

wic MICHIGAN VENDOR NEWS

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Information for Store Owners, Managers and Cashiers

Winter 2022/23



FY2022 WIC STATS

In fiscal year 2022, Michigan WIC served **321,001 participants** (236,595 infants and children and 84,406 pregnant and postpartum people).

These WIC participants redeemed **\$133,439,510.31** in WIC benefits at more than **1,400 authorized Vendors** throughout the state.

Thank you for another great year!



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

THE HISTORY OF WIC

Sponsored by Senator Hubert Humphrey (D) of Minnesota, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) started as a two-year pilot program in 1966 ([P.L. 92-433](#)). At that time, eligibility was limited to children up to age four and excluded non-breastfeeding postpartum women. By the end of 1974, WIC was operating in 45 states.

In 1975, WIC was established as a permanent program ([P.L. 94-105](#)) and eligibility was extended to non-breastfeeding women (up to six months postpartum) and children up to five years old. All participants also had to be at nutrition risk and of inadequate income. However, inadequate income was not defined. In 1978, [P.L. 95-627](#) defined nutrition risk and established income eligibility standards that were linked to the income standards associated with reduced price school meals.

Another income standard change took place in 1989, when [P.L. 101-147](#) established similar income eligibility for Food Stamp, Medicaid and AFDC participation, thus lowering the WIC income standard and simplifying the application process.

WIC began to promote and support breastfeeding women in the late 1980s, and in 1989 Congress mandated \$8 million be used specifically for that purpose. In 1999, the WIC program standardized nutrition risk criteria for program eligibility and began assigning individual nutrition risk priority levels.

The first WIC site opened in Pineville Kentucky on January 15, 1974, with the program expanding to all but five states by the end of the year. In 1974, the WIC Program began in Michigan. The first WIC Clinic opened in the Upper Peninsula in Delta/Menominee County and the next clinic to open was Kalamazoo Family Health Center.



The purpose of the WIC Program is to provide nutrition support to low-income women, infants, and children through education and strategies for a healthy diet, supplemental foods, referrals, and breastfeeding promotion and support.

For more than 45 years, the Michigan WIC Program has been successful in improving the health of babies and children, providing care for one out of two babies born in the state, and improving the nutrition status of WIC mothers.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: Kimberly Keilen is Retiring!

Kimberly Keilen has been the Section Manager of Vendor Relations and Program Integrity since 2019. She has a master's degree in social work and a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Starting her career as a corrections officer in 1986, Kimberly has served in state government for 36 years. After transferring to the Department of Health and Human Services in 1994, she has since worked in the following positions:

- Assistance Payments Worker
- Family Independence Worker
- Foster Care Worker
- Family Independence/Adult Service Manager
- Child Protection Supervisor
- SNAP Program Manager
- Program Policy Director
- Foster Care Supervisor
- Vendor Relations and Program Integrity Section Manager

Kimberly recently announced her plans to retire on December 31, 2022. She states she has been blessed to have such an amazing career serving the residents of Michigan in all her various roles. In addition to spending more time with friends and family, she looks forward to cooking, making pottery, gardening and playing golf.

We wish Kimberly well in this next chapter and thank her for her many years of dedicated service on behalf of our state!



SURVEY RESULTS

Cash-Value Benefits

Cash-value benefits (CVBs) are WIC benefits provided in a dollar amount that can be spent on fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables. Currently, children receive **\$25 per month**, pregnant and non-breastfeeding postpartum individuals receive **\$44 per month**, and breastfeeding individuals receive **\$49 per month**.

Michigan WIC surveyed WIC participants to increase client awareness of CVB benefits, identify barriers to CVB redemption and utilize feedback to improve future redemption.



The survey showed that:

- Clients **prefer fresh fruits and vegetables** over either frozen or canned options.
- 35% of respondents believe the **current CVB amount is insufficient**.
- The largest barriers to CVB redemption include: clients **not knowing** what fruits and vegetables are WIC-approved (13.9%), **spoiled** fruits and vegetables at their store (10.4%), and being **unable to find** WIC-approved fruits and vegetables at their store (6.7%).
- 29.5% of clients also said that **WIC labels** on shelves helped them redeem their CVBs.
- 28% of clients reported that **reminder text** messages from their local agency also helped them to redeem their CVBs.

