



ILLINOIS
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ASSOCIATION

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Illinois School Nutrition Association

USDA Foods Tool Kit



Illinois School Nutrition Association

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Updated October 2019

Getting Started

Welcome to the USDA Foods Toolkit. This tool is designed to guide you through spending your district's entitlement dollars.

Entitlement dollars are calculated by multiplying the total number of lunches you claimed in the previous school year by the current Per Meal Rate. The Per Meal Rate is determined annually and reflects changes in the *Food Away from Home Series* of the *Consumer Price Index*.

Schools may choose how to allocate their entitlement dollars between three (3) different programs:

- Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD)
 - Fresh produce delivered through a designated vendor
- Processor Diversion (Reprocessing)
 - Completed in the late winter/early spring for the following school year
- USDA Foods (PAL)
 - Ordered through the ICS website and delivered monthly through Lanter

More information about each of these programs is detailed in the following sections.

Creating a Cycle Menu

If this is your first time planning a cycle menu, use the simple steps below as a guide.

Benefit: By utilizing a cycle menu, the number of portions you will need for any given product becomes more predictable and thus, allocating entitlement dollars will be easier to complete.

1. Gather your menu planning materials and resources including the following:
 - School calendar with important dates
 - Past student participation records
 - Past production and inventory records
 - Your ideas for new food items and recipes
 - For new menu ideas, try asking the following:
 - Building staff
 - Colleagues/ Industry
 - Foodservice staff
 - Neighboring school districts
 - Students
 - Do not forget to consider:
 - Trends in the industry
 - USDA/ISBE regulations
2. Determine the length of your menu cycle.
 - A cycle menu is typically between 1-4 weeks, depending on the number of entrees served daily.
 - For elementary schools, 3 weeks is a typical cycle.
 - Shorter menu cycles for middle and high schools are typical, as they have more daily options.
 - If posting a cycle menu, a longer cycle (four or more weeks) may be desired to avoid repeating weeks during the same month.

3. Identify what will be your main entrées.
 - Entrées are usually the most expensive item and are the base of the menu.
 - Consider entrées that utilize commodity dollars first.
 - Try to vary the entrées choices daily and include a variety of Meat/ Meat Alternate choices.
 - For example – Avoid serving baked chicken on Monday and chicken nuggets on Tuesday.
 - Do not repeat entrée choices too often.
 - Consider reducing the length of your menu cycle if entrée choices are repeated often or modify entrée items slightly (i.e. Cheeseburger vs. Pizza Burger)
 - Consider the following when identifying main entrées:
 - Old favorites
 - New items
 - Parents requests
 - Student/ Staff requests
 - Ethnic /Cultural preferences
 - Variety
 - Available time for preparation
 - Equipment
 - Cycle length
 - Product/Production cost

4. Identify your fruit and vegetable choices, ensuring that all NSLP regulations have been met.
 - Allowable Fruits:
 - Fresh, frozen without added sugar, canned in juice/ light syrup, or dried
 - Juice: No more than half of weekly offered fruit may be juice and all MUST be 100% juice
 - Allowable Vegetables:
 - Fresh, frozen and canned (keep in mind sodium guidelines when using canned products)

- Must include all subgroups:
 - Dark Green
 - Red/Orange
 - Beans/Peas (Legumes)
 - Starchy
 - Other
5. Identify the bread/ grain choices for all your entrée choices, to ensure NSLP regulations have been met.
 - All bread/grain choices must be 50% or greater whole grain, aka whole grain rich.
 - Grain-based desserts cannot exceed a two (2) ounce equivalent over the course of a week.
 6. Identify that the milk variety you serve is compliant with NSLP regulations.
 - All milk must fat-free or low-fat
 - At least two (2) varieties must be offered.
 7. Calculate the cost of your cycle menu as written.
 - Include cost of all food items: meat/meat alternate, bread/grain, fruit, vegetable and milk
 - Try to include a balance of low and high priced items, to ensure the average food cost is within your budget.
 - Don't forget to include the cost of all disposables/ packaging supplies needed for service.
 8. Conduct a menu evaluation considering the following:
 - Nutritional adequacy
 - NSLP regulations
 - Staffing/Production skills
 - Variety, color, texture, consistency and flavors
 - Cost/Availability of products

