

Tips on Shopping for WIC Foods: Topic of the Month

DECEMBER 4, 2024

It is important to educate participants on WIC allowed foods when prescribing the food package. Some foods are trickier to choose at the grocery store than others, and participants can benefit from knowing tips for picking out the correct foods. This month's topic of the month contains some tips for helping participants have a positive shopping experience.

Fruits and vegetables cash value benefit (CVB)

Fresh fruits and vegetables



- Any fresh fruit or vegetable is allowed.
- Pumpkins and salad mixes with added ingredients are **not allowed**.

Integrated stores, or stores that can accept WIC payment and other payment types in the same transaction, are responsible for mapping fresh produce. This means they must set it up for WIC sale in their register systems before participants can purchase it with their WIC cards. If they fail to set it up in their systems, which may happen occasionally, it will not ring up for WIC sale and can result in families either not getting the item or paying for it with another payment type.

- If participants are reporting many issues with one store, you may email health.wicvendor@state.mn.us to let us know.

While we can contact the store about mapping in general, it is always helpful to have specifics on what items are not going through at the register.

- For more information on mapping fresh produce: [Mapping Fresh Produce](#) and [Introduction to Fresh Produce Mapping Module](#)

Stand beside stores, or stores that transact WIC cards in a terminal that is not part of their register system and does not allow other payment types in the same transaction, do not have to map fresh produce. Fresh produce is rung up differently and will always go through for WIC purchases at stores that use a stand beside terminal.

Here is an example of a stand beside terminal:



Selecting fresh produce

For stores with self-checkout (currently Walmart, Target, Hy-Vee, some Econo Foods, Family Fare, and Family Fresh Markets), participants using self-checkout need to enter the PLU code (Product Look Up code) on the sticker of bulk, bag-it-yourself items.

Here is what the PLU sticker looks like:



Participants **should not** scan this sticker, even if the register tells them they can scan it. They should instead use the item lookup function on the register or input the PLU into the register themselves.

For pre-packaged/bagged produce, the participant should scan the UPC on those items.

Here is what a UPC looks like:



For more information on self-checkout, visit: [Using Self-Checkout with the WIC Card.](#)

Participants should not use the My Minnesota WIC app to scan fresh produce items. Most fresh produce UPCs are not in the Minnesota WIC Approved Product List (APL), so they will not scan as allowed in the WIC app, even if they are allowed.

Fresh berries are especially difficult for stores to set up in their register systems because there are thousands of UPCs for berries, and they change frequently.

- If a fresh produce item does not ring up for WIC sale:
 - The participant should take a photo of the item, including UPC, and submit it to their local agency. It's important to have the UPC so it can be submitted to the store for mapping.
 - If the participant was unable to take a photo of the item:
 - The participant can submit a description of the item with the full number of the UPC.
 - If the participant paid out of pocket for the item, they can submit a receipt showing the item.

- This information, along with the date of the shopping trip, name of store, and household ID should be sent to health.wicvendor@state.mn.us. All other transaction issues should be reported to the Minnesota helpdesk.

For more information on submitting transaction issues, see the [Transaction Troubleshooting Guide](#).

Selecting frozen and canned produce



Because frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are in the WIC APL, the My Minnesota WIC app can be used to scan these. Using the food finder in the app is encouraged because frozen and canned produce can be one of the harder foods to select correctly at the store.

- Any plain or mixture of plain fruits and vegetables is allowed. Any container type is allowed except individual squeeze pouches.
- Added sugar and artificial sweetener is **not allowed** for canned or frozen fruits.
- Added vinegar or other added ingredients are **not allowed** in canned or frozen vegetables.
- Canned tomatoes, including those with herbs and seasonings, are allowed.

When choosing canned fruits, encourage participants to look for “100% juice” or “packed in water” on the can. “No sugar added” might mean that the fruit is packed in water or juice, but it can also mean that the fruit was packed with artificial sweetener.

Whole grains

Bread



Bread is allowed only in 16-ounce package sizes. WIC allowed bread will often have “16 ounce” highlighted on the package. Bread vendors stock the shelves at stores, and store staff has very little control over how much bread is delivered. If a participant would like bread, and there isn’t any stock on the shelf, they can come back on a different day or choose another whole grain option.