While CVB redemptions decreased from 73.9% in 2019 to 67.7% in 2022, survey results show that clients not only appreciate this benefit but would like it to be increased. Vendors can make a difference by **ensuring the variety and freshness** of fruits and vegetables available and by **clearly labeling** WIC-approved products in your store.

The Shopping Experience

In December 2019, the Southeast Michigan WIC Engagement Project asked WIC clients to provide feedback on their shopping experience. More than 1,300 clients participated in the survey. The responses detailed below can help provide WIC Vendors with a better understanding of both what is going well and areas for improvement.

- On a scale from 'Really Bad' to 'Really Good,' clients said their shopping experience when using WIC was **generally 'Good.'**
- The most frequent issues reported by clients were stores **not carrying enough stock** of WIC-approved items, specifically those on a client's shopping list, and WIC items being **difficult to find**.
- More rarely, clients reported that the **checkout process was frustrating**, needing to separate WIC and non-WIC items was challenging, that staff were not equipped to answer questions, and that they felt judged by store staff.
- When asked what would make their shopping experience easier, clients replied with the following:
 - Clear and accurately **labeled WIC items**
 - A dedicated **WIC aisle or shelf**
 - **Increased variety** of WIC items
 - **Mixed basket** purchases
 - Increased **training of store staff**

How to Treat Customers

1. MAKE PEOPLE FEEL WELCOME & COMFORTABLE

- Smile
- Call people by name if you know them
- Angry customers – Listen, apologize, satisfy, thank you

2. LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMER

- Demonstrate understanding

3. HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

- Encourage



Save the Date!



2023 WIC VENDOR CONFERENCE

DATE:

Thursday, Sept. 14

LOCATION:

Treetops Resort
3962 Wilinkinson Rd.
Gaylord, MI

THEME: Piece by Piece—Making a Difference in the Mitten

More details to come!

PROGRAM UPDATES

"Shrinkflation"

As companies deal with rising costs for ingredients, packaging, labor and transportation, manufacturers are quietly **shrinking package sizes without lowering prices**. People refer to this practice as "shrinkflation," and it is more common during times of inflation. When a smaller size item enters the market, **it usually has a new Universal Product Code (UPC)**. Because WIC customers can only scan and purchase UPCs of items that have been reviewed by our Food Authorization Committee, we ask that you notify us of any WIC products that have changed in size.

Recently Quaker Instant Grits & Oatmeal in the 12 oz size was discontinued by the manufacturer and replaced with 9.8 oz sizes, which have different UPCs. The 9.8 oz size DOES NOT meet our state policy criteria. **We cannot approve these new sizes/UPCs at this time, therefore, clients cannot redeem 9.8 oz Quaker Grits & Oatmeal with WIC benefits.** In the meantime, Quaker manufactures **larger sizes of instant grits & oatmeal that meet our policy requirement**. The UPCs below highlighted in yellow have been added to our [Approved Product List \(APL\)](#).

Product Size & Name	Product UPC
12 oz Quaker Instant Grits, butter	Discontinued 030000037904 (9.8 oz UPC: 030000568507 not approved)
12 oz Quaker Instant Grits, original	Discontinued 030000047606 (9.8 oz UPC: 030000568545 not approved)
11.8 oz Quaker Instant Oatmeal, original	Discontinued 030000012109 (9.8 oz UPC: 030000567319 not approved)
21.7 oz Quaker Instant Grits, butter	030000319307 available in APL
21.7 oz Quaker Instant Grits, original	030000319291 available in APL
36 oz Quaker Instant Grits, original	030000041383 available in APL
23.7 oz Quaker Instant Oatmeal, original	030000315071 available in APL

Formula Updates

Michigan WIC applauds our Vendors for ensuring formula access for WIC families. Some key points as they relate to formula:

- [Temporary alternative formula options](#) are approved through **Feb. 28**.
- Alternative sizes and forms of Similac products are approved through **April 30**.
- We continue to educate WIC families to purchase formula following these three steps:
 1. Look for Similac WIC sizes first.
 2. Followed by other Similac formulas if the WIC size is not available.
 3. Followed by alternative brand choices as a last resort.

Following these three steps will prevent clients from having to make a future formula change and will better prepare our authorized Vendors to meet supply needs of Similac formulas after temporary choices are discontinued.

- Michigan WIC continues to meet regularly with Abbott to address formula purchasing challenges. If you are experiencing any issues securing Similac contract formulas, please contact us for assistance at 517-335-8937 or MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov.
- You will find the three steps identified above as well as a complete listing of all currently authorized formulas in the [Dec 19 formula benefit guide](#).

