



SERVING TRADITIONAL HMONG FOODS IN EARLY CARE MEALS WITH THE CACFP/FOOD PROGRAM

Delicious Hmong ingredients and recipes can connect children in your care with cultural traditions and a healthy world of flavor — plus you can be reimbursed for those meals through the CACFP/Food Program!

Have you ever purchased a traditional ingredient such as Hmong greens (Zaub Paaj) or lemongrass at your local farmers market and wanted to serve it to children you care for? Or prepared one of your favorite Hmong recipes and wondered if it could count as part of a Food Program meal? Serving culturally relevant traditional ingredients and recipes and produce fresh from one of Minnesota’s many local Hmong farmers can be an excellent way to introduce delicious foods and connect children in your care with Hmong cultural traditions. These items can also fit into the meal pattern of the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP, also known as “the Food Program”), which means you could be reimbursed for the meals you serve if you participate in the Food Program.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) runs the CACFP/Food Program, which provides reimbursement to providers for a maximum of two meals and one snack, or one meal and two snacks per day per child 12 years of age or younger. To receive reimbursement, providers must serve meals that meet specific meal pattern requirements based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The meal pattern has five components, including fruits, vegetables,

Child and Adult Care Food Program		Minimum Portion Size		
Child Meal Pattern		Ages 1-2	Ages 3-5	Ages 6-12 and 13-18 ^{1,2}
Breakfast Serve all three components for a reimbursable meal.				
Milk³		4 fluid oz	6 fluid oz	8 fluid oz
Vegetables, fruits or portions of both⁴		1/4 cup	1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Grains^{5,6}				
• Whole grain-rich or enriched bread		1/2 oz eq	1/2 oz eq	1 oz eq
• Whole grain-rich or enriched bread product, such as a biscuit, roll or muffin		1/2 oz eq	1/2 oz eq	1 oz eq
• Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cooked breakfast cereal ⁷ , cereal grain, rice and/or pasta		1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
• Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified ready-to-eat breakfast cereal (dry, cold): • Flakes or rounds • Puffed cereal • Granola		1/2 cup 3/4 cup 1/8 cup	1/2 cup 3/4 cup 1/8 cup	1 cup 1 1/4 cup 1/4 cup
Lunch and Supper Serve all five components for a reimbursable meal.				
Milk³		4 fluid oz	6 fluid oz	8 fluid oz
Meat/meat alternate				
• Lean meat, poultry or fish		1 oz	1 1/2 oz	2 oz
• Tofu, soy product or alternate protein product		1/4 cup	3/8 cup	1/2 cup
• Cheese		1 oz	1 1/2 oz	2 oz
• Cottage cheese		2 oz or 1/4 cup	3 oz or 3/8 cup	4 oz or 1/2 cup
• Large egg		1/2	3/4	1
• Cooked dry beans or peas		1/4 cup	3/8 cup	1/2 cup
• Peanut butter or soy nut butter or other nut or seed butters		2 tbsps	3 tbsps	4 tbsps
• Yogurt, regular or soy, plain or flavored, sweetened or unsweetened ⁸ • Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts or seeds ⁹		4 oz or 1/2 cup 1/2 oz = 50%	6 oz or 3/4 cup 3/4 oz = 50%	8 oz or 1 cup 1 oz = 50%
Vegetables or 100% vegetable juice⁴		1/8 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup
Fruits or 100% fruit juice^{4,10}		1/8 cup	1/4 cup	1/4 cup
Grains⁵				
• Whole grain-rich or enriched bread		1/2 oz eq	1/2 oz eq	1 oz eq
• Whole grain-rich or enriched bread product, such as a biscuit, roll or muffin		1/2 oz eq	1/2 oz eq	1 oz eq
• Whole grain-rich, enriched or fortified cooked breakfast cereal ⁷ , cereal grain, rice and/or pasta		1/4 cup	1/4 cup	1/2 cup



milk, meats/meat alternates (proteins) and grains. It advises how much of each type of item to serve to children (see meal pattern insert on page 1 of this document), depending on their ages, and also has guidelines about the nutrition requirements and limits on sugar, fat and salt so that meals meet federal dietary recommendations.

