



# VENDOR NEWS

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Information for Store Owners, Managers, and Cashiers

Spring 2021

Dear Vendor,

Time has a way of moving quickly and as the weather begins to improve, I am excited to be communicating with all of you through our 2021 *Spring* Vendor Newsletter.

The past year has been a difficult and challenging one for all of us. However, I remain positive about the future. We know that our important work must continue and I continue to be impressed by the level of commitment from our valued WIC Vendors who remain dedicated program partners. You will find a lot of great information in this newsletter about important initiatives and program changes, including:

- The EBT transition and what it means to our authorized WIC Vendors.
- Updates to the Food Guide, including many new WIC-approved food items.
- Proposed updates to the Minimum Stock Requirements, some based on Vendor feedback.

Please remember to check your email periodically for updates on these initiatives and other important communications that may affect your WIC contractual requirements.

As we work together to bring important services to WIC families, please feel free to contact us with your questions or concerns. Thank you for all you do!

Sincerely,

*Kimberly Keilen*

Section Manager—Vendor Relations & Program Integrity

## EMAILING VENDOR CONTRACTS



**For the Northern Contract cycle**, all Vendors receiving a WIC Vendor Contract for the new cycle beginning July 1, 2021 will have their contract **sent to the email address** provided on their WIC Vendor Application. It is important that the email address and store contact be listed as the **individual that is authorized** to sign a contract for the store. All new contracts for July 1, 2021 will now have the option to **e-sign** the contract.

In order to e-sign the contract, the authorized signee must simply click the highlighted signature box on the contract and the document will be automatically sent to the Department for execution. We are excited to modernize this process!

Please email [MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov) or call 517-335-8937 with all questions and input.



**WIC PROGRAM Federal Regulations require that state agencies ensure that the public has an opportunity to provide comment on development of the WIC Program State Plan of Operations.**

**The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will accept written comments regarding the operation of the WIC Program in Michigan between March 1, 2021 and April 30, 2021. Comments may be related to any aspect of the operation of the WIC Program in Michigan. These comments will assist the department to constructively review WIC operations and make improvements in the operation of the WIC Program in Michigan.**

**Comments should be mailed to:**

**WIC Division  
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services  
Elliott-Larsen Building  
320 S. Walnut  
Lansing, MI 48933**

**or emailed to: [MichiganWIC@michigan.gov](mailto:MichiganWIC@michigan.gov)**

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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Published March 1, 2021

# NEW FOOD GUIDE!

The Michigan WIC Program is happy to announce that our new Food Guide is effective March 1, 2021. The new Food Guide has been expanded with additional health messages, more food choices, and updated authorization criteria.

WIC also included many of the expanded food choices that were implemented at the beginning of the pandemic into the new Food Guide. The new Food Guide is available in English, Spanish and Arabic on the WIC Connect app and at [Michigan.gov/WICfoods](https://Michigan.gov/WICfoods).



## Highlights to the new Food Guide include:

- Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables;
- Additional choices of national and store brand cold cereals;
- Revised egg criteria;
- Expanded breastfeeding messaging;
- Expanded options in fish category;
- Allowing organic infant cereals, infant fruits and vegetables, and infant meats; and
- Allowing kid-friendly yogurt in 2 oz tubes.

## Proposed Changes to Minimum Stock

To accompany changes in the Food Guide, the Michigan WIC Program is also working to update the [Minimum Stock Requirements](#). To better understand Vendor's experiences, we are relying on feedback from Vendors who participated in surveys, webcasts, and regional forums.

If you have questions, please consider participating virtually in one of our upcoming [webcasts or forums](#) or responding to our call for public opinion by email or mail.

We hope to finalize these changes in the coming months. Stay tuned and don't forget to check your email!

## Updating the APL

It is important for Vendors to update the Approved Product List (APL) in their point-of-sale (POS) systems on a regular basis to ensure they can redeem benefits for newly added WIC foods. If you are having trouble updating the APL and are not able to ring-up products in the new Food Guide:

- Call the Conduent Help Desk at 1-877-823-4369 if you have a stand-beside device.
- Call your third-party processor (TPP) if you have an integrated system.

If you continue to experience transaction issues, please notify the WIC Vendor Relations Unit at 517-335-8937 or [MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov).

