

wic MICHIGAN VENDOR NEWS

Inside This Issue

2022 Vendor Conference	2
Program Updates	3
Southeast OAP	4
WIC Works!.....	4
Vendor Compliance	5
Formula & Breastfeeding	6
WIC Food Corner	7
Training/Resources.....	8

Information for Store Owners, Managers and Cashiers

Fall 2022

Dear Vendor,

Welcome to fall and our beautiful weather here in Michigan. The fall season is one of my most favorite times of the year. Football season is underway, leaves are changing and we are beginning to harvest everything that was planted this summer. Hopefully, everyone will be able to participate in some fall events throughout the season.

We held our 2022 Vendor Conference in Dearborn on Thursday, Sept. 8, and it was a great success. We were happy to see and meet so many of our vendors. The WIC Vendor Teams were excited to be able to collaborate and share ideas to better serve and meet the needs of our WIC participants. The positive energy throughout the conference reiterated the importance of teamwork and cooperation with all of our vendor partners. Thank you, WIC Vendors, for your continued support. Despite the many challenges we have faced in the last couple years, we continue to meet the needs of our WIC clients. As always, we value our WIC Vendors' partnership, feedback and commitment to the Michigan WIC Program.

This quarter's newsletter highlights the Vendor Conference, program updates and the start of the Southeast Open Application Period.

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



Checking Your Emails



It is very important that all Vendors on the WIC Program routinely check their e-mail for updates and messages from the Michigan WIC program. In the ever-changing world of food retail, e-mail is the fastest and most efficient way for the program to disseminate important information to Vendors. Store managers and staff should check e-mail with the email address the WIC program has on file every day for updates so the latest and greatest WIC information reaches our Vendors in a timely manner. Remember to notify the WIC program with any email address updates or changes.

Please email the [WIC Vendor Relations Unit](#) or call 517-335-8937 with all questions and input.

WIC VENDOR CONFERENCE

Thank you to everyone who helped make the WIC Vendor Conference a huge success. Held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Dearborn, this was our first in-person conference since the pandemic and we are so glad to have had over 150 people in attendance, including guest speakers and participants from as far away as Chicago, Milwaukee and Kentucky.

THEME: You Are the Star!

The goal of this year's conference was to show appreciation for the integral role Vendors play in the WIC Program and to acknowledge their contributions during the past few challenging years. The theme, 'You are the Star!' was reflected in the day's activities and decorations. Vendors were greeted by a 'red carpet' at registration, where they took photos with gold statuettes. Vendors could win prizes throughout the day by playing movie trivia, searching for hidden golden tickets, and participating in a networking game. Prizes included movie passes, movie gift baskets and WIC banners. Conference attendees also received take-home bags with popcorn, chocolate, stress balls and a variety of WIC training materials.



Randy Garrett, FNS



Pastor Heather Boone, Elizabeth Aboona, Eman Hussain and Shawn Gompa

HIGHLIGHTS

Vendor analyst Shawn Gompa facilitated a vendor panel around the topic of best practices to improve the WIC shopping experience. The conversation centered around promotion, accessibility, and troubleshooting errors. We are so thankful to Eman Hussain of Dearborn Fresh Supermarket, Elizabeth Aboona of Americana Foods, and Pastor Heather Boone of Village Market for sharing their experiences with attendees.

Jim Chilcoat from CDP, our WIC EBT contractor, joined us for the day to talk about the future of online ordering. He shared pilot projects and initiatives from around the country and outlined the steps needed to make online ordering a reality in Michigan. We are excited about the prospect of bringing this technology to our WIC Vendors and participants in the near future!

THANK YOU TO OUR EXHIBITORS!

Double Up Food Bucks, FIS, Michigan Public Health Institute, Fair Food Network, Midwest Independent Retailers Association

Stay tuned for details about regional conferences coming to a town near you!



State WIC staff and FIS/CDP partners

Staff Spotlight: Katherine Groble

Katherine joined the WIC Vendor Relations Unit in 2018 where she started as a field analyst before taking on the role of Vendor Module Analyst in 2019. In addition to making enhancements to the MI-WIC database system, Katherine is also responsible for monthly and annual data and reports and has been integral to updating our Vendor policies. She was also lead on developing the new online vendor training course. Katherine's favorite aspects of the job are the daily variety and the many opportunities for collaboration it offers.