Serving traditional Hmong foods is allowed in CACFP meals, and traditional foods can contribute towards reimbursable meals. Traditional Hmong items may not always be listed explicitly in the official USDA Food Buying Guide, but there is often a similar food that can be used to determine what part of the meal pattern an item satisfies. For example, if Hmong greens (Zaub Paaj) are not included in the Food Buying Guide, spinach is a similar included item you can use to confirm that Zaub Paaj counts as a vegetable and you should serve a 1/4 cup as a serving in a reimbursable meal. If it's not clear how a traditional Hmong food would credit toward the meal pattern requirements, providers can get support to determine where it fits based on its nutritional profile. In Minnesota, the Department of Education works through sponsoring organizations to provide CACFP reimbursement to in-home early care providers. Sponsors are a great resource for further support to determine how to

credit items, as they are the experts regarding reimbursement through the CACFP. Additionally, [USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's Regional Offices](#) can provide technical assistance on a case by case basis.

While the amount of a vegetable, fruit or protein to use as a serving is fairly easy to figure out looking at the meal pattern requirements, it can be challenging to know the serving size with more complex recipes that mix ingredients together. USDA has a database of approved recipes that are aligned with the meal pattern requirements to make sure they fit into reimbursable meals, but they don't include many traditional Hmong recipes at this time. It is possible — though a little tricky! — to measure the right amounts to include in a recipe so it meets the requirements. In recent years, federal nutrition programs have recognized the importance of serving traditional foods as part of CACFP and other nutrition program meals, and they are adding more diverse culturally responsive recipes and items to their resources, as well as encouraging providers to serve meals from diverse cultural traditions.

The CACFP/Food Program can also adapt to some traditional foodways. For example, some Hmong communities consider it taboo to serve fruit at the same time as the rest of the meal. Waiting until after the rest of the meal is finished to bring the fruit servings to the table would still meet the meal pattern requirements.

From 2020-23, the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA) and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) worked together to support a cohort of Hmong in-home daycare providers on the East Side of St. Paul with weekly fresh produce through HAFA's community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes. We saw the power Farm to Early Care programs can have to connect children to Hmong cultural traditions while giving Hmong farmers a new market into which to sell.

To boost the long-term resources that providers have to purchase their meals, we shared information with providers in our cohort about the CACFP and the potential to receive reimbursement for meals they serve. Enrolling in CACFP can be intimidating, and immigrant providers, such as those in our cohort, face additional barriers when trying to navigate the paperwork and processes to join. Extra reimbursement money could be highly beneficial to providers



wanting to serve healthy meals and purchase local, in particular since providers have reported that cost can be a barrier. At the same time, a larger food budget also makes it easier for farmers to receive a fair price for their produce.

Our cohort of Hmong providers shared feedback on challenges and opportunities to participate in the CACFP (highlights are collected in the [Reflections on the Child and Adult Care Food Program From the MN Farm to Early Care CSA Hmong Provider Cohort](#) resource). Provider recommendations on how to address challenges for providers who want to serve Hmong foods included the following: incorporating diverse cultural dishes and recipes into CACFP standards; incentivizing culturally appropriate items; and explicitly adding culturally appropriate Hmong produce (for example, lemongrass, Hmong greens like Zaub Ntsuab and Zaub Paa, etc.) to the lists of approved items and online entry portals.



Additional resources:

- [Serving Traditional Hmong Foods in Early Care Meals with the Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\): A Recipe Collection](#). This collection of 10 recipes incorporates culturally relevant Hmong foods along with other fresh, simple recipes and provides crediting information for providers seeking to include these foods as part of a CACFP-reimbursable meal. Sized for in-home family child care providers, this booklet provides straightforward, kid-friendly recipes you can include in your reimbursable early care meals. Information and resources on ingredients are also included to make sharing more vegetables with kids fun and informative!
- [Reflections on the Child and Adult Care Food Program From the MN Farm to Early Care CSA Hmong Provider Cohort](#)
- [Minnesota Family Child Care CACFP Food Program Sponsor List and Benefit Information](#). Minnesota currently has four nonprofit family child care sponsoring organizations that administer CACFP. Sponsors are responsible for recruiting, training, monitoring and reimbursing family child care providers, and can provide guidance on how to credit traditional Hmong items and recipes in reimbursable meals. Information about Family Child Care Home (CACFP) sponsors, including links to their websites, are located on this page.
- The [USDA Food Buying Guide \(FBG\)](#) includes crediting information and portion sizes needed to meet the nutritional standards to create reimbursable meals, and is available online, as a mobile app and a downloadable PDF file.
- [Planting the Seeds: A Farm to in-home Early Care Pilot Case Study](#)
- Learn more about Farm to Early Care in Minnesota: www.farmtoearlycaremn.org

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