## ONLINE ORDERING/CURBSIDE PICK-UP

Currently, Michigan WIC does not allow online ordering or curbside pick-up. While the pandemic emergency has increased national conversations around this urgent need, there are certain technological and programmatic considerations for both the program and Vendors that require further exploration.

As such, the WIC Program is currently unable to accommodate online ordering and curbside service. However, with a heightened focus on food access and safety, the Michigan WIC Program, alongside the USDA, will continue to work on this initiative that is so important to our WIC families.



# EBT TRANSITION

As has been communicated previously, the EBT transition process has begun! Fidelity Information Services (FIS) and Custom Data Processing (CDP) have been awarded a new seven-year EBT contract. The EBT contractor is integral in reimbursing Vendors for WIC transactions, hosting the Approved Product List (APL), tracking client benefits, authorizing point-of-sale (POS) systems and running the Help Desk. For now, Conduent will remain our EBT provider until Summer 2021, when the final conversion is expected.



## What This Means for our Authorized WIC Vendors

**Authorized Vendors currently utilizing an integrated system for WIC transactions:** Your system will be evaluated to ensure it is certified through FIS prior to the conversion date.

**Authorized Vendors currently utilizing a stand-beside point-of-sale (POS) device provided by Conduent:** Vendors will need to replace their existing stand-beside POS devices with a device issued from FIS. Vendors will receive a notification from FIS with instructions to complete a merchant agreement contract and return the existing device. A return shipment packet, with a general letter and return label, will be placed in the equipment boxes sent to Vendors by FIS. Vendors should not take action to return existing equipment until further notification from FIS.

**Authorized Vendors currently paying for a stand-beside POS device from a third-party provider:** Vendors will be notified of the required steps on how to secure a new stand-beside POS device from FIS.

As a reminder, all authorized WIC Vendors are required to pay for their own stand-beside POS devices. This cost is being shifted to Vendors as a result of federal law ([Public Law 113-79, 2014 Farm Bill](#)). Please note, if you are a Vendor serving a participant access need, you may still qualify for state-funded equipment and will be notified of this status, if applicable, by the WIC Program.

It will be important for Vendors to check their email for updates and next steps throughout the transition period.

# SUMMER PROGRAMS

## Summer EBT for Children

The Michigan WIC program has received a USDA grant to continue the **Summer EBT for Children (SEBTC)** program for the summer of 2021. This grant helps provide a monthly prescription of nutritious WIC foods, redeemed using the SEBTC Bridge Card, to eligible school-age children in selected public schools and Intermediate School Districts (ISDs).



The value of this food package is about \$30 per month per selected child. Eligible families can redeem SEBTC benefits at any authorized WIC Vendor during the summer months of June, July, and August, with benefits expiring on September 6, 2021.

We know summer is right around the corner; and SEBTC is working to confirm the service areas for 2021. Please be on the lookout for additional information about the program. Vendors in selected service areas will receive a brochure that provides more detailed information regarding this program, including a list of foods approved for SEBTC.

We appreciate your participation and partnership as we administer this program.

## Project Fresh



Project FRESH (i.e. Farmer's Market Nutrition Program) helps provide healthy and nutritious produce to Michigan WIC clients, while promoting our state's diverse agricultural products.

The program provides WIC clients with locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables from authorized **farmers, farmers' markets and roadside stands** throughout Michigan via the use of **coupon booklets**. While administered by Michigan WIC, WIC-authorized Vendors **MAY NOT** accept Project FRESH coupons.

Visit [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71547\\_4910\\_4921---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71547_4910_4921---,00.html) for more information.

# WIC FORMULAS

## Infant Formula Rules



Three rules about infant formula and medical foods to know and abide by:

1. **NEVER KEEP INFANT FORMULA ON YOUR SHELF PAST ITS EXPIRATION DATE.** This could result in violation points for the Vendor if it is documented during monitoring visits. This also presents a food safety issue for vulnerable populations, like infants and children.
2. **ALWAYS ALLOW THE EXCHANGE OF DAMAGED OR EXPIRED INFANT FORMULA FOR THE EXACT SAME FORMULA.** If a client wants to exchange infant formula the client must receive the exact same prescribed formula. They cannot request or select a different formula.
3. **ALWAYS PURCHASE INFANT FORMULA FROM LEGITIMATE, MDARD-LICENSED RETAILERS OR WHOLESALERS.** Never purchase infant formula from clients or illegitimate or unlicensed sources. If your store is audited, failure to purchase formula from approved sources could result in adverse action against your store.