FAQs: Menu Planning

1. What are the advantages of using a cycle menu?
 - Reduces menu planning time
 - Streamlines purchasing procedures
 - Improves forecasting capabilities
 - Allows for labor efficiency over time
 - Allows for monthly cost and nutrition analysis, versus annual
 - Controls food costs
 - Reduces inventory and storage costs
2. Do I have to menu food items that cater to cultural, ethnic or religious food preferences?
 - There is no regulation requiring you to make accommodations for these preferences, however incorporating them into your menu will likely increase participation and customer satisfaction.
3. If I have a cycle menu, can I still offer new items seasonally?
 - Yes, cycle menus can be adjusted or new items may be added seasonally to enhance customer satisfaction.
 - Examples may include the following:
 - The first Monday of every month is “Manager’s Special.”
 - “Seasonal Specials” are added to a certain day during the cycle and is rotated quarterly.
 - Promotional menus are served on holidays or other special occasions.
4. What is the definition of whole grain rich?
 - Meet at least one of the following:
 - Whole grains per serving must be greater than or equal to eight (8) grams
 - “Whole grain” is listed as the first ingredient
 - May be listed second if water is the first ingredient

- Product includes FDA's whole grain health claim on its packaging:
 - *"Diets rich in whole grain foods and other plant foods and low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers."*

5. Menu Planning Basics

- Include familiar foods as well as foods that may be new to students
- Include foods with different shapes, colors, textures and temperatures
- Include foods that are "in season"
- Include both raw and cooked produce
- Consider how long fresh foods will last when delivered
- Vary your preparation methods so that equipment can handle the operations needs
- Consider your delivery times and storage capacity

6. Where can I find sample menus?

- Most school districts post their menus online
- SNA (School Nutrition Association) webpage:
 - <http://schoolnutrition.org/Resources>
- USDA Food and Nutrition Service webpage:
 - <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

Navigating the ICS

Illinois Commodity System (ICS)

Before utilizing your entitlement dollars, you must first learn to navigate Illinois's USDA Food Distribution Program website, ICS (Illinois Commodity System).

ICS is housed within the ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education) website and can be accessed by going to ISBE's Nutrition & Wellness section and clicking on sub section Food Distribution. Or save this link to your favorites: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Nutrition-Programs-Food-Distribution.aspx>. Click on the Illinois Commodity System link which is the heading of the section or the "ICS Login" in the shape of the state of Illinois.

It is important to log into ICS periodically as Important Messages are updated by ISBE pertaining to the DoD program, USDA Food Lanter deliveries, new USDA food items available, food recalls, and Processor Updates.

ICS Website Contains the Following Information:

- Anticipated USDA Foods Chart for the current school year
- Anticipated Lanter Delivery Schedule
- Approved End Product Reports for Processors
- Monthly USDA foods delivery requests and reporting (see the USDA foods section of the toolkit for information on placing your annual order)
- List of participating delivery sites for your district
- USDA Food Fact Sheets
- USDA Recipes

The Illinois Commodity System (ICS) Instruction Manual is a must read for all new users and is full of good reminders for all returning users. It gives you specific information about the system, including how to sign up as a new user, and instructions to complete the Annual Commodity Order. The web site to access the ICS Instruction Manual is: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ics-instruction-manual.pdf>.

FAQs: ICS

1. Can I make changes to my annual order?
 - You can change the USDA Foods portion of your order at any time throughout the year.
 - Reprocessing allocation can't change after the diversion to processing window closes.
2. Why aren't I getting commodities anymore?
 - By looking at your annual order form, you are able to verify whether or not you still have money to purchase USDA Foods.

DoD

As part of an initiative by USDA to offer schools a wider variety of fresh produce than would be available through normal USDA purchases, the Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program was created.

Benefit: The DoD program provides weekly delivery of fresh fruits and vegetables. Prior to this program, fresh fruits and vegetables were not available using commodity entitlement dollars.

