

Smart Snacks in School

Flexibility for Entrees Served as Part of National School Lunch and School Breakfast

The Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 directed the USDA to establish nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold to students in school during the school day. The new Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards will help schools to make the healthy choice the easy choice by offering students more of the foods and beverages we should be encouraging – whole grains, fruits and vegetables, leaner protein, lower-fat dairy – while limiting foods with too much sugar, fat and salt.

The new *Smart Snacks in School* nutrition standards apply to all foods sold to students at school outside of the federally reimbursable meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. A less commonly thought-of food that will be subject to the new standards are entrée items served as part of the reimbursable school meal that are also sold individually to students (e.g. students that just buy an individual slice of pizza on the day it is served as part of the school lunch). School meals are science-based, nutritionally balanced and provide age-appropriate portions to children. Recognizing that components of school meals are healthier items, USDA has provided schools with the flexibility to sell certain entrée items as a la carte foods. USDA anticipates that this approach, along with the recent changes to school meals, will result in healthier menu items being offered in the a la carte line than in the past.

Highlights of the *Smart Snacks in School* nutrition standards include:

- **Allow schools to offer certain entrée items in the a la carte line.**
Schools may offer entrée items for sale as a la carte foods on the day they are served as part of the meal and the day after. These entrées would be exempt from the nutrition standards on those days in order to send a consistent nutritional message about school meals, as they already fit into a balanced and nutritionally sound meal, and represent a healthier choice for students who do not want the whole meal. This balanced approach mitigates potential confusion among parents, students and schools that a particular entrée item is healthful when sold as part of the reimbursable meal but not when the same entrée item is sold separately.
- **Provide flexibility for school food service operators to plan and prepare healthful meals.**
Allowing entrée items to be sold a la carte on the day they are served and the day after helps school food service operators to better manage their programs, including the service of leftovers, and to prevent food waste. It also helps to mitigate potential disruption that may occur from students being confused about whether particular foods being served to other students can be purchased individually.
- **Ensure that all other food and beverage items for sale in schools are healthier.**
Side items, snack foods, beverages and any entrées not served as part of a reimbursable meal will need to comply with the nutrition standards, including calorie, fat, sugar and sodium limits, in order to be sold to students in school. USDA will closely monitor this exemption during implementation to determine the overall nutrient profile of products being offered under the exemption, as well as any food safety impacts related to leftovers served à la carte.