## Formula Purchase Requirements

The Michigan WIC Program requires that all WIC authorized Vendors **MUST** only purchase infant formula from wholesalers, distributors, and retailers **licensed** by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) or from infant formula manufacturers registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This requirement also applies to all **online purchases**.

MDARD is available to answer any questions as to whether a wholesaler, distributor, or retailer is properly licensed or general questions you may have regarding licensing requirements and procedures. You may contact MDARD in a variety of ways:

- Contact by phone: **1-800-292-3939**
- Contact by e-mail: [mda-info@michigan.gov](mailto:mda-info@michigan.gov)
- General website: [Michigan.gov/MDARD](https://Michigan.gov/MDARD)

Additionally, you can find the licensure status of any Michigan wholesaler or retailer on their website at <https://aca3.accela.com/MDARD/Default.aspx>.

For a list of FDA-approved formula manufacturers, please visit our website at [Michigan.gov/WICVendor](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor).

If you are unable to confirm FDA/MDARD licensure status or have any questions regarding this requirement, please call the WIC Vendor Relations Unit at **517-335-8937**.

## Ordering WIC Formulas

If you are having trouble finding a WIC-approved formula or medical food in your system, please follow the steps below to ensure the client is able to get the products they need.



1. Check the client shopping list, benefit balance or WIC Connect Mobile app for information regarding the **product description, quantity prescribed, and benefit expiration date**.
2. Pay special attention to the product name, size, form (powder, liquid, etc.) and container.
3. Refer to the list of Michigan [WIC Authorized Formulas](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor), available on the WIC Vendor website at [Michigan.gov/WICVendor](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor), to verify approved products.
4. Try looking up the product using both the **individual** and **case** UPCs.
5. Call the client's local clinic or the **WIC Client Helpline at 800-942-1636** if you are unable to identify the correct product.
6. Formulas and medical foods should be available for pick-up by clients within **2 business days** of placing the order.
7. No doctor's prescription is required to place an order for specialty formulas or medical foods.

# PROGRAM INTEGRITY

## Violation Letters

Michigan WIC conducts routine monitoring of Vendors, as well as undercover compliance buys and inventory audits. Vendors will receive Notices for violations documented during monitoring visits, undercover compliance buys, or inventory audits. It is important for Vendors to read the details in each violation letter received to determine what the violation was for. Undercover buys will not list the date of the buy to protect the integrity of the investigation.



Vendors are highly encouraged to discuss the rules of transacting WIC with their staff and ensure that staff are properly labeling and pricing WIC-approved food items. Staff should never substitute foods that are not approved by WIC or that are not on a WIC participant's shopping list. The prices of each WIC-approved food item should also be displayed on the package, container, shelf, or on a sign. Employees should examine foods regularly to ensure expired WIC-approved foods are not being offered for sale and/or sold to WIC participants.

Monitoring visits, undercover compliance buys, and inventory audits help to ensure program compliance. As partners in delivering WIC services, we appreciate the work you do each and every day on behalf of our WIC families!

## Record Keeping

Comprehensive recordkeeping is an important part of WIC Program participation and COVID-19 has brought WIC Program Integrity audits into increased focus.

The current pandemic has required Vendors to change their normal ways of working. This has included asking employees to socially distance, modifying shopping aisle logistics, and closing stores or reducing staff because of low sales volume, sick employees and/or workforce quarantine. As a result, Vendors have encountered challenges in providing timely records.

**The WIC Vendor Contract, Section III, Items 20-23 and Section IV require that Vendors maintain purchase and inventory records for three years for authorized WIC food items for which they have requested payment from the WIC Program. In accordance with the WIC Vendor Sanction Policy, Section B, Items 11 and 12, Vendors are required to provide these records upon the Department's request within twenty-one (21) calendar days.**

Helpful hints to stay on top of recordkeeping during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

- Scan receipts and digitally store them at the end of a workday.
- During non-peak hours, have someone continually check and update records.
- Have a back-up plan for who will respond to a record request, should the recordkeeper become unavailable.
- Email receipts to yourself and keep the original copy for verification purposes.
- Keep thermal receipts away from UV light and moist, heated areas.



The WIC Program Integrity Unit is responsible for ensuring Vendor compliance with the WIC Vendor Contract and state and federal regulations. They conduct compliance buys and inventory audits, and follow-up with Vendor complaints received from Local Agencies, WIC participants and other Vendors. The Program Integrity Unit can be contacted at [MDHHS-WICProgramIntegrity@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-WICProgramIntegrity@michigan.gov) or 517-335-8899.

