

Frequently Asked Questions by Rice Suppliers About the WIC Program

Q: What is WIC?

A: *Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC) is a USDA-funded, state agency-administered program for low- to middle –income mothers and young children with the goal of preventing children’s health problems and improving growth and development. In December 2007, USDA published a comprehensive Interim Rule that modernizes the WIC Program to reflect U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommendations. Healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains were added as allowable foods.*

Working within the USDA WIC Rule, each state must design a list of approved food items for its state food packages based on product cost, availability, and the cultural preferences of WIC recipients in the state. USDA will approve all state packages by October 1st, when they become operational.

Q: What change has occurred that affects rice?

A: *For the first time in the 30 year program history, USDA has allowed brown rice the WIC program as an alternate whole grain option to wheat bread. Most states have included brown rice in their new state WIC packages.*

Q: What are the standard brown rice specifications in the new WIC package?

A: *The USDA Rule allows 1 pound of brown rice per month for women and 2 pounds for children, specifying “Whole grain brown rice (regular, instant or quick cooking) with no added sugars, fats, oils, or salt.”*

Since the initial Rule was issued, USDA has allowed states to authorize flexibility for different package sizes based on product availability, provided that the maximum allowable size (1 pound, 2 pounds) is available in the state so that participants may receive maximum value from their benefits. This means that some states are allowing 14, 24, and 28 oz packages or using the terminology “up to one or two pounds”.

Q: How does WIC work?

A: *At local WIC clinics, participants receive checks (or vouchers) or electronic benefit transfers (EBTs) to purchase specific foods each month. They purchase these foods from approved ‘WIC vendors’ (retailers) who purchase the items from ‘suppliers’ (food manufacturers).*

Q: Who is the typical WIC participant?

A: Mothers, infants and children up to age five. Hispanics are the largest WIC demographic, followed by Caucasians, African-Americans, Asians and Native Americans.

Q: Do Specifications Vary By State?

A: Yes. At this time, 95% of states have chosen to include brown rice. The states that have not included brown rice (Delaware, Idaho, and Michigan) in Year 1 will reconsider adding it in Year 2.

Q: Where can we access information on the different rice sizes and specifications that have been approved within each state? How can we access this information?

A: There is no one location where all the information is listed. Each state will post its approved foods list by October 1 on its website. In the interim, USA Rice created a list based on information published to date of WIC state agencies specifying which sizes and types of rice are approved within each state. For additional information, contact the WIC state agency office directly.

Q: When will the new WIC food package be implemented in all participating retail stores?

A: Some states have already implemented the new WIC food package. All states must implement by October 1, 2009.

Q: Is there any cost to rice manufacturers to be part of the WIC Program?

A: There is no fee by WIC for "suppliers" (food manufacturers) to participate—only the usual costs associated with product placement and sales in retail stores.

Q: Is there a cost per pound limit for brown rice to be accepted into the WIC program?

A: The state agencies consider cost containment issues when determining which food items to include on their WIC Food lists; many specify lowest-priced item to help meet state budget guidelines or allowances. However, no established guideline is in place that applies to all states.

Q: What types of WIC-related promotional materials are rice manufacturers allowed to produce or provide to our retail accounts?

A: There are a number of tools you can work with your retail accounts on to help maximize the opportunity for increasing sales on WIC approved items.

Here are a few:

- 1. Shelf talkers identifying WIC-approved items (most but not all states allow use of shelf talkers). These generic signs are a valuable tool to educate both consumers and store staff about approved WIC food card items.*
- 2. Recipe brochures featuring meals made with WIC-approved items.*
- 3. Featuring WIC related items as part of an ad circular or coupon promotion program.*

***NOTE:** Food manufacturers are not permitted to include the words “WIC approved” on food packaging or list brand names on shelf talkers.*

Q: Do retailers select which rice they want to place the WIC shelf talker in front of, or is it mandated at the federal/state level?

A: Retailers can choose whether or not to identify WIC approved items with generic shelf talkers, and many choose to do so to facilitate to process for WIC participants and store personnel. In the rice category, as for all WIC food categories, if the retailer chooses to tag foods then they must tag all qualifying WIC products in that category.

Q: Are sales reports available to track WIC sales volumes within each state for the national WIC program?

A: How to track rice movement in WIC is still being determined. USA Rice is working with state agencies to request information where possible. Conceivably a supplier could obtain information from a retailer.

Q: Do any of the states allow bulk rice in the new WIC Food Package?

A: Yes, at this time California, Oregon, and Washington (serving 1.8 MM participants) have specified that bulk rice is allowable.

Q: If our product was not included in a state WIC package, who do we talk to at WIC about getting our product approved in the future?

A: Refer to the state agency list provided by the USA Rice Federation. For the state you’d like to submit product information to, the Vendor Manager Contact at the state agency will typically be your primary point of contact or can point you to the right person. They will ask you to fill out a “Request for Information,” providing the UPC, brand name, and ounce size of your product. Information and materials can also be found on most state’s websites or by contacting the state agency directly.

For Additional information go to www.usarice.com/wic or <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/>