DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The APL, Produce Mapping, and the App: What WIC Staff Need to Know

What is the APL and how does it work?

The term "APL" stands for "Approved Product List." It is a list of WIC Allowed UPCs and PLUs. The store's point of sale system (POS) or stand-beside terminal uses this list to know if a food in the transaction is WIC allowed. For definitions of these and other terms, refer to the [Glossary of Vendor-related eWIC Terms](#).

UPCs for WIC foods in the APL are organized in categories and subcategories. Below is an example of two UPCs in the yogurt category; one is in the whole milk yogurt subcategory and the other is in the lowfat or nonfat subcategory. If a participant's benefit balance lists "WIC-allowed Lowfat or Nonfat Yogurt," they will not be able to buy a UPC that is in the "Yogurt – Whole Milk" subcategory.

UPC_PLU	Item Description	Category Code	Category Description	Subcategory Code	Subcategory Description
074265011446	ZIYAD OLD COUNTRY STYLE PLAIN YOGURT 32 OZ	50	Yogurt	001	Yogurt - Whole Milk
070038600596	BEST CHOICE LOW FAT VANILLA YOGURT 32 OZ	50	Yogurt	002	(32 oz) WIC-allowed LowFat or NonFat Yogurt

If a UPC or PLU is in the APL in a category or subcategory for which the participant has available benefits, the store's point of sale (POS) system will automatically know that the food is WIC allowed without the retailer having to do anything.

What is "produce mapping" and why is it necessary?

First, it's important to know that, in most cases, packaged produce is rung up with a UPC on its label, while bulk produce that the customer bags themselves is rung up with a PLU typed into the cash register. This is because there is a set price for the packaged item, but the bulk item is priced by weight or quantity purchased. WIC staff might have experienced this when doing their own grocery shopping.

"Produce mapping" is the process a retailer or corporate office uses to link a UPC for a fresh fruit or vegetable that is not in the APL with a PLU that *is* in the APL. This is done using their POS software. Mapping works *only* for packaged **fresh** fruits and vegetables, not frozen fruits and vegetables or other WIC foods.

Mapping is necessary because there are thousands of UPCs for fresh produce, the UPCs change weekly, and State WIC staff cannot keep track of all of them the way retailers can. Many retailers will have 50 or more UPCs in their system for blueberries alone, but they can map or link those 50 UPCs to a single PLU that's in the APL, making them WIC allowed. Mapping is also faster because a retailer can do it right away, whereas it can take two to three days to add a UPC to the APL.

What are the expectations for retailers to complete mapping?

Minnesota WIC has outlined expectations that require all integrated vendors to complete produce mapping so that WIC allowed fruits and vegetables are available to WIC participants.

Produce mapping is not necessary for stores that use a stand-beside terminal, because the cashier needs only to enter the dollar amount(s) of the fruits and vegetables purchased.

Mapping is an ongoing process because new produce UPCs are coming into stores all year round. While most retailers do a good job, new items are sometimes missed. Mapping is unique to WIC, so not all store employees are familiar with this concept.

Why does the app work for some foods, but not all?

In order for a food to show as WIC allowed in the app, its UPC or PLU must be in the APL. Since UPCs for most fresh fruits and vegetables are not in the APL, they will scan as "Not Allowed" in the app. However, if the retailer has mapped that produce item's UPC to a PLU that is in the APL, (and if the participant has an available CVB balance), it will scan as WIC allowed at the cash register and be deducted from the WIC card's balance. It is possible to type a PLU number into the app, but that does not tell if an item with a UPC is mapped to the PLU. For these reasons, the app is not reliable for fresh fruits and vegetables. The app is reliable for frozen fruits and vegetables, all other WIC foods, and formula because those UPCs are in the APL.

What's the best way to talk about this with WIC participants?

Terms like "mapping" and "APL" might be overwhelming for participants. Instead, start by finding out what they might like to buy with their CVB dollars. If they plan to buy frozen fruits and vegetables, they *should* use the app to know if the item is WIC allowed, because those UPCs are in the APL.

It's a good idea to let participants know that Minnesota WIC allows all plain fresh produce, but there is an action that needs to be taken by each retailer to make sure that fresh, packaged items scan as WIC allowed. If a participant is likely to buy fresh produce, let them know that it's easiest to buy bulk or un-packaged produce that they bag themselves. If they want to buy a produce item that is packaged, they should not use the app to know if the fruit or vegetable is WIC allowed, because the app cannot tell a user if the store has completed the necessary steps to make the item WIC allowed.

If a WIC participant finds a packaged fresh produce item that is not allowed, they can report it to a store manager and ask that they make it WIC allowed, or they can take a picture of the item and share it with their WIC clinic staff. WIC clinic staff can then send the photo(s), the participant's household ID, and the name of the store where the issue occurred to health.wicvendor@state.mn.us after confirming that the item should be WIC allowed.

References

Glossary of Vendor-related eWIC Terms
(https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/vglossary.html)

Minnesota Department of Health | MN WIC Program | 85 E 7th Place | PO Box 64882 | St. Paul, MN 55164-0882 | 651-201-4404 | health.wicvendor@state.mn.us | www.health.state.mn.us | 12/1/20

To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-4404