# REGIONAL VENDOR FORUMS

Thank you to all the Vendors that participated in our first three **Regional Vendor Forums** for U.P., Northern, and Central Vendors. We appreciate all of your ideas and feedback; from creating marketing materials for use at the register to learning about problems some of you are having with your integrated software providers. We hope you found the dialogue as fruitful as we did!

As a reminder, the purpose of these online forums is to give you, the Vendors, an opportunity to ask questions and join us in a discussion around your experience as a WIC Vendor and ways to improve the WIC Program.

Vendor feedback is important to us and we know that Vendors from different areas of the state have different perspectives and needs. We hope you join us for your region's forum (dates below). Additional registration information will be sent to Vendors via email. You can also register by visiting <https://miwicevents.com/vendor-webcasts-trainings/>.



**Southwest/Western Vendors**  
**Southeast Vendors**

April 14, 1-3 p.m.  
June 23, 1-3 p.m.

**NOTE:** A pre-recorded 20-minute [webcast](#) with additional information regarding program changes, including the EBT TRANSITION, NEW FOOD GUIDE AND UPCOMING CHANGES TO MINIMUM STOCK REQUIREMENTS, can be found at [Michigan.gov/WICVendor](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor).

## FOOD INSECURITY

Every day many Michiganders struggle to put food on their tables. This problem has increased during the past year as the pandemic put strains on many people's finances. Food insecurity, defined as a 'lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle' is a harsh reality for far too many.

Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks, estimates that food insecurity in Michigan rose from 13.6% in 2018 to over 19% in 2020, in large part due to challenges related to COVID-19. This rate rose among the child population even more from 14.7% in 2018 to 25.5% in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity does not only cause hunger pangs; it can make underlying health problems worse, make focusing in school harder, and negatively affect work performance.

Hunger is often an invisible struggle which may impact your friends, neighbors, or colleagues without you knowing. Assistance is available through programs like SNAP or WIC for those who qualify, and at food pantries, which are generally open to the public. Michigan's network of pantries serves every county in Michigan. To find a food pantry, visit [pantrynet.org](https://pantrynet.org) or call 2-1-1. Many food pantries are offering no-contact and drive thru services to keep both clients and volunteers safe. It is recommended to call a food pantry directly to confirm they are operational before going to a distribution site.

During a crisis, shoppers may be inclined to stock up on essentials. Panic buying can lead to product shortages and make shopping difficult for WIC clients who have prescribed food packages, and for others with limited budgets. Discouraging bulk buying of essentials can help maintain a consistent supply chain and ensure that everyone shopping in your store has access to what they need to feed themselves and their families. These actions, combined with available resources, can help to ensure that families struggling to make ends meet are able to put food on their tables.



1. [feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief\\_Local%20Impact\\_10.2020\\_0.pdf](https://feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf)

# WIC FOOD CORNER

## March is National Nutrition Month!

Celebrate National Nutrition Month by trying out different recipes with your family, learning about meal planning, and eating a variety of nutritious foods every day. You may even want to think about visiting a registered dietitian nutritionist. Below are some helpful tips for eating right on a budget:



1. **Cook more, eat out less.** Home-cooked meals tend to be less expensive and healthier.
2. **Plan what you're going to eat.** Review recipes and make a grocery list of what you need before going to the store to save time and money.
3. **Decide how much to make or buy.** Doubling a recipe can save time in the kitchen and extra portions can be used for lunches or meals later in the week.
4. **Determine where to shop.** Check the paper and online for sales and coupons and make sure to compare prices of different brands when at the store.
5. **Shop for foods that are in season.** Fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season are usually easier to get and may be less expensive. Frozen and canned produce may also be more affordable at certain times of the year.
6. **Watch portion sizes.** Eating too much can add up to extra dollars and calories.
7. **Focus on nutritious, low-cost foods.** The following foods are healthy and inexpensive: beans, peas, lentils, potatoes, eggs, peanut butter, canned fish, grains and frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.
8. **Make your own healthy snacks.** Convenience costs money and many snacks cost more when sold individually.
9. **Start a garden or visit a Farmer's Market.** This can be a fun activity for kids and an affordable way to eat more fruits and vegetables.
10. **Quench your thirst with water.** Substituting water for sweetened beverages not only saves you money but is also healthier.

