

February 21, 2023

Benefits, and Certification Branch
Policy Division
Food and Nutrition Service
1320 Braddock Place, 3rd Floor
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Re: Docket No. FNS-2022-0007; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages

The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA) submits these comments in response to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) "Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages" proposed rule (87 FR 71090). NANA is the nation's largest nutrition advocacy coalition consisting of over 500 national, state, and local organizations. NANA envisions a country where everyone has access to adequate, affordable, culturally appropriate, and nutritious food; where the food environment promotes healthy eating; in which evidence-based nutrition policy is the basis of food policies and programs; and in which physical activity is promoted. NANA applauds the USDA's efforts to ground the proposed rule in independent, science-based recommendations that promote alignment with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs). Further, the proposed revisions promote choice and dignity among participants and will support the health of participants.

In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) issued a final report and made expert recommendations to promote further alignment between the WIC food packages and the most recently available science.¹ The greatest limitation of the NASEM report was a charge of cost neutrality.² Fundamentally, NANA believes that departure from cost-neutrality is imperative for WIC to sustain and expand its public health impact.

Over the years, a cost-neutral approach has diminished the purchasing power of WIC families, especially as new food categories were added to a cost-neutral package in 2009. WIC participants' diets, consistent with the general population, fall far behind DGA recommendations in several key food categories. Through a combination of WIC's food prescription and nutrition education at an early and critical stage of life, WIC is uniquely positioned to shape healthy eating habits and improve health outcomes.

NASEM's detailed review was presciently aligned with the first-ever issuance of DGA recommendations for pregnancy, lactation, and the first two years of life,³ reflecting the NASEM report's dedicated effort to ground its recommendations in the most current nutrition science. With targeted investment to provide additional foods that balance and bolster the food packages, WIC can focus with precision on closing nutrient intake disparities, diversifying options available to participating families, and making meaningful progress in improving healthy eating patterns in families.

NANA strongly supports USDA's proposal to establish higher values for the Cash Value Benefit (CVB) to reach target intake for fruits and vegetables. WIC's increased issuance of fruits and

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

² See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 32-33. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

vegetables is one of the most substantial investments in nutrition security in recent years. Whole fruits and vegetables were not added in the WIC food packages until 2007, when WIC took a step forward to align with the DGA recommendation that at least half of all fruit intake be whole fruit.⁴ With the increased amounts first put in place by Congress in 2021, USDA's proposed rule would take a noteworthy step forward in establishing healthy eating patterns by affirming WIC benefit issuance at 50% of DGA-recommended intake.⁵ Research that examined the last food package update found that obesity rates were decreasing among 2–4-year-olds participating in WIC when the food package was updated to better align with the DGA.⁶

Higher fruit and vegetable issuance is critical for improving health outcomes and closing intake disparities. Whole fruit is higher in fiber than 100% fruit juice,⁷ and NASEM prioritized fiber intake across all child and adult food packages.⁸ By decreasing overall juice issuance and boosting CVB for whole fruit purchases, WIC can work to reverse intake disparities that disproportionately affect low-income families and, in particular, Black children.⁹ NASEM also identified significant gaps in vegetable consumption among WIC-eligible populations, including 100% of postpartum women, 99% of children, and 99% of pregnant women who fall short of DGA-recommended vegetable intake. Added CVB value was incredibly well received by program participants after it was implemented in spring 2021, resulting in rapid and measurable increases in fruit and vegetable consumption (averaging at ¼ cup per day for WIC-enrolled children).¹⁰ In addition to addressing key nutrient gaps, the CVB is the most versatile element of the WIC food package, providing a greater degree of choice that can empower WIC families to reflect cultural eating patterns and experiment with new varieties. Added CVB benefits greatly shifted participant perceptions about the value of WIC participation: 83.8% of WIC participants felt that the CVB was “not enough,” but only 24% felt similarly after the increased amounts were put in place in 2021.¹¹ NASEM identified that a higher-value CVB could incentivize ongoing participation by young children, addressing a persistent challenge that fueled participation declines in the 2010s. In addition to increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and improved participant perceptions and program satisfaction, research conducted in Southern California with over 1,500 families found that the higher-value CVB increased the average number of different vegetable and fruit types purchased. At the lower \$9/month CVB, only four fruits and vegetable types were purchased, at the \$24/month CVB, seven fruit and vegetable types were purchased, and at the \$35/month CVB, nine fruit and vegetable types were

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, at 32. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf.

