

WIC Shopping Basket

Benefits of Allowing Canned Fruits, Vegetables, Beans



NUTRITION

When it comes to food and nutrition, ALL forms (fresh, canned, frozen and dried) should be promoted, per the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

- ▶ Allowing ALL forms of fruits, vegetables and beans in food packages gives WIC moms greater choice to buy what works best for them. It also allows them to maximize their fruit and vegetable voucher, a key objective of the 2009 WIC food package changes.
- ▶ Canned fruits and vegetables offer WIC families the same quality nutrients as fresh, sometimes at higher levels than in other forms (*UC-Davis; J Sci Food Agric, 2007*).



AFFORDABILITY

Canned foods often provide key nutrients for less money and time-investment than other forms (*J Nutr and Food Sci, 2012*).

- ▶ A \$10 or \$12 WIC voucher can go much further when purchasing canned varieties of most fruits and vegetables, stretching food dollars while providing important nutrition.
- ▶ Canned foods are often less expensive per serving than other forms. Allowing the option of canned fruit, vegetables and beans can help WIC participants make the most of their benefits year-round, especially when some foods are out-of-season.



CONVENIENCE

Canned foods are easy to prepare, requiring no to little re-heating, no special cooking skills and little advance planning, so busy WIC moms can get nutritious food on the table quickly.

- ▶ A recent survey of WIC participants found nearly 10% did not regularly purchase dry beans and peas; a top reason given was because they were “too much trouble to prepare” (*WIC Survey, USDA/FNS, April 2012*).
- ▶ Research suggests 1/3 of Americans decide what to make for dinner at the last minute and choose to serve a particular dish because it requires little or no planning (*Rutgers; Top Clin Nutr, 2007*).



LESS WASTE

Fresh food can spoil quickly. Canned foods can be stored until ready to eat, so taxpayer dollars intended to improve nutrition for WIC families do just that.

- ▶ 2/3 of Americans throw away fresh fruit on occasion; 80% sometimes throw out fresh vegetables (*Produce for Better Health Foundation, 2012*).
- ▶ WIC requirements say state agencies must consider the impact of WIC-approved options on homeless participants who may not have the ability to properly store fresh produce.
- ▶ Canned food is packed in the most recycled food and beverage container – the steel can – which reduces environmental waste.



ACCESS

Canned fruits and vegetables are always in season and various retailers carry them, so WIC moms can find what they are looking for at a reliable price.

- ▶ Canned foods are typically found at large and small retailers, preventing searches to find eligible fresh fruit and vegetables. And because canned foods have a longer shelf-life, WIC moms can stock up on frequently used items in just one trip to one supermarket.
- ▶ In the U.S., 11.5 million people live in low-income areas more than one mile from a supermarket (*USDA report on food deserts, June 2009*).



PREFERENCE

Many state WIC programs allow canned fruit, vegetables and beans, recognizing families enjoy the nutrition, affordability and convenience they provide.

- ▶ Canned fruits and vegetables play a key role in the U.S. food supply, accounting for 6% of per capita fruit availability and 24% of total vegetable availability (*USDA/ERS Food Availability Data, May 2012*).
- ▶ A study of Wisconsin's WIC program after it allowed the substitution of canned or dried beans for peanut butter found families particularly liked the canned bean option. Among those opting for beans, nearly 54% selected canned vs. 46% who chose dried. Study authors speculated allowing beans could reduce overall fat intake among participants – a goal of the latest WIC food package changes (*Altarum Institute, Dec. 2011*).





USDA Recommends Canned Food Choices for WIC



Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's interim rule on the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), proposed new food packages were implemented in 2009. Canned fruits, vegetables and beans, as well as canned juice and fish, are allowed under the new food packages.

Canned food choices approved by the USDA as part of the WIC program

Canned Fruit

Any variety of canned fruit packed in natural juice or water

No added sugars, fats, oils or salts (sodium)

Canned Vegetables

Any variety of canned vegetables
(except white potatoes and pickled vegetables)

No added fats or oils

Minimal added sugar allowed for processing

Canned Fish*

Light tuna**
Salmon**
Sardines
Mackerel *(restrictions)*

May be packed in water or oil

Canned Juice

100% unsweetened fruit or vegetable juice**

Must contain a minimum of 30 mg of vitamin C per 100 mL

Must be pasteurized

Canned Beans

Any type of mature beans, peas or lentils (64 oz)***

No added fats, oils or meats

Minimal added sugar allowed for processing
(Baked beans permitted if limited cooking facilities)

* States must offer at least two types
** Must conform to FDA standard of identity
*** Most state agencies allow cans 16 oz or smaller due to variation in marketplace availability
(WIC Food Policy Options Final Report, USDA FNS, June 2011, p. 32)

The Canned Food Alliance, a National Strategic Partner of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, is a consortium of steelmakers, can manufacturers, food processors and affiliate members that have joined together to drive increased consumption of canned foods by enhancing the perception of their numerous benefits, including nutrition, convenience, affordability and accessibility. For more information about canned food research, facts, resources, the canning process, family mealtime solutions, recipes that use canned foods and more, visit Mealtime.org/WIC.

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