To learn more about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits, visit [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)!

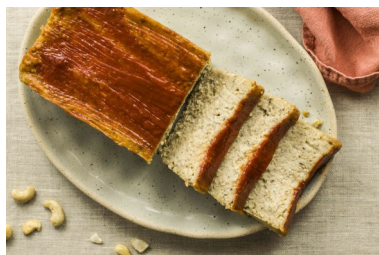


## Vegetarian Cashew Nut Loaf

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons margarine (or oil)
- 2 onions (large, chopped)\*
- 3 cups raw cashews
- 4 cloves garlic
- 5 slices bread (whole wheat works best)\*
- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups soy milk\*
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon celery seeds
- Salt
- Olive oil; ketchup (optional)

\*means a WIC-approved food



Recipe from:  
vegetarian.com by Jolinda Hackett

### Directions:

1. Pre-heat the oven to 400 degrees and lightly line or grease a large (one-pound) loaf pan.
2. Heat the margarine or oil in a skillet, and sauté onion until soft, about 4-5 minutes, then set aside.
3. In a food processor, pulse the cashews and the garlic cloves to chop, then add bread and sautéed onions until well combined.
4. Add in the soy milk, Italian seasoning, celery seeds and a generous amount of salt and pepper. The mixture should be chunky and moist, but not wet.
5. Spoon the cashew mixture into the prepared loaf pan and lightly smooth the top.
6. Drizzle your loaf with olive oil and ketchup if you'd like and bake for 30-35 minutes, or until the loaf is firm and the top is lightly browned.
7. If the loaf is too brown without firming up, you can reduce the oven temperature and cover the top of the loaf with foil to prevent further browning.
8. Allow your loaf to cool slightly before serving to set.
9. Serve topped with extra ketchup, vegetarian gravy, mashed potatoes and a side salad.



# FY 2021 TRAINING SCHEDULE

As a reminder, all WIC authorized Vendors—including Pharmacy Vendors—are required to participate in one interactive training each Contract Cycle (i.e. **once every three years**). Below is the upcoming webcast training schedule for the remainder of FY 2021.

## GROCER VENDORS

June 8 @ 2 p.m.  
Sept. 7 @ 2 p.m.

## PHARMACY VENDORS

June 15 @ 2 p.m.  
Sept. 14 @ 2 p.m.



If your store requires a training, you will be sent an invitation via email. Vendors may also participate in trainings more frequently as desired. This is suggested when there is a new manager or other staff turnover. To register, please visit <https://miwicevents.com/vendor-webcasts-trainings/>.

If you would like to know the date of your most recent training or would like more information regarding registration for these events, please contact the **Vendor Relations Unit** at **517-355-8937** or by email at [MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov).

A recorded version of the [WIC Vendor Training](#) and the [WIC Pharmacy Training](#) can also be viewed at any time online at [Michigan.gov/WICVendor](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor).

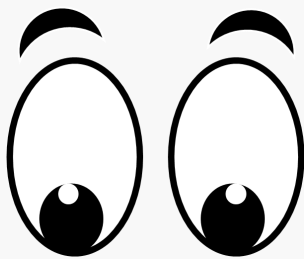
## RESOURCES

Contact the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services – WIC Division

Elliott-Larsen Bldg., 6<sup>th</sup> Fl.  
320 S. Walnut St.  
Lansing, MI 48913

Phone: 517-335-8937  
Fax: 517-335-9514  
Email: [MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov](mailto:MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov)  
Website: [Michigan.gov/WICVendor](https://Michigan.gov/WICVendor)

**Visit our website** for links to lots of helpful documents and resources, including:



- ◆ WIC Vendor Selection Criteria
- ◆ UPC Request Form
- ◆ WIC Vendor Complaint Form
- ◆ WIC Vendor Handbook
- ◆ A recording of the WIC Vendor Training webcast
- ◆ Copies of the WIC Vendor Contract and associated documents
- ◆ Minimum Stock Requirements
- ◆ Previous WIC Vendor Newsletters
- ◆ And more!

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will not exclude from participation in, deny benefits of, or discriminate against any individual or group because of race, sex, religion, age, national origin, color, height, weight, marital status, gender, identification or expression, sexual orientation, partisan considerations, or a disability or genetic information that is unrelated to the person's eligibility.