

Food packages under supplemental plan to be geared to women's, children's needs

Food packages provided to women and children in a U.S. Department of Agriculture supplemental food program would be geared to their different health and nutritional needs under rules proposed recently.

"We want to tailor the food packages to the nutritional needs of children of different ages as well as the special needs of women who are breastfeeding or pregnant," said Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman.

Currently, the special supplemental food program for women, infants and children (WIC) provides only three types of food packages—one for infants, one for women and children, and one for children with special dietary needs.

Food-Stamp fraud calls for repayment

People who get food stamps fraudulently will have to pay them back under a rule proposed by the Department of Agriculture.

Currently, people convicted of fraud are dropped from the food stamp program for three to 27 months. The new proposal would require them to either repay the value of the stamps in cash or agree to have their food stamp allotment reduced until the amount is recovered before they can join the program again.

The proposed rule would implement legislation passed by Congress in August (Public Law 96-58). The final regulation is scheduled to go into effect in May 1980.

In addition to the repayment provision, the rule will allow states to keep 50 percent of all money they recover from fraud claims to help defray their costs. Recovered funds presently are returned to the federal government.

"We expect this change will be a significant incentive to states to prosecute fraud more vigorously," said Carol Tucker Foreman, assistant secretary of agriculture.

The rule also requires food stamp applicants to obtain and furnish social security numbers for all household members. Foreman said this will deter fraud by enabling states to use social security numbers to crosscheck food stamp applications with other wage and benefit records.

The Department put other legislative reforms into effect earlier this year to tighten eligibility standards and reduce abuse: income eligibility limits were lowered to the poverty level; the number of deductions allowed from gross income was cut from eight to three; participation by students was limited; and households are now dropped from the program if the breadwinner voluntarily quits a job. The legislation also increased the federal reimbursement to states for fraud investigation from 50 percent to 75 percent to their costs.

The new proposal also requires states to promptly reduce food stamp benefits to people receiving annual cost-of-living increases in social security and supplemental security income (SSI). This requirement would save between \$30 and \$50 million a year beginning in fiscal 1981. Each additional dollar in SSI or social security benefits reduces food stamp benefits by 30 cents.

"In the past, it has often taken states a number of months to reduce food stamp benefits when SSI or social security recipients' incomes rose because of cost-of-living increases. Now states will have to make these adjustments immediately, or, if they lack this computer capability, within three months," Foreman said.

Comments may be submitted to Alberta Frost, acting deputy administrator, Family Nutrition Programs, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Under the proposal, the program would provide seven food packages geared to the dietary needs of the different participants.

In addition, the department is proposing to limit the sugar content of cereals available through the program.

The seven food packages outline in the proposal would be geared to: infants from birth to two to four months; infants from two to four to six months; infants from six to 12 months; children from one to

five years; children from one to five years with special dietary needs; pregnant and breastfeeding women; and women who have completed breastfeeding. The food package includes such items as iron fortified infant formula and cereal, eggs, milk, adult cereal, cheese and juice. The department is proposing to restrict the sugar content of cereals provided in food packages to no more than six grams of sugar for each ounce of dry cereal. This would

eliminate cereals in which sugar constitutes more than 21 percent of the cereal by weight.

The Surgeon General and the American Society for Clinical Nutrition have recently warned of the connection between sugar consumption and tooth decay, Foreman said. The Surgeon General's report calls for curbing excessive sugar intake and states that "American would be probably healthier, as a whole, if they consumed less

sugar." In addition, under the proposal, WIC participants who do not have iron deficiencies could receive cereals providing at least 25 percent of the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance (USRDA) for iron. Participants with iron deficiencies would be limited to cereals providing at least 45 percent of the USRDA for iron.

Currently, all participants are restricted to cereals with at least 45 percent of the

USRDA. This significantly limits the number of available cereals and surveys indicate that a substantial number of participants are not using the cereals available from this limited selection.

"The proposal on iron fortification is designed to tailor iron requirements to nutritional needs while also insuring that more cereals are actually consumed," said Foreman.

To supply more protein to pregnant and breastfeeding

women, and to encourage breastfeeding, dried beans and peas or peanut butter would be added to their food package under the current proposal.

The department is also requesting comments on whether vegetables or whole wheat breads should be distributed to participants in the WIC program.

WIC provides food and nutrition education to 1.6 million low-income women and children up to five years

old with special nutritional needs. Women participating in the program are either pregnant or breastfeeding or have recently given birth.

The proposed changes in the food packages were published in the Federal Register Nov. 30. People interested in commenting may write to Stanley Garnett, acting director, Supplemental Food Programs Division, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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