1. The DoD Program allows participation to all schools that request it.
 - During the annual order period, you indicate the amount of your entitlement you would like to divert to this program under *Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Participation* on the *Annual Order Forms* menu option on the Illinois Commodity System (ICS).
 - Minimum DOD allocation is \$150 per year.
2. Calculate the amount of DoD money, if any, you want to allocate for the following school year.
 - You can choose not to put any money into this program.
 - Participation in the DoD Program reduces the money you can spend on reprocessed end products or USDA Foods.
3. Enter your DoD dollar amount on the ICS website, in the *DoD Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* section, under the *Annual Order Forms* tab.

4. DoD orders can be placed using the DoD ordering system, FFAVORS, at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/fresh-fruits-and-vegetables-order-receipt-system-ffavors>
 - For ordering instructions, please read the *DoD Ordering Manual*. (19 pages)
 - <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/DoD-FFAVORS-ordering-manual.pdf>

NOTE: The distributor contract for DoD fresh fruits and vegetables is awarded by the USDA subject to periodic change.

There is no additional fee for delivery from the designated DoD vendor.

FAQs: DoD

1. How do I begin utilizing my DoD allocation?
 - Contact ISBE at 800-545-7892 or fdp@isbe.net.
2. When can I place my DoD order?
 - DoD orders can be placed a maximum of ten calendar days from the current date.
 - Orders must be placed no later than seven calendar days before the delivery date.
3. How often can I receive a DoD order?
 - The number of DoD orders you can receive is at the discretion of the vendor, but is generally once a week.

Reprocessing

Donating entitlement pounds to be further processed provides your district with the opportunity to receive a wider variety of end products that may better meet your district's needs and local flavor profiles.

Benefit: Reprocessing provides you with an opportunity for labor cost reductions and an increase in food safety, by eliminating handling of raw product.

1. Be aware of the deadlines for placing your annual USDA Foods order.
 - Do not wait until the last day to place your order.
 - Refer to *ISBE's Outlook Newsletter* and the ICS message board for the annual processing deadlines, as they are subject to change.
2. If your district diverted commodities in the previous year, log in to ProcessorLink or K12 (look at the Tracking section below) and find out the amount of carry-over pounds, if any, your district will have available to start the next school year.
 - Any balances will be allowed to be carried over to the next school year, so order accordingly. In other words, do not place a diversion to processor order until you have projected how many pounds you will have in your accounts (ProcessorLink and K12).
 - Carry-over pounds must be used by October 31st of the following school year, without risk of being taken away.

3. Look at your total PAL allocation (balance, given in dollars) for the start of next school year.
 - Dollar amount can be found in the *Annual USDA Foods Order Form* section, under the *Annual Order Forms* tab on the ICS website.
 - Total value of commodities diverted for processing, USDA Foods and DoD cannot exceed your beginning balance.
4. Before getting started, remember to update your contact and delivery information on the ICS website, to ensure the accuracy of contact and delivery information.
5. Print *Approved End Products Reports* from the ICS website, under the *Reports* tab, for those products that interest you.
6. Select the processor/manufacturer and end products that meet the specifications for your menu.
7. Compare the total cost per serving of processed end products, to the commercially purchased equivalents.
 - If the processed end product total cost per serving is less than the commercially purchased equivalent, processing may save you money.
 - If the processed end product is more expensive than commercially purchased equivalent, it may be better to use your PAL dollars towards a different product.
8. Calculate your menu needs for each end product using the *USDA Food Diversion Work Sheet (Resources tab)* provided in this tool kit.
 - To utilize the *USDA Food Diversion Work Sheet*, you will need the following information:
 - Number of servings needed to menu one time
 - The number of times the item will be served on your menu in the school year
 - The *Approved End Products Report* for each item

9. Repeat the *USDA Food Diversion Work Sheet* for each processed end product you would like to divert.
 - This worksheet will provide you with both the number of pounds needed and the amount of PAL dollars it will cost to divert each processed end product.