Tortillas



Soft corn and whole wheat tortillas in 16-ounce packages are allowed. Other sizes are not allowed.

- Hard taco shells are not allowed.
- “Whole wheat” may be listed on packages but does not mean that the tortilla is 100% whole wheat. Participants should use the My Minnesota WIC app or their Shopping Guides to determine if the tortilla they are choosing is WIC allowed.

Brown rice

Any brand of plain brown rice in 16-ounce packages is allowed. Other sizes are not allowed.

- Parboiled rice may have a brownish appearance but is not allowed.

Rolled oats

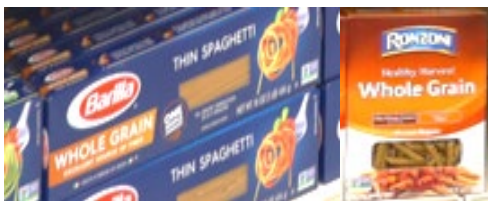
Rolled oats are allowed in only 16-ounce package sizes.



- Currently only one brand is allowed (Mom’s Best Quick or Old-Fashioned Oats).
- Participants sometimes confuse instant oatmeal packets (which is part of the cereal benefit) and rolled oats.

Pasta

Any brand 100% whole wheat pasta is allowed in 16-ounce sizes. Other sizes are not allowed.



- Pasta made from other ingredients, such as legumes, is not allowed.
- Look for the word “whole grain” on the product.

Milk

Cow's milk is allowed in gallon or half-gallon sizes. Other milks are also allowed, such as lactose-free, powdered, evaporated, and goat's milk.

- The most common error is that participants may incorrectly bring a higher fat milk to the register than what is on their WIC card.
- Lactose-free milk is allowed only in half-gallons. Lactaid makes a container that looks like a gallon but is not. Participants sometimes choose that because they think it is a full gallon and can be interchanged with the half-gallons on their WIC card, but it will not ring up for WIC at the register.
- Soy beverage is also allowed only in half-gallons when refrigerated. Shelf stable soy milk is allowed in quarts.

Cheese



Cheese is **only** allowed in **8-ounce or 16-ounce** packages; no other sizes are allowed. WIC allowed varieties are block, shredded, string cheese, and cheese twists. Packages that contain mixtures of WIC allowed cheeses are also allowed. Check the Shopping Guide to find the different varieties of allowed cheeses.

- Crystal Farms shredded cheese has downsized some of their packages to 7-ounce. Those are **NOT** WIC allowed.
- String cheese and farmer cheese (sometimes called queso fresco) can be especially difficult to find in the correct package size. Stores do not have to carry either of these cheeses as long as they have other WIC allowed cheeses in 8-to-16-ounce package sizes. Queso fresco must show "farmer cheese" on the label so not all are allowed.

Yogurt

WIC only allows 32-ounce containers of yogurt. As with milk, the most common issue is that participants sometimes do not check the fat content and may get yogurt that has a higher fat content than what is on their cards. Only what is on their cards will ring up as allowed.

- Yogurt with artificial sweeteners and sugar in excess of 40 grams/cup is not allowed.

- Greek Gods makes a 32-ounce container and a 24-ounce container. The 32-ounce container is allowed, but the 24-ounce container is not. The two sizes look almost identical. Participants who are used to shopping at a store that carries the 32-ounce size may mistakenly pick up a 24-ounce size thinking it will be allowed.

Cereal



All WIC allowed cereal brands are listed in the [Shopping Guide \(PDF\)](#).

- Cold cereals under 12-ounces are **not** WIC allowed.
- Some hot cereals, like plain oatmeal packets or grits, are allowed in sizes less than 12-ounces. Letting participants know that they can get these hot cereals may help them maximize their cereal benefit when it drops below 12-ounces.
- Some cereal boxes may look over 12-ounces but are under 12-ounces. The most common one is a 9.8-ounce box of Cheerios.
- Many cereals are downsizing, so it may be harder for participants to easily add up the cereal ounces to maximize their benefit when shopping.

Juice

Shelf stable juice

Juice must be in a 64-ounce, or half-gallon, container. No juice mixtures are allowed.