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 13, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

⁶ West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resources. *WIC Highlights Positive Effects of Cash Value Benefit*.

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, at 88. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf.

⁸ See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 224-244. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

⁹ Drewnowski A, Rehm CD (2015) Socioeconomic gradient in consumption of whole fruit and 100% fruit juice among US children and adults. *Nutrition Journal* 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-14-3>.

¹⁰ Ritchie L, et al. (2022) Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. National WIC Association & Nutrition Policy Institute. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>.

¹¹ Ritchie L, et al. (2022) Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. National WIC Association & Nutrition Policy Institute. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>.

purchased.¹²

NANA supports the reduced juice amounts proposed in the rule and encourages USDA to go further by allowing juice only as a substitution. USDA's proposed rule, echoing NASEM's recommendation, would reduce overall issuance of 100% fruit juice and permit substitution of the remaining juice benefit for additional Cash Value Benefit (CVB). NANA is supportive of this reduction, as the food packages would provide approximately 50% of AAP's recommended limit for juice consumption, consistent with WIC's supplemental nature.¹³ Children should be encouraged to eat whole fruits to meet their recommended daily fruit intake.¹⁴ Intake of 100% fruit juice should be monitored and in moderation as overconsumption of juice can contribute to pediatric obesity, dental decay, and unhealthy eating habits.¹⁵ Limiting juice consumption leaves room for the consumption of more nutritious foods like whole fruits and vegetables. Whole fruit is higher in fiber than 100% fruit juice,¹⁶ and NASEM prioritized fiber intake across all child and adult food packages.¹⁷

Added CVB value was incredibly well received by program participants after it was implemented in spring 2021, resulting in rapid and measurable increases in fruit and vegetable consumption (averaging at ¼ cup per day for WIC-enrolled children).¹⁸ In addition to addressing key nutrient gaps, the CVB is the most versatile element of the WIC food package, providing a greater degree of choice that can empower WIC families to reflect cultural eating patterns and experiment with new varieties. Added CVB benefits greatly shifted participant perceptions about the value of WIC participation: 83.8% of WIC participants felt that the CVB was “not enough,” but only 24% felt similarly after the increased amounts were put in place in 2021.¹⁹ NASEM identified that a higher-value CVB could incentivize ongoing participation by young children,²⁰ addressing a persistent challenge that fueled participation declines in the 2010s. In addition to increased consumption of fruits and vegetables and improved participant perceptions and program satisfaction, research conducted in Southern California with over 1,500 families found that the higher-value CVB increased the average number of different vegetable and fruit types purchased. At the lower \$9/month CVB, only four fruits and vegetable types were purchased, at the \$24/month CVB, seven

¹² Yopez CE, Anderson CE, Whaley SE, Ritchie LD, Tsai MM, Au LE. (2022). Increasing the WIC vegetable and fruit benefits results in large increases to both the amount and variety purchased. (Data Brief). Los Angeles, CA. Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) WIC program, a Program of Heluna Health, and Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI). <https://lawicdata.org/publication/briefs/>

¹³ American Academy of Pediatrics, Section on Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition, Committee on Nutrition, “Fruit Juice in Infants, Children, and Adolescents: Current Recommendations,” *Pediatrics*, May 2017.

¹⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics, Section on Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition, Committee on Nutrition, “Fruit Juice in Infants, Children, and Adolescents: Current Recommendations,” *Pediatrics*, May 2017.

¹⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Nutrition, *Pediatric Nutrition*, November 2019, 211.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, at 88. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf.

¹⁷ See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

¹⁸ Ritchie L, et al. (2022) Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. National WIC Association & Nutrition Policy Institute. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>.

¹⁹ Ritchie L, et al. (2022) Multi-State WIC Participant Satisfaction Survey: Cash Value Benefit Increase During COVID. National WIC Association & Nutrition Policy Institute. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/nwa-multi-state-cvb-report-march-2022.pdf>.