Stand-Beside Update

FIS launched an update to FIS WIC point-of-sale (POS) devices that makes them more reliably overnight download Michigan WIC's latest Approved Products List (APL). If you **leave your device signed in and powered on overnight**, it will update the device for you to sell WIC foods with the latest changes in allowed items and bar code numbers (UPCs).

When the device updates, you will see **"CLOSED"** the next morning. This means you need to sign back into your device. To use your device, **you will need to sign back in** with the second button labelled **"Sign On-Off"** on the top row.



From there, you will enter your 3-digit clerk ID and 4-digit PIN and a report will print off. From there, you should be able to use your device as normal. If you have questions about this, please call us at 517-335-8937.

VENDOR COMPLIANCE

Resuming of Normal Monitoring Activities

Due to the improving situation in supply chains and infant formula production, the WIC Program would like to announce that **normal monitoring visits will resume after the first of the year. Violation points will be assigned** to Vendors for violations observed upon second and subsequent visits. Make sure you are familiar with the Minimum Stock Requirements, including the necessary quantities, brands, and sizes, along with other program requirements.

Promotions & Incentives

Promotions and incentives are a useful way for Vendors to attract customers to their store. However, it is important to remember that all promotion and incentives **must be available to ALL customers, including WIC participants**. This means that promotions like special item pricing, discounts, manufacturers' coupons, buy-one-get-one (BOGO), bonus sizes and loyalty cards must be available to WIC participants. Failure to do so is a violation of the [WIC Vendor Contract](#).



The maximum value for promotions and/or incentives is \$2. Formula and diapers are not allowed to be used as incentive items.

Allowable incentives that are exceptions to the \$2 limit are:

- **Discounts** applied directly to the total transaction amount charged to the WIC program.
- **Loyalty programs** or clubs requiring participant enrollment or documented membership. The loyalty programs or clubs must meet all state and federal regulations (i.e., Kroger Plus card or Meijer card).
- **Manufacturers' coupons.**
- **Free ounces** added to food item by manufacturer (bonus size items).
- **Buy one, get one (BOGO)** – the sale of one WIC food item as part of a normal WIC transaction and the provision of an additional item at no added cost, or a second item at a reduced price. Infant formula may not be included as any part of a BOGO.

Cash or cash equivalent (debit cards, gift cards, phone or gas cards, etc.), lottery, alcohol, and tobacco are NOT allowed under any circumstance.

Submitting a Vendor Complaint

The WIC Program continuously works to contain costs and ensure delivery of nutritious foods to its WIC participants. General complaints may be submitted for a variety of program issues regarding WIC staff, participants, or Vendors. For general complaints, fill out the linked [WIC Vendor Complaint Form](#) and fax it to 517-335-9514.

The form is designed to capture information necessary for the Michigan WIC Program to resolve the issue. It is best to fill out the form as completely as possible and include as much detailed information as possible, such as:

- Nature of the issue
- WIC Vendor Name
- WIC Client name/ID number/card number
- Current benefit issuance period
- Date and approximate time of occurrence
- Receipts, photographs of items and POS error messages, if applicable.

If you need any assistance or guidance to meet these or any other requirements, please contact the WIC Program at MDHHS-WICVendor@michigan.gov or 517-335-8937.

BREASTFEEDING

How Lactation Support Benefits Employers

Modified from The Business Case for Breastfeeding

Investing in a breastfeeding employee support program has proven to produce a 3-to-1 return on investment through greater employee retention, increased productivity, lower health care costs and decreased sick days.

The fastest growing segment of today's labor force is women with infants and children.



Breastfeeding employees miss work less often

Employers that support breastfeeding through their policies enjoy reduced employee absenteeism.

Human milk boosts an infant's immune system and helps protect against common childhood illnesses, infections and dermatitis.

Because breastfed babies are generally healthier, mothers and fathers are able to spend more time at work rather than taking leave to care for sick children.

Breastfeeding lowers health care costs

The reduced health care costs for breastfed infants translates into lower medical insurance claims for businesses.

Babies who are not breastfed visit the physician more often, spend more days in the hospital, and require more prescriptions than breastfed infants. Mothers who breastfeed have lower risks for certain diseases such as pre-menopausal breast cancer.

More employer benefits...

