

Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

This guidance applies to the meal patterns for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. For additional guidance on the grains component for grades K-12 in the NSLP, SBP, and SSO, see the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) guide, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*.

For information on crediting breakfast cereals for grades K-12 in the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, see “Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the ASP Meal Pattern for Grades K-12” on page 4. For information on crediting breakfast cereals for preschoolers (ages 1-4) in the NSLP, SBP, SSO, and ASP, see the CSDE’s handouts, *Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Preschoolers in the NSLP, SBP, and ASP* and *Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Grains Component in the School Nutrition Programs*.



“Breakfast cereals” are defined by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations (21 CFR 170.3(n)(4)). They include ready-to-eat (RTE) cereals (such as puffed cereals, round or flaked cereals, and granola) and instant and regular hot cereals (such as oatmeal, cream of wheat, and farina). RTE breakfast cereals are a type of breakfast cereal that can be eaten as sold. They are typically fortified with vitamins and minerals. To credit in school meals for grades K-12, breakfast cereals must be whole grain-rich (WGR), enriched, or fortified; and must provide the required volume or weight specified in the USDA’s ounce equivalents chart.

WGR Breakfast Cereals

Cooked breakfast cereals, including regular and instant (such as oatmeal), are WGR if:

- a whole grain is the first ingredient (or water is the first ingredient and a whole grain is the second ingredient);
- any other grain ingredients are enriched; and
- the combined weight of any noncreditable grains (such as fiber, bran, germ, and modified food starch) does not exceed 6.99 grams per ounce equivalent (½ cup cooked or 28 grams dry). Cooked breakfast cereals that exceed this limit do not meet the WGR criteria.

RTE breakfast cereals are WGR if a whole grain is the first ingredient and the cereal is fortified. Fortification is not required for 100 whole grain cereals. The limit for noncreditable grains does not apply to fortified RTE breakfast cereals that contain a whole grain as the first ingredient.



Enriched Breakfast Cereals

A breakfast cereal is enriched if it is labeled as “enriched” or the ingredients statement lists the five enrichment nutrients. The five enrichment nutrients are defined by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and include thiamin (vitamin B₁, thiamin mononitrate, or thiamin hydrochloride); riboflavin (vitamin B₂); niacin (vitamin B₃ or niacinamide); folic acid (folate); and iron (reduced iron, ferrous sulfate, or ferric orthophosphate). They are often listed after “Vitamins and Minerals.” The ingredients statements below show some examples of enriched breakfast cereals. These breakfast cereals are also fortified because they contain additional nutrients beyond the five enrichment nutrients.

- Ingredients: Wheat farina, salt, defatted wheat germ, guar gum, natural flavor, *ferric orthophosphate*, vitamin A palmitate, *niacin*, *riboflavin*, pyridoxine hydrochloride, *thiamin mononitrate*, *folic acid*, BHT (to preserve freshness).
- Ingredients: Rice, sugar, contains 2% or less of salt, malt flavor. BHT added to packaging for freshness. **Vitamins and Minerals:** *Iron*, vitamin C (ascorbic acid), vitamin E (alpha tocopherol acetate), *niacinamide*, vitamin A palmitate, vitamin B6 (pyridoxine hydrochloride), *vitamin B2 (riboflavin)*, *vitamin B1 (thiamin hydrochloride)*, *folic acid*, vitamin B12, vitamin D.
- Ingredients: Milled corn, sugar, malt flavor, contains 2% or less of salt. **Vitamins and Minerals:** *Iron*, vitamin C (sodium ascorbate, ascorbic acid), *niacinamide*, vitamin B6 (pyridoxine hydrochloride), *vitamin B2 (riboflavin)*, *vitamin B1 (thiamin hydrochloride)*, vitamin A palmitate, *folic acid*, vitamin D, vitamin B12.

For additional guidance on enriched grains, see the CSDE’s handout, [Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP](#).

Fortified Breakfast Cereals

Fortified foods have nutrients added by the manufacturer that were not originally present in the food or that are at higher levels than originally present. Manufacturers may choose which additional nutrients to use for fortification. Fortified breakfast cereals typically contain the five enrichment nutrients (iron, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and folic acid) plus other vitamins and minerals that do not exist naturally in grains, such as vitamins A, C, D, E, B6 (pyridoxine hydrochloride), vitamin B12 (cobalamin), pantothenic acid, phosphorous, magnesium, and zinc.

Different cereal brands may list different fortification nutrients. The USDA does not specify a minimum number of nutrients or a minimum percentage for the level of fortification for breakfast cereals in the Child Nutrition Programs.

A breakfast cereal is fortified if the food is labeled as “fortified” or the ingredients statement lists the vitamins and minerals added to the product. The example below shows a whole-grain RTE cereal

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fortified with 11 vitamins and minerals, listed after “Vitamins and Minerals.”

- Ingredients: Whole-grain wheat, raisins, wheat bran, sugar, brown sugar syrup, contains 2% or less of salt, malt flavor. **Vitamins and Minerals:** *Potassium chloride, niacinamide, reduced iron, vitamin B₆ (pyridoxine hydrochloride), zinc oxide, vitamin B₂ (riboflavin), vitamin B₁ (thiamin hydrochloride), vitamin A palmitate, folic acid, vitamin D, vitamin B₁₂.*

Note: This cereal is also WGR because it contains a whole grain (whole-grain wheat) as the first ingredient and is fortified. The noncreditable grain (wheat bran) is exempt from the limit for noncreditable grains because the RTE breakfast cereal is fortified and contains a whole grain as the first ingredient.

