



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

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The Honorable Mark Pryor  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
129 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to advise you that the final rule amending the food packages offered in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was published in the Federal Register and to thank you for your support of this critical program.

The final rule includes several significant improvements to the food package that will increase WIC participants' access to fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy. The Department received 7,764 comments in support of these improvements. Implementing these improvements as quickly as possible is critical in order for WIC participants to begin realizing the added dietary benefits that will come from expanded access to healthy foods.

For that reason, the Department is acting now to finalize the changes, while also retaining the current provision excluding white potatoes from the WIC food packages. Of the roughly 7,800 comments received on the rule, only 266 opposed the restriction of white potatoes. The restriction of white potatoes, which was recommended by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in 2005 and has been in place since 2007, is based on data indicating that consumption of starchy vegetables meets or exceeds recommended amounts, and food intake data showing that white potatoes are the most widely used vegetable.

Continuing the exclusion of white potatoes maintains consistency with the IOM's recommendations and minimizes the introduction of additional confusion for WIC participants. That said, the Department recognizes the language included in the fiscal year 2014 appropriations bill expressing the expectations of Congress that all varieties of vegetables be included in the food package. Additionally, the Department continues to be committed to a science-based review process for the food packages provided by WIC. In order to accommodate both of these goals, the Department intends to jumpstart its regular review of the WIC food package, which was scheduled for mid-to-late 2015, to begin more than a year earlier so that we can seek the assistance of the IOM to learn if the basis for its recommendation for the exclusion of white potatoes from the WIC food packages is still supported by the most current science available. The Department will use the updated scientific information it receives from the IOM to inform its next course of action with respect to the food package.

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Thank you again for your ongoing support of this critical nutrition assistance program. We look forward to working with Congress to continue providing all eligible WIC participants access to the healthy foods available through the program.

A similar letter is being sent to Senator Blunt and Congressmen Aderholt and Farr.

Sincerely,



Kevin W. Concannon  
Under Secretary  
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services