How to Get Your Product Considered for USDA Foods

Steps for Vendors

1. Use this decision tree to see if your product may be a good fit for USDA Foods programs.
2. Learn more about how to get your product considered for USDA Foods programs.
3. Review the Foods Available Lists to see if USDA currently purchases those items.
    1. If USDA already purchases the product, visit the AMS website for information about how to become a qualified vendor and a schedule of upcoming solicitations.
    2. If USDA does not already purchase the product, determine if the product meets the minimum criteria and how to become a qualified USDA vendor.
4. If the product meets the criteria, review the process for adding foods to the USDA FAL and submit your request to USDAFoods@usda.gov.

Common Questions

What are USDA Foods?

USDA Foods are foods purchased from American farmers, dairies, ranchers, and fisheries to support federal nutrition assistance programs and American agriculture. The Food Distribution Programs utilize USDA Foods to provide healthy, nutritious foods to program participants. Additionally, items available through USDA Foods in Schools are selected to support meal pattern requirements and nutrition standards for child nutrition programs.

Most USDA Foods are single or minimal ingredient products that are easy to incorporate into a variety of cuisines and dietary patterns. Each program offers their own specific list of foods, which can include:

- Fresh, canned, dried, and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Canned and dried beans

- Frozen and canned meat, poultry, and fish
- Enriched and whole grain cereals, pastas, rice, and flours
- Low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese
- Lean proteins such as nuts, peanut butter, and eggs

While most USDA Foods are on the Foods Available List, some items are better suited for the USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program or the USDA Foods Processing program.

What is the Foods Available List?

The Foods Available List (FAL) is a list of USDA Foods FNA and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) make available for state distributing agencies and tribes to order for their respective programs. USDA Foods in Schools, FDPIR, TEFAP, and CSFP each have an individualized FAL that supports the diverse needs of program recipients and align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. We collaborate with Tribal organizations, school districts, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations to determine foods that are of interest to program recipients.

Each program has additional considerations that are specific to the population they serve:

- For the USDA Foods in Schools Program, items in institutional or individually portioned pack sizes are preferred, such as 30 lb. cases and #10 cans.
- For FDPIR, TEFAP and CSFP, retail pack sizes, such as 1 lb. bags and 15.5 oz. cans, that are more appropriate for use within the home, are preferred.
- We also strive to provide foods that are culturally relevant to program recipients, including kosher, halal, or traditional Indigenous foods.

Other considerations may arise as programs evolve over time. Each FAL is updated annually with the USDA Foods in Schools FAL updated in the winter and the CSFP, TEFAP and FDPIR FALs updated in the summer.

How are Products Added to the Foods Available List?

USDA Foods are minimally processed and seasoned, driven by stakeholder needs, and support a healthy dietary pattern as determined by the Dietary Guidelines. Each item on the Foods Available List (FAL) has a specification that outlines product attributes such as nutrient content, quality, flavor, color, texture, size, weight, labeling, and inspection requirements.

FNA and AMS review submitted products to determine if they are American produced by more than a single manufacturer and meet nutrition requirements and taste profiles while considering the needs of program operators regarding packaging and preparation. Due to the discretion each distributing agency has in ordering foods specific for their program operations, **USDA cannot guarantee new foods added to the FAL will be ordered.** The process to update the FAL is described in more detail in this step-by-step process.

How are USDA Foods Purchased and Delivered?

We request orders for USDA Foods from distributing agencies[1] based on their programmatic needs. USDA Foods are purchased in full truckload quantities by AMS through a competitive procurement process. AMS strives to award multiple vendors to supply each product, however distributing agencies, tribes, and local agencies cannot select a specific vendor when placing an order. Distributing agencies, must utilize a request-driven ordering system when submitting orders for USDA Foods.

Delivery locations vary depending on the USDA Foods program. Products ordered for CSFP and FDPIR are primarily delivered from the vendor to USDA's national warehouse, whereas products ordered for TEFAP and USDA Foods in Schools are delivered directly to state and local warehouses across the country.

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[1] *Distributing agency* means a state agency selected by the Governor of the state or the state legislature to distribute donated foods in the state, in accordance with an agreement with FNA, and with the requirements in 7 CFR 250 and other federal regulations, as applicable. Indian tribal organizations may act as a distributing agency in the distribution of donated foods on, or near, Indian reservations.

What are Section 32 Foods?

Sometimes referred to as "bonus" products, Section 32 procurements are designated through the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1935. These are items made available for distributing agencies, Tribes, and local agencies to order without spending their USDA Foods entitlement[2] funds. AMS economists conduct comprehensive market assessments, which include justified market support, that document industry-wide need to support that product. AMS economists then provide a recommendation to USDA officials, which is used to determine if a product will be approved and made available through Section 32.

Section 32 items are available for a limited time and must meet the nutrition and procurement requirements of USDA. Section 32 requests should come from industry groups and not from individual suppliers. Products that are already available through the FAL may become available through Section 32 when a market requires support. However, a Section 32 product is not automatically added to the FAL.

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[2] *Entitlement* means the value of donated foods a distributing agency is authorized to receive in a specific program, in accordance with the law.

What is the USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program?

The USDA DoD Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program allows state distributing agencies and tribes to order fresh produce through a partnership with the DoD Defense Logistics Agency. This program is available in USDA Foods in Schools and FDPIR.

What is the USDA Foods Processing Program?

The USDA Foods Processing program allows program operators to contract with commercial food processors to convert USDA Foods into more convenient, ready-to-use end products. This program is available in USDA Foods in Schools.

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