10. Enter the pounds you would like to divert by selecting the *Diversion to Processor* section, under the *Annual Order Form* tab on the ICS website.
 - Letter K of the *USDA Food Diversion Work Sheet* represents the number of pounds needed for each processed end product.
 - Add together the pounds for all the processed end products that are utilizing the same commodity (ex. Cheese, American) AND are going to the same processor (ex. XXXX Food Group).
 - Pounds for each commodity must be entered separately for each processor.

11. The pounds for each commodity are entered into the *Diversion to Processor* section, your PAL allocation will automatically update to reflect the remaining available balance (available for PAL requests).
 - In addition, the following balances are also automatically updated as you place your annual USDA Foods order:
 - PAL processing
 - Value of PAL requests
 - DoD Fresh Fruits and Vegetables participation
 - Orders placed under the *Bonus* tab do not draw down your PAL allocation.

NOTE: Your reprocessing allocation cannot be changed after the final cutoff date. You cannot spend more in this category than your final allocation.

FAQs: Reprocessing

1. What are the benefits of reprocessing?
 - Consistent product
 - Reduction in labor costs (prep time is decreased)
 - Reduction in waste (better portion control)
 - Reduced storage fees
 - Choose items that fit in your cycle menu & that students like
 - Receive products when you need them, as you need them
 - Guaranteed utilization of commodity \$\$
 - Spend commodity dollars wisely, on products that you're currently menuing
 - Increased customer satisfaction – varied & higher quality meals served

2. What is the difference between NOI, Rebates, FFS, & Modified FFS?
 - Approved End Products are offered in the following ways:
 - Net off invoice
 - Products are delivered from distributor
 - Invoiced for the total cost of the item on the invoice
 - Value of commodity is deducted from the invoice
 - Used for products that are substitutable (ex: chicken)
 - Rebate
 - Products are ordered & billed through distributor
 - You request reimbursement for commodity value from the manufacturer.
 - Receive a rebate check from manufacturer

- Fee for Service
 - Products are ordered from manufacturer directly
 - Delivered via a distributor who charges you for delivery & storage fees
 - You are billed by the manufacturer for the cost of reprocessing
 - Modified Fee for Service
 - Products are ordered and delivered from distributor
 - Distributor acts as the processor's billing agent and invoices the recipient agency a per pound or per case price excluding the value of the commodity plus distribution fees.
 - Used for products that are not substitutable (ex: beef)
3. How do you calculate and compare the cost per serving of a processed end product to a commercial equivalent?
- Calculate the "true cost" of a processed end product by multiplying the number of pounds of commodity (ex. Cheese, American) needed to produce one case by the commodity value per pound. Then add on any other applicable costs, i.e. processing costs, distributor costs, state charges, and/or storage and handling fees, to retrieve the true cost per case. Divide that number by the number of servings per case, to obtain the true cost per serving. You may then accurately compare this number to the commercial equivalent cost per serving.
4. Are there a minimum number of pounds that must be diverted to a processor?
- The minimum amount of pounds (ex. Cheese, American) that can be diverted to one processor is one hundred (100) pounds.

5. What happens if a full truck load (minimum) is not diverted to a processor I chose?
 - You will have the opportunity to adjust your annual USDA Foods order if a processor you chose did not get enough pounds diverted, to warrant ordering a full truck load. There will be a message on the ICS website message board with the timeframe in which changes can be made, instructions, and a list of approved processors. ISBE will zero out your original pounds, diverted to non-approved processors. You may want to access ICS again to verify the actual pounds being diverted on your behalf once ISBE has prorated the final pounds.

6. Do I need to notify the processor with what I intend to order?
 - Once the final number of pounds for each processor have been determined (by ISBE), your school contact information and the number of pounds you diverted will be provided to the processor(s). The processor may then contact you to get more specific information regarding the specific reprocessed end products you intend to order. You may also consider submitting the reprocessed end products you chose to the processor for bid pricing.

7. What if I don't use everything I diverted for reprocessed end products by the end of the school year?
 - Any pounds which were diverted to a processor will be rolled over to the next school year. Those pounds must be used by October 31st of the following school year.