- Juicy Juice apple is the only variety Juicy Juice that is allowed because the other flavors are mixtures. Grape flavored Juicy Juice is a mixture of juices.
- Vegetable and Tomato juices are allowed, including low sodium varieties.

Refrigerated juice

Orange juice is the only refrigerated juice that is allowed and must be packaged in a 64-ounce container.

- Most refrigerated juices are **not** the correct size.
- Allowed brands are typically store brands or smaller, regional suppliers, such as Polka Dot, Prairie Farms, or Cass Clay. Store brands such as Great Value, Hy-Vee, and Essential

Everyday also typically come in a 64-ounce size. WIC allowed name brand orange juice includes Land O'Lakes and Kemps.

- Stores do not have to carry refrigerated orange juice if they have shelf-stable orange juice available for WIC purchase.

Canned fish

Participants should select only 5-ounce or larger cans of plain tuna packaged in water or pink salmon. Red salmon is not allowed, because the price is too high.



- Multi-packs of canned fish are allowed.
- Foil packs are not allowed.

Peanut butter, canned and dry beans

Peanut butter

Only 16-to-18-ounce containers are allowed. Spreads are **not** allowed.

- Natural peanut butter is allowed, but **Jif and Skippy Natural are not** allowed, because they are spreads. Participants can select other natural peanut butters that are allowed.
- Reduced sugar is allowed but reduced fat is **not** allowed.

Canned and dry beans and peas

Canned beans are allowed in 15-to-16-ounce size cans.

- Regular or low sodium is allowed.
- Beans with added ingredients, like chili beans and baked beans, are not allowed.
- Refried beans are not allowed.
- Green beans cannot be purchased with this benefit but can be purchased with the CVB fruit and vegetable benefit.

Any 16-ounce package of dry beans or peas is also allowed.

- Soup mixes or bags with other ingredients are **not** allowed.

Infant fruits and vegetables



Plain infant fruits and vegetables in 4-ounce containers in any variety or a mixture of plain fruits and vegetables are allowed.

- Infant fruits and vegetables with added cereal or other ingredients, like meats, also known as dinners, are **not** allowed.
- Two-packs are allowed but count as two and **not** as one container. This is a common mistake when participants choose infant fruits and vegetables.
- Some two-packs are two containers of 2-ounce infant fruits and vegetables. These add up to 4-ounces but are **not** allowed.
- Pouches are **not** allowed.

The WIC transaction has a 50 unique item limit, so it may be good advice to tell a parent with twins or many family members in the same household to split the WIC transaction into two separate transactions. If the 50 unique item limit is exceeded, the transaction will not go through.

Other tips

- It is extremely important to check the midpoint receipt when checking out with a WIC card. Some stores have a display on the PIN pad or the screen facing the customer that shows WIC allowed foods and can function the same way as the midpoint receipt. If a participant sees that something is not coming off their WIC card that they expected WIC to pay for, they should decline the transaction and have the cashier remove the item from their transaction, unless they want to pay out of pocket for the item.
- Stores do not have to carry all WIC foods and allowed brands. If a store does not have a food that a participant would like, they can ask the store to order it. Not all stores will be able to order a certain food if they cannot get it through their normal supply chain.
- Using the My Minnesota WIC app is the best way to ensure that the participant is choosing the correct WIC foods and that the foods are available to that household. Participants must register their card with the app for full functionality.

References- complete listing of hyperlinks:

[Mapping Fresh Produce](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/vendor/mapping.html) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/vendor/mapping.html)

[Introduction to Fresh Produce Mapping Module](https://www.health.state.mn.us/training/cfh/wic/vendor/modules/producemapping/index.html)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/training/cfh/wic/vendor/modules/producemapping/index.html)

[Using a WIC card at Self-Checkout](https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/selfcheckout.html)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/selfcheckout.html)

[Transaction Troubleshooting Guide](https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/vendor/troubleshoot.pdf)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/vendor/troubleshoot.pdf)

Shopping Guide (PDF)

(https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/vendor/fpchng/shopguide.pdf)

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Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, health.wic@state.mn.us, www.health.state.mn.us; to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.

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