²⁰ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 454-455. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

fruit and vegetable types were purchased, and at the \$35/month CVB, nine fruit and vegetable types were purchased.²¹

To assure full alignment with NASEM recommendations, NANA urges USDA to ensure that pregnant participants are receiving CVB amounts that reflect 50 percent of fruit and vegetable intake under a 2,600-kcal diet pattern. When USDA implemented the CVB increases under bipartisan appropriations, pregnant participants were issued amounts that reflect a 2,300-kcal diet pattern. The NASEM report urges pregnant participants to be issued amounts under a 2,600-kcal diet pattern, and USDA should honor the science-based recommendations.²²

NANA supports the reduced juice amounts proposed in the rule and encourages USDA to go further by allowing juice only as a substitution. USDA's proposed rule, echoing NASEM's recommendation, would reduce overall issuance of 100% fruit juice and permit substitution of the remaining juice benefit for additional Cash Value Benefit (CVB).²³ NANA is supportive of this reduction, as the food packages would provide approximately 50% of AAP's recommended limit for juice consumption, consistent with WIC's supplemental nature.²⁴ Children should be encouraged to eat whole fruits to meet their recommended daily fruit intake.²⁵ Intake of 100% fruit juice should be monitored and in moderation as overconsumption of juice can contribute to pediatric obesity, dental decay, and unhealthy eating habits.²⁶ Limiting juice consumption leaves room for the consumption of more nutritious foods like whole fruits and vegetables. Whole fruit is higher in fiber than 100% fruit juice,²⁷ and NASEM prioritized fiber intake across all child and adult food packages.²⁸ NANA applauds USDA's efforts to reverse the balance of juice and whole fruit, ensuring that whole fruit now constitutes – for the first time ever – the majority of fruit intake issued through WIC. Given WIC's supplemental nature, WIC issuance should *at least* reflect DGA recommendations about balance within food groups and should likely exceed such recommendations to reflect the broader purchases a family may make with non-WIC resources (e.g., SNAP, household income, etc.).

NANA encourages the USDA to go one step further and flip the substitution pattern: eliminate default juice issuance, add an additional \$3 (adjusted for inflation) to the CVB, and permit juice only as a substitution option.

²¹ Yepez CE, Anderson CE, Whaley SE, Ritchie LD, Tsai MM, Au LE. (2022). Increasing the WIC vegetable and fruit benefits results in large increases to both the amount and variety purchased. (Data Brief). Los Angeles, CA. Public Health Foundation Enterprises (PHFE) WIC program, a Program of Heluna Health, and Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI). <https://lawicdata.org/publication/briefs/>

²² See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 174. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

²³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 18-19, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

²⁴ [ii](#) American Academy of Pediatrics, Section on Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition, Committee on Nutrition, "Fruit Juice in Infants, Children, and Adolescents: Current Recommendations," *Pediatrics*, May 2017.

²⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics, Section on Gastroenterology, Hepatology, and Nutrition, Committee on Nutrition, "Fruit Juice in Infants, Children, and Adolescents: Current Recommendations," *Pediatrics*, May 2017.

²⁶ [iii](#) American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Nutrition, *Pediatric Nutrition*, November 2019, 211.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, at 88. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf.

²⁸ See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 224-244. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

Given the benefits of whole fruit consumption compared to juice consumption, NANA urges the USDA to make the increase \$3 in CVB the default benefit, with families having to affirmatively select juice as an alternative. Evidence shows that “opt-in” programs often result in individuals making healthier choices when the healthier choice is the default. By decreasing overall juice issuance and boosting CVB for whole fruit purchases, WIC can work to reverse intake disparities that disproportionately affect low-income families and, in particular, Black children.²⁹ WIC participation is also associated with earlier introduction of juice³⁰ and higher rates of consumption when compared to non-participants.³¹ By eliminating default juice issuance, WIC can better align participant perceptions and nutrition education messages with medical advice.