Katherine has a bachelor's degree in zoology, psychology and French from UW-Madison, and master's degree in international development and sustainable agriculture from MSU. Prior to joining WIC, she was researching sweet potato value chains in Kenya. Katherine currently lives in Lansing with her husband, two African street dogs, and cat. She enjoys traveling, cooking, reading, gardening, home improvement projects, and hanging out with her animals.



PROGRAM UPDATES

Updated Vendor Policies

An email was sent on Friday, Aug. 26, notifying Vendors of recent changes to the following WIC Vendor policies:

- 1.02 – Overview of the WIC program
- 2.01 – Vendor Applications & Authorization
- 2.02 – Vendor Selection Criteria
- 2.04 – Vendor Limitation Policy
- 6.03 – Adverse Actions Against Vendors
- 7.01 – Appeals policy Overview
- 7.02 – Adverse Actions Subject to Appeal
- 2.05A – WIC Vendor Contract
- 2.05B – WIC Pharmacy Vendor Contract
- 6.01A – WIC Vendor Sanction Schedule

These updated policies, **effective Sept. 1**, can all be found on our [website](#) under the [Michigan WIC Vendor Policy](#) tab, or by clicking on the individual links above. Additionally, you can visit the [WIC Vendor Communications](#) tab for a [complete list of the changes](#) made to each document.

APL Now Online!

We listened to your feedback and published the Approved Products List (APL) [in Excel format](#) on our [website](#) to facilitate the identification and purchase of WIC-approved foods. The APL lists all **UPCs** of WIC-approved foods as well as **PLUs** for fresh fruits and vegetables. Please note that currently multiple items do not have detailed product descriptions and substitute formulas are listed with the same description as the formula they are able to replace. The APL is subject to change and will be **updated monthly**.

Canned & Frozen Fruits and Vegetables

Did you know that WIC clients can use their cash value benefits (CVBs), previously used only for fresh fruits and vegetables, for canned and frozen fruits and vegetables as well? The [Michigan WIC Food Guide](#) was updated Wednesday, June 1, to include criteria for the allowed varieties of canned and frozen varieties of fruits and vegetables, with limitations primarily for excluding food items with non-fruit/non-vegetable ingredients.

If you are wondering whether an item is authorized, you may find our public listing of [Michigan WIC's Approved Product List](#) helpful in determining whether an item in your store is or is not approved.

Some things to keep in mind when transacting fruits and vegetables:

1. Vendors should scan the UPC for frozen/canned fruits and vegetables when conducting a WIC transaction.
2. For fresh produce items, if your system is not recognizing the UPC on a package, you may use the general PLU code 44691 to enter the price and charge a customer's WIC balance for fresh fruits and vegetables **ONLY** (never do this for frozen/canned items)!
3. The Split Tender Policy applies to both fresh and frozen/canned fruits and vegetables. CVBs will be charged, and the client should be allowed to pay any remaining costs for WIC-approved fruits and vegetables with an alternate form of tender.



VENDOR COMPLIANCE

Tips to Maintain WIC Inventory

Maintaining minimum stock and checking dates on your products is a constant task. Here are some methods from Vendors across the state you can consider for your store to make it easier.



1. Write down expiration dates in a spreadsheet with names of items. You can sort by date and know exactly when to check for an item close to expiration. You can remove the item or delete the line in the spreadsheet if the items were already sold.
2. Tag the shelves with colored stickers to indicate months of the year. For items expiring this year, employees can place the stickers when stocking the shelf. If the color for October is orange, an employee seeing a date for October 2022 on the shelf would place an orange sticker to prompt other staff and themselves to be on the lookout when October comes along. This can make the process easier and make the most use of your earlier efforts.
3. Rather than checking every food item on the same schedule, you may check perishable items biweekly, produce weekly, other items monthly, etc. Creating a schedule can reduce overall labor.
4. Organizing your WIC items together can help you visually see when items are falling below minimum stock and check all items at once.
5. Contract with an outside service to check your store shelves for outdated items. Especially if your store is experiencing staff shortages, you may end up saving time and money by doing this every so often.

