

Clarification on the Use of Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meal Service

Purpose:

This instruction sets forth the policy of Offer versus Serve (OVS) and family style meal service in institutions participating in Child Nutrition Programs and the option to allow schools and SFAs serving preschool children through NSLP and SBP to use family style meal service.

Scope:

Sponsors participating in the National School Lunch (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and/or Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Description:

The CACFP regulations at 7 CFR 226.20(o) permit the substitution of NSLP meal patterns, including the use of OVS, when meals are prepared by SFAs and served by schools or other institutions participating in the CACFP. Among the CACFP institutions that may benefit from the use of OVS are those caring for school-age children in outside-school-hours care centers or at-risk afterschool care centers. These school or community-based centers could be operated by the school or SFA or by another CACFP institution that contracts with the SFA for meals.

Institutions electing to use OVS must implement it in accordance with the method used by the school providing the meals. OVS may not be used with snack services under either the NSLP or the CACFP.

Although adult day care centers may find it advantageous to contract with a school or SFA for meals, OVS for adult meals must follow the requirements described in the CACFP regulations at 7 CFR 226.20(q). These requirements are specific to the CACFP adult meal pattern and permit adult participants to decline certain food items.

Generally, OVS is not considered appropriate for preschool children because it may interfere with Program nutrition goals and the CACFP institution's efforts to introduce new foods to children. Rather, we encourage CACFP institutions to consider using family style meal service, as described in FNS Instruction 783-9, Rev. 2, as a way to provide younger children some choice in the types and amounts of food selected. Schools and residential child care institutions serving children through the NSLP or SBP also may use family style meal service.

SOURCE: 7 CFR 226.20(O), FNS INSTRUCTION 783-9, REV. 2.