NANA supports USDA’s proposal to include seafood in the child and adult food packages. USDA’s proposed rule would greatly expand access to seafood, from only 3.4% of WIC participants to an estimated 58.7%. In addition to introducing a new food category to many WIC participants, seafood is an important source of protein and other nutrients like iron, choline, omega-3 fatty acids, calcium, and vitamin D that are a priority for the WIC population.³² The 2020 DGA emphasized the particular benefits of seafood consumption for pregnant and breastfeeding women, noting the potential benefits to a child’s cognitive development.^[OB]

While USDA proposes the addition of fish to the food packages for children at age 2, this misses an opportunity to introduce fish early in the diets of young children. By waiting until age two, children may miss out on the durable protective effects of seafood such as reduced allergic disease. NANA also urges USDA to make canned or pouches of fish available to one year olds so that they are able to take full advantage of the benefits of seafood consumption and develop a taste preference for fish early on. We appreciate that the proposed rule includes three canned fish options that are labeled as “Best Choices” in the FDA-EPA guidance, but we urge USDA to go further to include additional “Best Choices” as options for children. In addition, USDA should set a pathway that encourages industry innovation in alignment with DGA, Closer to Zero and other guidance that limits methylmercury and outlines safe consumption patterns for children. Inclusion of these additional seafood options in the WIC program, may prompt producers to manufacture package sizes that are appropriate for young children.

NANA supports USDA’s decision to issue seafood monthly, instead of forcing a complicated rotation with legumes and peanut butter. In addition to the health benefits of expanded access to a new food category, USDA should avoid complex issuance patterns that could confuse participants and deter retention of eligible families.

NANA supports USDA’s proposal to adjust dairy issuance to promote participant choice.

Although the proposed rule would decrease overall dairy allotments to allow for more balanced issuance across food categories, the WIC food package will provide 75% of the recommended daily intake of

²⁹ Drewnowski A, Rehm CD (2015) Socioeconomic gradient in consumption of whole fruit and 100% fruit juice among US children and adults. *Nutrition Journal* 14(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-14-3>.

³⁰ McElligott JT, et al. (2012) Variation in fruit juice consumption among infants and toddlers: associations with WIC participation. *Southern Medical Journal* 105(7):364-369, <https://doi.org/smj.0b013e31825c0252>.

³¹ Guthrie JF, et al. (2018) WIC and non-WIC Infants and Children Differ in Usage of Some WIC-Provided Foods. *The Journal of Nutrition* 148(3):1547S-1556S, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxy157>.

³² U.S. Department of Agriculture & U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025*, at 55, 61, 101, 117. https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans-2020-2025.pdf.

dairy.³³ The current food package provides nearly 159% of the daily recommended amount of dairy-based calcium for breastfeeding women.³⁴ Even with the proposed dairy reduction, the program remains within its mandate to provide *supplemental* nutrition for priority nutrients including calcium. The decreased dairy is proposed within an overall effort to balance the WIC food package, and dairy will still be one of the most-issued food groups. The decrease in dairy is countered with an increase of CVV for fruits and vegetables, a category for which WIC currently provides *less than* 50% of the recommended intake across all categories. The NASEM review concluded that reductions in dairy issuance would not result in decreased purchases, with the National WIC Association estimating that - even under the proposed allotments - there would still be more than 150 million quarts each year that are issued but not redeemed. Balancing dairy issuance will bring the package into closer alignment with the 2020-2025 DGAs and complement other facets of the proposed rule - such as the yogurt substitution pattern and addition of soy- and plant-based alternatives - to ensure a broader range of participants can access the priority nutrients included within the dairy category, such as potassium, calcium, and vitamin D.

NANA supports added dairy substitutions to promote flexibility and choice for participants. NANA supports steps proposed by USDA to further improve flexibility and choice among dairy options. Removal of the limitation on the quarts of milk that could be substituted allows a participant to redeem dairy issuance with “substitute” items that increase flexibility and meet cultural and individual food preferences: yogurt, soy-based yogurt, cheese, soy-based cheese, and tofu.³⁵ Americans from diverse backgrounds utilize various forms of calcium-rich foods to provide the important nutrients that are fulfilled through this category. It is important that the WIC food package continues to better reflect and provide for the diverse eating patterns of participants. These calcium-rich food options allow WIC participants to plan daily meals and snacks that meet personal and cultural preference while incorporating priority nutrients for themselves and child participants.

