

Variations in Meal Requirements for Religious Reasons: Jewish Schools and Institutions

Purpose:

This instruction sets forth the policy allowing variations in the food components of meals served to meet ethnic, religious, economic, or physical needs on a site-wide or facility-wide basis.

Scope:

Meals served in Jewish facilities participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

Description:

In accordance with this provision, meals served in Jewish facilities may be exempted from the enrichment and whole grain portions of the Child Nutrition Program grain requirements during the religious observance of Passover. Un-enriched matzo may be substituted for the grain requirement during that period of time only. At all other times of the year, matzo served as the grain component must be whole grain rich, whole grain, or enriched in accordance with the specific regulatory meal pattern requirements operated under in the particular program.

In addition to this variation, Jewish schools and institutions may be exempted from the meal requirement of the Child Nutrition Programs which requires that milk be served with all meals. Such schools and institutions may choose from four options below; these options apply only to meals containing meat or poultry when participants do not have the opportunity to refuse the milk or meat/poultry through Offer vs. Serve. Entities wishing to exercise the options available shall notify the State agency.

In all other meals, for example, those containing fish, cheese, eggs, and peanut butter, milk must be served since Jewish Dietary Laws allow such meat alternates to be consumed with milk at the same meal. For review and audit purposes, schools and institutions electing to use the options must maintain a record on file of which of the following option(s) they have chosen.

Option I: Serve an equal amount of non-dairy milk substitute (for medical or special dietary needs) that is nutritionally equivalent to fluid milk as per 7 CFR 210.10 (m).

Option II: Serve an equal amount of full-strength juice in place of milk with lunch or supper. When juice is substituted for milk, it may not contribute to the vegetable/fruit requirement. Schools or institutions operating five days per week may substitute juice for milk twice per week

for lunches and twice for suppers but no more than once each day. Schools and institutions operating seven days per week may make three substitutions per week for lunches and three for suppers but no more than one each day.

Option III: Serve milk at an appropriate time before or after the meal service period in accordance with applicable Jewish Dietary Laws.

Option IV: Serve the snack's juice component at breakfast, lunch or supper, and serve the corresponding meal's milk component as part of the snack.

A limit is placed on the number of substitutions per week in Option II because milk is a primary source of calcium and riboflavin. Schools and institutions electing this option should be encouraged to serve other sources of calcium and riboflavin when substituting juice for milk. Other good sources of calcium are green leafy vegetables such as greens and broccoli. Other good sources of riboflavin are dark green and yellow fruits and vegetables and whole-grain or enriched breads and cereals.

In the same regard, Jewish Dietary law poses challenges to serving the dark green vegetable subgroup as required in the National School Lunch Program. Jewish facilities facing this challenge may be exempt from the requirement to serve the dark green vegetable subgroup, but must serve the same total amount of vegetables. The vegetables served in place of dark green vegetables must come from the red/orange or beans/peas subgroups. These subgroups are underrepresented in the American diet and The Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010, gives the following specific recommendation, "Eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green and red and orange vegetables and beans and peas."

Options III and IV are not permitted in outside-school-hours care centers under the Child and Adult Care Food Program and in non-camps under the Summer Food Service Program because children are not always present for both meal services.

For Option II, an exemption for breakfasts served in Jewish schools and institutions is not necessary. Milk must be served with all reimbursable breakfasts since the School Breakfast Program meal pattern allows for but does not require, a meat/meat alternate component, and the school may elect the Offer versus Serve option under the School Breakfast Program. Likewise, a meat/meat alternate is not a requirement in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program breakfast patterns, and the offer versus serve option is not allowed.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) may approve variations in the food components of meals served in the child nutrition programs on an experimental or on a continuing basis where there is evidence that such variations are nutritionally sound and are necessary to meet ethnic, religious, economic, and physical needs.

SOURCE: FNS INSTRUCTION 783-13, REV. 2, DATED DECEMBER 3, 1992, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE.