.” The health benefits of dairy products include better bone health and a lower risk of type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease—three critical health risk areas for WIC's demographics.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov).

Unfortunately, 90% of the U.S. population does not meet the levels of dairy consumption recommended by the DGAs. As a result, WIC's supplemental food package provides redemptions for milk, yogurt, and cheese. Unnecessary specifications and package restrictions, however, can also cause the WIC food package to be too prescriptive.

Congress should allow WIC participants to choose yogurt package sizes and flavor varieties that better match current consumer preferences

For example, in 2014, USDA began allowing WIC participants to swap out one quart of milk, which is 32-ounces, for 32-ounces of yogurt, to provide an additional dairy choice. However, 33 states and the District Columbia only allow WIC households to select one 32-ounce container of yogurt instead of choosing a selection of the much more commonly sold single-serve yogurt containers (such as 4-ounce, 5.3-ounce and 6-ounce cups).

For comparison, in yogurt, there are approximately 35 flavor varieties offered in 32oz containers compared to approximately 200 flavor varieties available in single serve containers, and pound volume sales of 32oz containers is 634M pounds compared to 2.1B pounds of single serve containers. This means that WIC participants are limited only to a fraction of the yogurt available on store-shelves.²

States that allow only 32 ounce yogurt containers:

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Alaska | Maine | Oregon |
| Arizona | Maryland | Pennsylvania |
| California | Minnesota | Rhode Island |
| Colorado | Missouri | South Dakota |
| District of Columbia | Montana | Tennessee |
| Delaware | Nebraska | Texas |
| Hawaii | New Hampshire | Virginia |
| Idaho | New Jersey | Washington |
| Illinois | New Mexico | Wisconsin |
| Kansas | North Carolina | Wyoming |
| Kentucky | North Dakota | |
| Louisiana | Ohio | |

States that allow for other size containers (some allow limited options, such as 16 oz and 32 oz containers only, or 32 oz containers and 4x4oz multipacks only):

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| Alabama | Iowa | Oklahoma |
| Arkansas | Massachusetts | South Carolina |
| Connecticut | Michigan | Utah |
| Florida | Mississippi | Vermont |
| Georgia | Nevada | West Virginia |
| Indiana | New York | |

*This listing does not account for WIC programs in Tribal Nations or U.S. Territories.

² Source: IRI, MULO, L52WE 07.11.21

As USDA reviews and updates the WIC supplemental food package, the Department should clarify that states may allow WIC participants to use their yogurt redemption for containers that “total up to 32 ounces”, which will help ensure that more families have access to nutritious foods in flavors and sizes that better match their preferences. In addition, to avoid future inflexibilities, particularly in between formal food package updates which occur approximately once every ten years, Congress, as part of a Child Nutrition Reauthorization, should allow WIC participants to choose yogurt in smaller package sizes which have more flavor options and are more popular with consumers.

Congress should also affirmatively enable all WIC participants to choose reduced fat (2%) milk

In 2014, at the same time USDA began allowing yogurt into the WIC food package to provide more ways for participants to consume nutrient-dense dairy, the Department overcorrected in their rulemaking and took away the most popular milk variety, reduced fat (2%) milk, from children older than 2-years-old, as well as pregnant and lactating women unless the WIC participant has documented medical conditions. Since that change was made, WIC redemptions for low-fat (1%) milk have averaged 65-percent,³ meaning more than one-third of the recommended nutrient benefits from the milk category are not being consumed by WIC households.

In a September 2019 position paper, a number of public health organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the American Heart Association strongly recommended cow’s milk and water be the sole beverages to encourage in the diets of children due to its nutrient content and its contributions to healthy diets for young children.⁴

Limiting variety impacts access. A 2015 study found that many stores in Hispanic-majority and low-income neighborhoods were less likely to carry low-fat (1%) or non-fat milk, meaning due to WIC’s vendor stocking requirements, those stores may not accept WIC benefits. This could result in less WIC-participant access to grocery stores in their neighborhoods and less milk consumption by WIC families.⁵

Congress should allow all WIC participants to choose reduced fat (2%) milk so pregnant women, mothers and children can have better access to milk’s nutritional benefits.

³ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *Review of WIC food packages: Improving balance and choice: Final report*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>. Page 92.

⁴ Lott M, Callahan E, Welker Duffy E, Story M, Daniels S. Healthy Beverage Consumption in Early Childhood: Recommendations from Key National Health and Nutrition Organizations. Technical Scientific Report. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research, 2019. Available at <http://healthyeatingresearch.org>

⁵ Rimkus L et al. “Disparities in the Availability and Price of Low-fat and Higher-fat Milk in US Food Stores by Community Characteristics.” *J Acad Nutr Diet*, 2015.

Conclusion

Milk-variety and yogurt container size flexibilities were successfully used through waivers provided by USDA and state agencies to maintain food access for WIC participants during the COVID pandemic emergency. They allowed WIC participants to access foods that met WIC nutritional needs but were more readily available in the supply-chain and on store shelves.

Simply put, the more the WIC food package reflects the nutrient-dense milk, yogurt, and cheese varieties that people want to buy and that are widely available, the more likely eligible families will participate in WIC by fully utilizing food redemptions and thereby achieve the nutritional benefits of the program. Dairy intake is particularly low among women who are pregnant or lactating⁶ - two subgroups within WIC who would benefit from these changes. In addition, these flexibilities would also allow additional smaller, neighborhood retailers to participate in the program due to being able to stock and carry more commercially available products, creating more food access points for WIC participants.

Thank you again for allowing me to participate in this hearing. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

⁶ https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf; pp 113-116.