USDA’s changes proposed to offer a broader range of package and container sizes introduce another degree of flexibility that will make it easier for State WIC agencies to authorize single-serve and multipack yogurt containers, string cheese, and drinkable yogurts. NANA supports the changes to dairy in the proposed rule to ensure that participants have more choice throughout the food package.

The proposed WIC food package revisions include several proposed guidelines for the nutrition standards for the dairy or other calcium-rich food group. **NANA supports the added calcium requirement of a minimum of 200 mg/100g for tofu, a WIC milk substitute.** This requirement will ensure that tofu meets the nutrient priority criteria as a calcium-rich food and in so doing will ensure that participants have choices to access nutrient rich foods that align with DGAs according to cultural and personal preferences. **NANA also supports the added vitamin D requirement for yogurt, a WIC milk-substitute, to align with the DGA requirements, 100 IU (2.5 mcg) per 8oz.** Vitamin D is a nutrient of concern, and the fortification of yogurt will help provide participants access to adequate amounts of vitamin D to support healthy development.

³³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 52, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

³⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, ed. *Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report*. National Academies Press; 2017. doi:10.17226/23655 at 110

³⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 25, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

NANA is also supportive of a proposed limit on total sugars for yogurt and soy-based yogurt to be (≤ 40 grams per 8 ounces to ≤ 30 grams per 8 ounces), and the proposed limit on total sugars for soy-based beverages (12 grams of total sugars per 8 fluid ounces). Currently, more WIC toddlers exceed the recommended intake of added sugars than non-WIC toddlers, 8.1% and 2.4%, respectively.³⁶ Research shows that the amount of added sugars consumed by children participating in WIC have not declined in recent years, and are unlikely to decline without limiting amounts added to these food items.³⁷ Among children receiving WIC, approximately one-quarter consume yogurt.³⁸ The NASEM report indicated that lower-sugar yogurts should be available in the marketplace.³⁹ Prior experience with changes in WIC packages, illustrated by increased availability of whole wheat bread in small stores after the 2009 updates, demonstrates that WIC package revisions spur innovation for industry and across the food supply chain.⁴⁰ The change proposed to reduce total sugars for yogurt, soy-based yogurt, and soy beverages creates incentive for these options to become more widely available, increasing access both to WIC participants and non-participants.

NANA is willing to work together with the USDA and industry to develop a proposed added sugar limit and urges the USDA to encourage adequate research for an added sugar limit, adjusting the WIC food package when this evidence becomes available. This effort better aligns with the DGAs and is consistent with ongoing work in other Federal Nutrition programs. Alongside this work, NANA encourages the USDA to incorporate additional efforts for participant education around sugar consumption, as added sugar intakes remain high for WIC children, likely due not solely from consuming foods that are part of the WIC food package, but also from foods purchased by families outside the WIC program.⁴¹

NANA supports the USDA's proposals to increase whole grain consumption and urges the USDA to require that all breakfast cereals, at a minimum, meet the whole grain-rich criteria. Further, NANA recommends that the USDA establish an added sugars limit, as opposed to a total sugars limit, for all breakfast cereals.

The 2020 DGA recommends that at least half of grains consumed be whole.⁴² **NASEM identified that 100% of adults and 93% of children do not meet DGA-recommended intake for whole grains,**⁴³ with children instead exceeding recommended refined grain intake.⁴⁴ Black and Hispanic families face the greatest intake disparities, with the average Hispanic toddler consuming only 26% of recommended

³⁶ Sanjeevi N, Freeland-Graves JH. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children food package revisions and anemia in children aged 2-5 years. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2022;116(4):1030-1037. doi:10.1093/ajcn/nqac141

³⁷ Sanjeevi N, Freeland-Graves JH. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children food package revisions and anemia in children aged 2-5 years. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2022;116(4):1030-1037. doi:10.1093/ajcn/nqac141

³⁸ Guthrie JF, Catellier DJ, Jacquier EF, et al. WIC and non-WIC Infants and Children Differ in Usage of Some WIC-Provided Foods. *J Nutr.* 2018;148(9):1547S-1556S. doi:10.1093/jn/nxy157