USDA Foods

After entering the desired amount of program dollars for DoD and the number of pounds to be furthered processed, any remaining balance on your PAL allocation can be utilized to receive monthly deliveries of USDA Foods.

Benefit: USDA Foods can add both value and variety to your child nutrition program, as there are more than 180 nutritious food items available.

1. The order categories for USDA Foods are as follows: dairy, grains, nuts and oils, meats/alternates, poultry/eggs, fruits and vegetables.
 - Place orders in the *Annual USDA Foods Order Form* section, under the *Annual Order Forms* tab on the ICS website.
 - Orders can be placed under the *PAL* tab or the *Bonus* tab.
 - Indicate the maximum # of cases per year.
 - There is no guarantee that the USDA Foods ordered in this section will be available or delivered to your district. This is a “wish list” of sorts. Values are not deducted from the beginning balance until they are actually allocated.
 - “Value of Pal Requests” should be approximately 35% over the “Available for Pal Requests” –NOT the beginning balance.
 - Orders placed under the *Bonus* tab do not draw down your PAL allocation.
 - Changes in this category can be made throughout the year, but be sure to check the Anticipated USDA Foods Chart before making changes, to see if foods you want are still available.

- Each month, July through March, between the 13th and 20th, you can make changes to your district's USDA Foods deliveries for the next month's delivery
 - If you do not respond to your allocation online at ICS between these dates, everything will be delivered as shown.
 - Lanter makes deliveries of USDA foods August through April
 - SFAs can choose to have the entire month's allocation held if unable to use or store it.
 - If product is held for more than two months, private storage charges will be assessed.
 - SFAs with more than one delivery site may also change the amount each site is receiving, moving product between schools or sites within the district. There is a minimum charged per case fee with an additional fee for custom delivery.

2. Fact Sheets are available for all USDA Foods

- Fact sheets are broken down by category: Grains, Meats/Meat Alternates, Vegetables/Fruits, Other Foods
- Fact sheets include the following information:
 - Crediting/Yield
 - Nutrition Facts
 - Product Description
 - Link for recipe ideas
 - Allergen information is found on the outside of the product package
- Fact sheets can be accessed on the USDA's website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-fis/usda-foods-product-information-sheets>.

FAQs: USDA Foods

1. Why do I get some USDA Foods only once a year?
 - When ISBE receives the order it determines when it's delivered to your school district. If ISBE gets a product only one time in a year, you will get the product delivered all at once, after it is received by ISBE.
2. Can I choose when I want to receive my USDA Foods?
 - The demand for certain products only warrants a one truck load purchase, so ISBE has to choose the month in which to order the truck load. Also, the USDA only offers some food items during specific periods of the year. ISBE has to place the order for when the product is available.
 - By contrast, if you divert to a manufacturer for further processing, you are able to choose when you want the products delivered.
3. Are USDA Foods free?
 - USDA Foods are not free. You should assess the costs involved with placing your annual USDA Foods order. Your PAL allocation should be considered "real" money, to be utilized within your program.
4. What is the "cost" of a USDA Food?
 - The true value of a processed end product is as follows: value of the USDA Food + state charges + processing costs + storage and handling fees.
5. Can I change my USDA Foods order or add more dollars to my DoD allocation during the school year?
 - Yes, you can change your annual USDA Foods order any time throughout the year in the same manner as when you placed the initial order. By contacting ISBE, you can request additional dollars be added to your DoD allocation. However, you cannot alter the pounds diverted for reprocessed end products once the annual USDA Foods order timeline has passed.

Tracking

The final and important step in reprocessing is to continuously monitor your usage, in order to efficiently manage your funds.

Benefit: If you do not utilize your reprocessed dollars you can risk losing them, and therefore money for your district.

1. There are two websites to track reprocessed food items:
 - www.processorlink.com
 - www.K12foodservice.com
2. You will need to set up an account for each site separately. Both websites allow you to track your district's diversions or reprocessed items. The sites provide an overview of all account statuses including allocated pounds and usage. It is important to note the reported amounts can be up to two weeks behind actual invoiced items.
3. Reports include:
 - Account balances for individual processors
 - Detailed transaction summary including: invoice numbers with date, product type, and pounds/dollars utilized
 - Usage summary available by months or by school in your district
 - Processor distributor history by specific product item
4. Both websites have accessible manufacturers' lists of products available to be reprocessed including donated food values and pounds (check with your individual distributor for availability).