Promoting WIC

Michigan stores across the state have been promoting their business with custom signs. Advertising WIC in your storefront is a good way to let potential customers know they can come to your store. As a retailer, you understand the importance of getting customers to physically enter your store. Since you go through the effort to get authorized and maintain WIC in your store, you offer something that not every retailer offers. Why not take advantage to get more customers?

A customer coming to do their WIC shopping is likely to purchase other items you have for sale as well. You may get started by contacting a printing service in your area. To help with seeking custom WIC signs, promotional materials produced by our office and other Vendors are available for download on Michigan.gov/wicvendor.



Inventory Audits

Vendors are randomly selected for Inventory Audits. Vendors must maintain required records for three (3) years for WIC foods purchased exclusively from WIC-accepted suppliers after final payment is received or after all pending matters are resolved, whichever period is greater. As of late, Program Integrity has requested records for all WIC-approved One (1) Gallon, and One-half (1/2) gallon of Whole milk, Skim (fat free milk), 1/2%, 1% (Low fat milk), and 2% (Reduced fat milk).

Keep in mind, any WIC-approved food is subject to an inventory audit. **Please refer to Section V., Paragraphs 1-4, of your WIC Vendor Contract for additional information.**

Pricing the Bread

All WIC-approved items available for sale must be priced at all times. **This includes bread.** There is a common misconception among some vendors that WIC-approved bread is automatically priced by the bread distributors.

This is not always the case. Bread that is on the shelf available for sale to WIC clients must be priced. Remember that failure to price WIC-approved foods available for purchase can result in violations, so make sure to double check the bread when your staff is pricing items.



FORMULA & BREASTFEEDING

Formula Update

To allow for additional flexibilities and help improve participant access to infant formula, Michigan WIC has been granted permission from USDA to allow for **interchangeable redemption of standard/contract formulas**. This change will allow WIC participants to redeem formulas across any standard formula type, and corresponding substitute.

In other words, WIC participants prescribed the “Standard Infant Formula” food package will be able to choose from any of the **four Similac standard/contract formulas: Advance, Sensitive, Isomil, and Total Comfort**, based on preference and availability.



This food package change occurred the evening of **Tuesday, Oct. 11**. Please make sure that your **APL file is up to date** in order to start transacting this new food package.

Also, keep in mind that all formula substitutes were put into place as a ‘temporary’ solution to the infant formula shortage and will eventually be discontinued. We highly encourage all Vendors to purchase and have available on store shelves the contracted **Similac products**, with substitute options available as an alternative. As a reminder, a list of all [substitute formulas](#) can be found at Michigan.gov/WICVendor.

Abbott will be discontinuing all sizes (including the WIC 12.5 oz powdered) Similac for Spit Up as part of ongoing efforts to manage their portfolio of products. State WIC is evaluating next steps related to this discontinuation.

Supporting Breastfeeding During the Shortage



Being a new parent is a source of anxiety for many; however, fear of not being able to find formula has not crossed the minds of most formula-feeding families, that is, until the recent formula shortage.

What many families may not realize is that they **CAN** get back to breastfeeding! Parents who tried breastfeeding but were unsuccessful **can relactate** with the right guidance and support. Even parents who did not consider nursing or pumping when their baby was born can induce lactation!

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months after birth with continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years or longer (recently updated from 1 year). Breast milk has been proven to be the best source of nutrition and protection against common illnesses and diseases. Plus, boosting baby’s immune system during a pandemic is a perk!

How can you help to support shoppers who are breastfeeding or interested in breastfeeding due to the formula shortage?

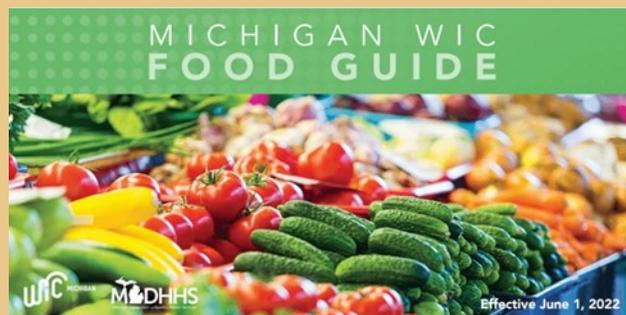
- Let them know breast milk is still an option.
- Encourage them to seek lactation support! Shoppers can call their local WIC office or the Michigan WIC [Breastfeeding Warmline](#) to speak with trained staff, ready to help!
- Informal milk sharing is on the rise. This is where parents obtain expressed breast milk from other parents in their community. Encourage shoppers to obtain milk from friends, family, or other trustworthy sources rather than individuals they do not know.
- Consider your words carefully as they hold power. Avoid shaming and judgmental comments. Keep it positive and encouraging. Let your shoppers know you care! A great example would be: “I’m sorry you are struggling to find formula. I can’t imagine how stressful this is for you. Have you thought about breastfeeding or increasing your milk production? WIC is a great resource for breastfeeding support. Would you like information on the Michigan WIC Breastfeeding Warmline?”