³⁹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, ed. *Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report.* National Academies Press; 2017. doi:10.17226/23655

⁴⁰ Oliveira V, Frazao E. Painting a More Complete Picture of WIC: How WIC Impacts Nonparticipants. Amber Waves. Published 2015. Accessed January 26, 2023. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015/april/painting-a-more-complete-picture-of-wic-how-wic-impacts-nonparticipants/>

⁴¹ Kim LP, Whaley SE, Gradziel PH, Crocker NJ, Ritchie LD, Harrison GG. Mothers prefer fresh fruits and vegetables over jarred baby fruits and vegetables in the new special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children food package. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2013;45(6):723-727. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2013.01.022

⁴² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.*

⁴³ See National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (2017) Review of WIC Food Packages: Improving Balance and Choice: Final Report, at 224-244. <https://doi.org/10.17226/23655>.

⁴⁴ See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. Food Patterns Equivalents Database, 2011-2018 (last modified Jan. 6, 2021), <https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/beltsville-md-bhnrc/beltsville-human-nutrition-research-center/food-surveys-research-group/docs/fped-data-tables/>.

whole grain intake.⁴⁵ NASEM recognized that breakfast cereals are well positioned to drive increased whole grain intake for young children, leveraging limited WIC resources to deliver whole grains and key nutrients like iron and folate through the same food category. NASEM identified that multiple whole grain cereals – including gluten-free varieties – are already on the marketplace.⁴⁶ Of the 54 brand-name cereals from four national manufacturers included on WIC lists in 2022, 45 are already compliant with USDA’s proposed standard (83%), including a variety of whole grain corn- and rice-based cereals. Of the remaining nine cereals, at least three advertise including 14 grams of whole grains, indicating that mild reformulations could align with USDA’s proposed rule. Nine gluten-free cereals are compliant with USDA’s proposed standards, with *none* of the non-whole grain cereals being gluten free, largely due to the use of malt flavor or malted barley flour.

Additionally, the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s 2021 School Meal Corporate Report Card found that all General Mills and Kellogg K-12 grain products were whole grain-rich, while 97% of Post’s K-12 cereals were whole grain-rich.⁴⁷ Further, many cereals met the WIC standard of no more than 6 grams of sugars per 1 oz including Kellogg’s cinnamon flakes and frosted mini-wheats bites (which were also whole grain-rich). General Mills sells a frosted corn flake which is whole grain-rich and Post sells three different varieties of Honey Bunches of Oats that are all whole grain-rich. Aligning school meal product formulations with retail offerings would be a welcome change for the school nutrition community and support acceptance of whole grain-rich products at school.

Introducing whole grain consumption during childhood is critical for WIC participants’ health throughout the lifecourse, as whole grain consumption boosts intake of priority nutrients like fiber and iron and is associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

In addition, NANA applauds USDA for proposing a broader range of nutritionally appropriate whole grain options that align with cultural eating patterns, including quinoa, wild rice, millet, triticale, amaranth, kamut, sorghum, wheat berries, tortillas with folic acid-fortified corn masa flour, corn meal (including blue), teff, buckwheat, and whole wheat pita, English muffins, bagels, and naan. Additional cultural options will both reflect traditional diets honored by WIC families while making the program more accessible to new immigrants and refugees as they settle in the United States.

In addition, NANA applauds USDA for proposing a broader range of nutritionally appropriate whole grain options that align with cultural eating patterns, including quinoa, wild rice, millet, triticale, amaranth, kamut, sorghum, wheat berries, tortillas with folic acid-fortified corn masa flour, corn meal (including blue), teff, buckwheat, and whole wheat pita, English muffins, bagels, and naan.⁴⁸ Additional cultural options will both reflect traditional diets honored by WIC families while making the program more accessible to new immigrants and refugees as they settle in the United States.

With respect to an added sugars limit on breakfast cereal, both the 2015 and 2020 DGA have recommended that no more than 10 percent of calories come from added sugars. Meanwhile, the majority

⁴⁵ See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. Food Patterns Equivalents Database, 2011-2018 (last modified Jan. 6, 2021), <https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/beltsville-md-bhnrc/beltsville-human-nutrition-research-center/food-surveys-research-group/docs/fped-data-tables/>.