Note: It is especially important to monitor these sites at the start of the school year to ensure your district's allocated

pounds and carry over have been loaded correctly. Also, at the end of the school year remember to print for your records any carry over balance remaining for the upcoming school year.

FAQs: Tracking

1. Can I change the distributor I use for a reprocessed item?
 - Yes, you can change the distributor on either K12foodservice or Processor Link. It is also important to inform both distributors and the broker of the change.

2. What can I do if I run out of reprocessed pounds at a manufacturer?
 - Contact your broker or manufacturer to discuss options for the remainder of the school year.

Resources

Websites:

ISBE Food Distribution Web-site: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Nutrition-Programs-Food-Distribution.aspx>

ICS: <http://webapps.isbe.net/USDAFoods/LoginForm.aspx>

- **Delivery Site Change Form:** <http://isbe.net/documents/fdp-delivery-change.pdf>

USDA Guidance Q & A (9/23/19): <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SP38-2019os.pdf>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service webpage: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

SNA (School Nutrition Association) webpage: <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Resources>

FFAVORS (DOD): <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/fresh-fruits-and-vegetables-order-receipt-system-ffavors>

USDA Processing Homepage: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/usda-foods-processing-home>

Tracking: www.processorlink.com

Tracking: www.K12foodservice.com

ISBE Contact Information:

Illinois State Board of Education:

(800) 545-7892 or (217) 782-2491

Food Distribution Program Staff (11/2017)

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USDA Food Diversion Work Sheet

To determine the number of raw pounds needed to divert to a processor for desired end products and pricing of end products.

Processor: _____

Date: _____

Product Information	
A. Product Code	
B. Product Name/Description	
C. Number of Servings per Case	
D. DF (USDA Food code & short title)	
E. DF Inventory Draw Down Per Case	
F. Value per Pound of DF (Current November 15 th pricing)	\$
End Product Calculation	
G. Number of Servings Needed for Each Day	
H. Number of Days Item on Menu (for entire year – use cycle menu)	
I. Total Servings Needed (G × H)	=
J. Total Cases (I ÷ C)	=

K. Number of Raw Pounds Needed ($J \times E$)	=
L. Units to Divert ($K \div$ Pack Size) Pack Size: _____	= Needed for ADE Survey
M. Total Entitlement Used for Product ($K \times F$)	= \$
Processing Costs	
N. Case Price of End Product (school price)	\$
FFS – last column in ADE catalog NOI – call processor for price	
O. Total Processing Fee ($J \times N$)	= \$
P. Delivery Fees ($J \times$ Delivery Cost per Case) (differs by distributor)	= \$
Q. TOTAL COSTS (O + P)	= \$

Common Acronyms

ACDA	American Commodity Distribution Association
APP	Alternate Protein Products
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
DA	Distributing Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
ECOS	Electronic Commodity Ordering System
EPDS	End Product Date Schedule
FDD	Food Distribution Division
FDP	Food Distribution Program
FIFO	First In First Out
FFS	Fees for Service
FSMC	Food Service Management Company
ICS	Illinois Commodity System
IFB	Invitation for Bid
LA	Local Agency
LEA	Local Education Agency
NOI	Net Off Invoice
NPA	National Processing Agreement
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OVS	Offer vs Serve
PAL	Planned Assistance Level
RA	Recipient Agency
RDA	Recommended Dietary Allowance
RFI	Request for Information
RFP	Request for Proposal
RO	Regional Office
SA	State Agency
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SDA	State Distributing Agency
SEA	State Education Agency
SEPDS	Summary End Product Data Schedule
SFA	School Food Authority

SFSP	Summer Food Service Program
SNA	School Nutrition Association
SNS	School Nutrition Specialist
SMI	School Meals Initiative
SMP	School Milk Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VPP	Vegetable Protein Products
VPT	Value Pass Through



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Updated October 2019