- Improves employee job satisfaction and productivity
- Increases loyalty and morale among all employees
- Enhances family-friendly image of company in the community

Retention Rate for Employees of Companies with Lactation Support Programs



Lower turnover rates

Employees are more likely to return to work after childbirth when their workplace provides a supportive environment for continued breastfeeding.

Being able to keep experienced employees after childbirth means lowering/eliminating the costs associated with hiring temporary staff or to recruit, hire, and train replacement staff.

Ready to start benefiting from your own workplace lactation program?

www.mibreastfeeding.org/workplace

MIBFN
Michigan Breastfeeding Network

MARKETING WIC

Using Online Marketing to Increase Sales

Our 2022 WIC Vendor Conference Panelist, Elizabeth Aboona of Americana Foods, shares how her store uses online marketing, loyalty and social media to drive sales in her store.

Using a loyalty program service:

- Another panelist mentioned using a loyalty program called [AppCard](#).
- A similar program called [Babylon Leads](#) sends text messages to customers instantly – featuring products, coupons, specials, rewards, and milestones. These texts can prompt customers to shop at your store more frequently.
- Updating the specials regularly – once a week or more – can be a quick process and make a substantial difference.



Elizabeth Aboona, speaking at the 2022 WIC Vendor Conference in Dearborn.

How we use a search engine optimization service to drive new customer traffic:

- Americana Foods uses [egumball](#) to increase the relevance of the store page in google searches.
- Potential customers in the area looking up “grocery” or “food” are more likely to find our store now.

How we make social media easy:

- The key to social media is to post often!
- To make it easy, we regularly post for each food related day of the year. There is a holiday for just about every food on just about every day. There is a hot dog day, a cake day, a bean day, a peanut butter day, and it goes on and on. Our store just finds days that have appetizing foods we just happen to sell and we find a beautiful picture of the food from the internet and post Happy Spaghetti Day! It is quick, easy and consistent.
- There are other ways to make content, like sharing recipes, etc.

WIC Promotional Materials Online

Michigan WIC has posted [print-ready promotional materials](#) to our website! We encourage all Vendors to use these customer-facing signs, tear-pads, labels, and the storefront banner as tools in advertising to grow your business.



Our data and feedback from Vendors have shown that using materials to improve the WIC shopping experience for your customers can increase WIC sales and help enhance your store's overall sales as well. You may print these materials or request our state office provide them to your store*.

*Availability varies by material. Please ask about anything you are interested in!



WIC FOOD CORNER

Winter Squash

Fall and winter are famous for pumpkin season, yet there are many more winter squashes in the produce section your customers – and our clients – may find interesting. Share some of the tips below to get excited about winter squash!

Winter squash are usually harvested in the fall, though some are available all year. They differ from summer squash (like zucchini and yellow squash) because of their hard rind, making them last longer. They are packed with nutrients such as vitamin C, potassium, magnesium, fiber, vitamin A and beta-carotene, which gives squash its bright colors.

Winter squash vary in size, color, shape and flavor. Common types found in grocery stores:



- **Acorn Squash:** As you might expect, this squash resembles a large acorn. It has dark green skin with yellow flesh and has a nutty, buttery flavor. When cut and baked in halves, it is great for stuffing with its bowl-like shell.
- **Butternut Squash:** This squash has a slim neck and bulb-shaped bottom along with thin, pale tan skin and bright orange flesh. Butternut squash is one of the most popular with its sweet, slightly nutty flavor and is usually available year-round.
- **Delicata Squash:** Small and oblong with thin yellow, dark green, and orange striped skin. This squash has yellow flesh that is sweet, nutty, and corn-like. Its texture is similar to that of a sweet potato.
- **Kabocha Squash (or Japanese Pumpkin):** This squash is round and squat with a dark green, often bumpy/ridged skin. Its dark orange flesh tends to be denser than other types with a nutty, earthy, and sweet taste.
- **Pumpkin:** Likely to be the most familiar squash, pumpkins are known for their round shape and ribbed orange skin and orange flesh. The flavor is sweet and buttery and is commonly used in soups and desserts.
- **Spaghetti Squash:** This variety is cylindrical in shape with pale to bright yellow skin and yellow flesh. Once cooked, the flesh is stringy like noodles and the flavor is quite mild and not as sweet. It's often used as a pasta or noodle alternative.