⁴⁶ See U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. Food Patterns Equivalents Database, 2011-2018 (last modified Jan. 6, 2021), <https://www.ars.usda.gov/northeast-area/beltsville-md-bhnrc/beltsville-human-nutrition-research-center/food-surveys-research-group/docs/fped-data-tables/>.

⁴⁷ Center for Science in the Public Interest. School Meals Corporate Report Card 2021. November 14, 2021.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 41, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

of children and adults consume more than the recommended limit of added sugars.⁴⁹ Industry-wide reformulation to reduce added sugars is critical. An added sugars limit for WIC-eligible products would help establish taste preferences for products that meet these standards and align with USDA's proposal to establish an added sugars standard in school meal standards, which the NANA Coalition widely supports. Any added sugar standard for cereal should be in complement, *not* in lieu of, a total sugar standard.

NANA supports USDA's proposal to create a pathway for plant-based dairy alternatives. NASEM was silent on the question of whether to authorize plant-based beverages beyond soy. NANA urges USDA to follow through on its proposal to develop a pathway to authorize nutritionally comparable dairy alternatives without having to wait for a future review or rulemaking.⁵⁰ Setting a standard and framework will encourage manufacturers to work toward new fortified products, delivering other healthier products to market. Providing a pathway for plant-based dairy alternatives that meet nutrition standards to be eligible for WIC purchases will increase the value and choice of the WIC package for participants with allergens or dietary patterns that do not include dairy.

NANA supports USDA's efforts to establish package and container size flexibility across food categories. USDA's proposed rule goes beyond the NASEM report to offer far greater flexibility to State WIC agencies in authorizing smaller package sizes than the maximum, across all food categories except for infant formula.⁵¹ This step will not only expand options and introduce more convenient package sizes (such as single-serve or multipack yogurts), but it also empowers WIC shoppers to assume greater responsibility in maximizing their redemptions. NANA is supportive of including package sizes that do not add up to the maximum monthly allotment to provide broader choice, as well as package sizes larger than the maximum monthly allotment to be used in aggregate benefits among a single family. Combined with tailored and individualized nutrition education and the emerging support of digital tools like shopping apps, package size flexibility could both reduce barriers in the shopping experience and further invigorate WIC's nutrition education programming.

NANA strongly urges the USDA to maintain the elevated CVB benefits throughout implementation. The USDA's proposed rule outlines an implementation timeline of 18 months, allowing States to adjust complex computer systems to account for the new food packages.⁵² This window is critical to ensure that States are positioned to appropriately program in new products, issuance levels, and substitution patterns. However, the proposed rule suggests that changes cannot be made on a food category basis; instead, an entire food package (e.g., the food package for children) must be adjusted at the same time. For example, the proposed rule suggests that canned fish could not be added to the child food package until the entire child food package is updated. This limitation is of particular concern for the food packages with elevated

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 23, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 48-49, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

⁵² U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages, Proposed rule, at 52, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/wic-fr-112122.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6a183be4-23c8-4619-bbe9-8928fa68d112>.

Cash Value Benefit, as a narrow reading of that limitation would suggest that benefits must be reduced to \$9 or \$11 for fruits and vegetables unless *all* changes are included across the individual food package. USDA should avert this disastrous result and explicitly exempt Cash Value Benefit from this limitation in implementation to assure equitable treatment of WIC participants as States adjust their systems and program in the new food packages. With the increased CVB amounts, fruit and vegetable consumption has increased, and program satisfaction has also increased. Reverting to the \$9 or \$11 CVB will negatively impact nutrition through lower fruit and vegetable consumption and program participation and satisfaction.

Sincerely,

1,000 Days

Advocates for Better Children's Diets

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Public Health Association

Balanced

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Colorado Children's Campaign

healthTIDE

International Fresh Produce Association

MomsRising

National Association of Chronic Disease Directors

National WIC Association

Nemours Children's Health

Nutrition Policy Institute, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources

Save the Children

Share Food Program

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