WIC FOOD CORNER

Updated Food Guide

A new version of the Michigan WIC [Food Guide](#) became effective June 1. Highlighted changes include minor adjustments to the **‘allowed’ and ‘not allowed’ criteria** for fruits and vegetables, cereals, infant meats, infant cereals, infant fruits and vegetables and peanut butter. A [complete list of these changes](#) can be found on our [website](#). Please email us at MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov to request copies of the new Food Guide for your store.



Adding Additional UPCs

Michigan WIC added thousands of UPCs, but we are aware there may be additional eligible UPCs that have not yet been identified. Please know the Michigan WIC Program continues to evaluate new foods for authorization. Vendors may submit additional WIC food item requests for consideration by using the [UPC Request Form](#) found on our website at Michigan.gov/WICVendor.

If you think that a product might be eligible, please complete and fax a UPC Request Form to 517-335-9206 or email the request to MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov. Please include any relevant product labels and nutrition information.

New Juicy Juice Watermelon

Reminder: The new 59 oz. Juicy Juice Watermelon is not an approved WIC item. Please make sure that you **DO NOT** label this item as WIC-approved in your store!



Savory Chicken and Rice Soup

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 onion (diced)*
- 2 stalks celery, sliced*
- 2 carrots, peeled and sliced*
- 8 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- ½ cups brown rice, uncooked*
- 2 cups chicken, cooked and shredded
- 1/8 tsp black pepper (optional)
- Parsley, chopped (optional)*



Directions

Place a large pot on medium heat and add the oil. Once the oil begins to sizzle, add the cut-up onion, celery, and carrots. Cover and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until tender, stirring every few minutes. Add the chicken broth and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add the rice and cook for about 30 to 35 minutes. Add the chicken and the black pepper. Stir and cook until heated through, about 3 to 5 minutes. Garnish with parsley and serve immediately or let cool and refrigerate for up to 4 days.

Makes 6 servings. 160 calories, 19 grams protein, 12 grams carbohydrate, 4 grams fat, 235 milligrams sodium, 1 gram fiber.

*Indicates WIC-approved food

ONLINE TRAINING

Need to complete your federally required training? The training webcasts have been replaced with the new **online WIC Vendor Training course**.

Visit the [Learning Management System](#) (LMS) Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. to complete the 10 lesson course at your leisure.

[Instructions](#) to complete the course as well as a recording of our ['How-to' Webcast](#) are posted on the [WIC Vendor website](#). We hope you enjoy this new and convenient training opportunity!

If your store requires a training, you will be sent an invitation via email. Call or email the Vendor Relations Unit for the date of your most recent training or for help registering.

QUARTERLY CALLS

Please join us for our regularly scheduled **Quarterly Vendor Calls**. These calls will provide Vendors an opportunity to:

- Learn more about program updates and changes as they happen.
- Share individual store experiences with the WIC Program.
- Ask questions and engage in dialogue with state staff.



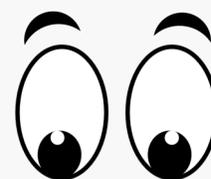
Calls will last one hour and will be hosted via Zoom. The next Quarterly Call is scheduled for **2:30 p.m., Monday, Oct. 17**. [Click here to access the meeting](#). We hope you can join us!

RESOURCES

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

Elliott-Larsen Bldg., 6th Floor
320 S. Walnut St.
Lansing, MI 48913

Phone: 517-335-8937
Fax: 517-335-9514
Email: MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov
Website: 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
- ◆ Recording of the WIC Vendor Training webcast
- ◆ WIC Vendor Policy
- ◆ 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.