Tips for Getting Started

- **Choosing a Squash:** When selecting a squash, choose one that feels heavy, is firm with no soft spots, and has a tan, dry stem. Canned or frozen winter squash may also be available.
- **Washing:** First, wash your hands, then the squash: rinse with plain running water while scrubbing the outside with a clean brush, then dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- **Peeling:** The skin of all winter squashes is edible but can be tough to eat. Peeling after cooking may make it easier.
- **Cutting:** Grab a cutting board and a sharp, sturdy knife. Cut the squash into halves and scrape out the seeds. Then, cut into chunks or slices, then cook it.

Tips for Cooking and Using. There are many ways to prepare squash. Consider baking/roasting in the oven or steaming or boiling in hot water, then mash to your ideal consistency. Mashed squash is a great side dish and pureed squash is perfect for soups.

- **Save the Seeds!** You are probably familiar with roasted pumpkin seeds, but did you know you can eat the seeds of any squash? Simply replace roasted pumpkin seeds in a recipe with squash seeds.
- **Storage:** The tough skin and firm flesh of winter squash allows it to be stored for several months. Keep it in a cool, dry spot and it can last between 2-4 months. Store cooked squash in the fridge for 3-4 days and although safe indefinitely, frozen squash is best used within 3-4 months.

Article closely adapted from <https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/what-do-i-do-winter-squash>.

WIC FOOD CORNER

Peanut Butter, Beans, Lentils and Peas

Legumes (peanut butter, beans, lentils and peas) are an important food category authorized on the WIC Program. Legumes are high in protein and fiber, as well as folate, manganese, iron, and magnesium, and can help stabilize blood sugar and promote heart and digestive health.

If your WIC Shopping List shows: **1 JAR 16-18 oz Peanut Butter, LB Dry, 15-16 oz Can Bean** you can buy...



or



or



If a WIC participant has this benefit on their shopping list, they can redeem it for peanut butter, dried beans, lentils or peas, or canned beans or peas (see image above).

The [minimum stock requirement](#) for **peanut butter** is **4 units** of any brand and variety (smooth, creamy, crunchy, or extra crunchy) in a 16-18 oz jar (1 unit = 16-18 oz jar).

The [minimum stock requirement](#) for **beans, lentils, and peas** is **4 units** of any brand in 16 oz bags and/or 15-16 oz cans/jars (4 cans/jars are equal to 1 bag of dry beans, lentils or peas).

Formula Purchase Requirements

The Michigan WIC Program requires that all WIC authorized Vendors **MUST** only purchase infant formula from:

- A Michigan based wholesaler, distributor, or retailer that is licensed to distribute food by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD);
- A non-Michigan based wholesaler, distributor, or retailer that is licensed to distribute food by the MDARD equivalent in the jurisdiction in which it is located;
- A Michigan based pharmacy that is licensed by the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA);
- A non-Michigan based pharmacy that is licensed by the LARA equivalent in the jurisdiction in which it is located; or
- A manufacturer that is registered with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).



This requirement also applies to all **online purchases**.

In the past, Vendors have been able to visit the MDARD website to verify the licensure status of a Michigan wholesaler or retailer; this process has recently changed. Now, please find the published lists of [MDARD Licensed Retailers](#) and [FDA-Approved Manufacturers](#) on our website. Vendors can still search LARA licenses at Michigan.gov/lara.

Sweet Potato and Apple Bake



Ingredients

- 3 cups sweet potatoes, cooked, peeled and sliced*
- 2 large tart apples, peeled and sliced*
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
- Dash of pepper
- 1 Tbsp. butter

*Indicates WIC-approved food

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Combine $\frac{1}{2}$ of the sweet potatoes and sliced apples in a greased 2-quart baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, nutmeg, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ of this mixture over sweet potatoes and apples and top with the remaining dry mixture and butter. Cover and bake for 15 minutes. Remove cover and bake for an additional 15 minutes, or until apples are tender.

Makes 10 servings. Each serving provides 162 calories, 1 gram protein, 38 grams carbohydrate, 2 grams fat, 103 milligrams sodium, 2 grams fiber.

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.



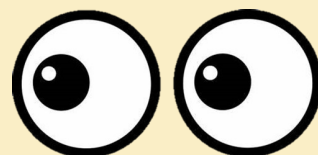
Calls will last one hour and will be hosted via Zoom. The next Quarterly Call is scheduled for **Monday, Apr. 17 at 2:30 p.m.** [Click here to access the meeting](#). We hope you can join us!

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 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.