Noncreditable Breakfast Cereals

Breakfast cereals that contain 100 percent bran (such as bran cereal) or 100 percent germ (such as wheat germ) do not credit in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns, even if they are fortified. The example below shows a noncreditable fortified 100 percent bran RTE breakfast cereal.

- Ingredients: Wheat bran, sugar, malt flavor, contains 2% or less of salt. **Vitamins and Minerals:** *Calcium carbonate, vitamin C (sodium ascorbate and ascorbic acid), reduced iron, niacinamide, vitamin B₆ (pyridoxine hydrochloride), vitamin B₂ (riboflavin), folic acid, vitamin B₁ (thiamin hydrochloride), vitamin A palmitate, vitamin B₁₂, vitamin D.*

This cereal cannot credit as the grains component because the ingredients statement lists wheat bran (noncreditable grain) as the first and only grain ingredient.

Serving Size

The USDA’s ounce equivalents chart indicates the required serving size for breakfast cereals in the NSLP and SBP. This chart divides grain products into nine groups (A-I) based on their average grain content. Cooked breakfast cereals (regular and instant) are in group H. Cold RTE breakfast cereals are in group I. The minimum creditable amount is ¼ ounce equivalent. This information is summarized in the CSDE’s handout, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP](#).

Cereal grains in group H (such as oats, buckwheat, farina, and quinoa) typically credit based on the cooked serving, but SFAs may also choose to calculate ounce equivalents based on the dry uncooked weight. Cereal grains require ½ cup cooked or 1 ounce (28 grams) dry to credit as 1 ounce equivalent of the grains component. **Note:** Dry cereal grains used as an ingredient in a recipe (such



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as rolled oats in bread) credit the same as groups A-G; they require 16 grams of creditable grains to credit as 1 ounce equivalent of the grains component.

RTE breakfast cereals in group I require 1 ounce (28 grams) to credit as 1 ounce equivalent of the grains component. A 1-ounce serving equals 1 cup of flaked or round cereals, 1 ¼ cups of puffed cereals, and ¼ cup of granola. If the appropriate volume of cereal weighs less than 28 grams, it still credits as 1 ounce equivalent. For example, 1 cup of flaked cereal that weighs 26 grams credits as 1 ounce equivalent.

For detailed guidance on the grains component, see the CSDE's guide, [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#), and visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Weekly WGR Requirement for the NSLP and SBP

Effective July 1, 2019, the USDA's final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements](#), requires that at least half of the weekly grains offered at lunch and breakfast must be WGR. Previously, the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 required that all grains were WGR. The CSDE strongly encourages SFAs to continue to serve only WGR grains, and offer 100 percent whole grains most often. This provides the best nutrition for children.

SFAs that choose to offer enriched grains (including breakfast cereals) must maintain documentation to demonstrate that at least half of the weekly grains offered at lunch and breakfast are WGR. SFAs must maintain this documentation on file for the Administrative Review of school nutrition programs. SFAs may calculate the menu's percentage of WGR grains using the CSDE's Excel worksheet, [Calculating Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the NSLP and SBP](#). For more information, see [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-19: Weekly Whole Grain-rich \(WGR\) Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#).

Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the ASP Meal Pattern for Grades K-12

The USDA's final rule, [Nutrition Standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs](#), revised the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 beginning in school year 2013-14; however, it did not change the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12. Consequently, the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 has different crediting requirements for breakfast cereals.

The ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 does not have a WGR requirement. Cooked and RTE breakfast cereals must be whole grain, enriched, or fortified. Breakfast cereals that contain 100 percent bran (such as bran cereal) or 100 percent germ also credit.

The required amounts of breakfast cereals for grades K-12 are in servings instead of ounce equivalents. The minimum serving for RTE breakfast cereals is ¾ cup or 1 ounce, whichever is less. The minimum serving for cooked breakfast cereals is ½ cup cooked or 25 grams dry. For more

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information, see the CSDE's handout, *Serving Sizes for Grains/Breads for Grades K-12 in the Afterschool Snack Program*. SFAs may choose to use ounce equivalents instead of servings, for consistency with school meals.

Resources

Calculating Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/PercentageWGRCalculation.xlsx>

Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/GrainCalc.pdf>

Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Grains Component in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/ComparisonGrainCrediting.pdf>

Crediting Enriched Grains in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditEnrichedGrains.pdf>

Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Crediting Whole Grains in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE)

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditWholeGrains.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-19: Weekly Whole Grain-rich (WGR) Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2019/OM11-19.pdf>

Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Grainsozeq.pdf>

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

Product Formulation Statement for Grains: Ounce Equivalents (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Documenting_Grains_oz_eq.pdf

Product Formulation Statements (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/PFS.pdf>

Sample Completed Product Formulation Statement for Grains: Ounce Equivalents (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/PFS_Sample_oz_eq.pdf

Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/manufacturerPFSstipsheet.pdf>

Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP

USDA Final Rule (83 FR 63775): Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-12-12/pdf/2018-26762.pdf>

Whole Grain Resource for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/whole-grain-resource-national-school-lunch-and-school-breakfast-programs-0>

Whole Grain-rich Criteria for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/WGRCriteria.pdf>



For more information, review the CSDE's *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditCereals.pdf>.

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