How does the WIC Food List Affect Program Integrity?

EMILY GOMEZ, MELANIE HALL, BECCA POLK, MARC WALKIN
Promoting program integrity is not limited to preventing fraud and containing costs.

Enforce the fact that the WIC food package is science-based by ensuring that participants receive and consume the foods that promote positive outcomes.

In order to consume the healthy WIC foods, they must be available and easy to find in grocery stores.

What if customers can’t find the WIC foods because the food list is too old or too limited?
State Agency Staff – Please raise your hand if...

- You have ever had a hard time getting in touch with food manufacturers and retailers...
- You have ever wondered what other states are doing...
- You have ever had someone from the food industry try to get a food approved out of process...
- You have ever added a food to the food list, only to have it change or be discontinued...
- You have ever gotten complaints that your food list is either too complicated or too limited making it confusing for clients...
- If you have ever had to change your timelines or rules based on decisions from USDA...
Food Industry Reps – Please raise your hand if...

- You have ever had a hard time determining when WIC agencies are reviewing their food lists...
- You have ever had a hard time trying to get a hold of the correct person at the state to answer your food list questions...
- Your company has ever created a new WIC food specifically to be WIC allowed...
- You ever had a hard time getting your company to make more WIC friendly foods or WIC friendly packaging...
- You have ever tried unsuccessfully to get an eligible food approved...
- If you have ever gotten a food list or other updates at the last minute (or not at all) and not had enough time to accommodate the changes on the back end...
Challenges - State Agency Perspective

- USDA Mandates (size ranges, cost containment, brand specificity)
- Maintaining contact lists
- Balance between participant choice and simplicity of the shopping trip
- Offering culturally relevant foods
- Politics at the state and local levels
- Inconsistency in product availability throughout state
- Food Policies that work with eWIC
Retail/Wholesale Perspective
Becca Polk – Supervalu, Inc and Save-A-Lot Food Stores

- Retailers need to ensure adequate supply of WIC foods
- Meeting WIC needs while taking into account the sales of the items
- Work on the back end (for retailers) to make sure WIC eligible transactions go through
- New WIC approved items take time
  - Manufactures may need to increase production
  - Retailers may need to revise store assortment/planograms
  - Distribution Centers may need to get items in warehouse
Food Manufacturing Perspective
Melanie Hall – Kellogg Co. & Marc Walkin – Beech-Nut

Manufacturers Nurture Close Relationships with Consumers and Retailers to Bring Foods to Market

- Data Driven, Insight Supported Idea
- Consumer Testing Recipe/Package Development
- Data Driven, Insight Supported Sell-in & Shelf Reset
- Forecasting and Production
- National Ship Date
- On Shelf, in the Cart, and in Her Heart

1-2 Years
Q1 and Q3
Q2 and Q4
Disruptions Manufacturer/Retailer Relationships Lead to Confusion in Aisle and at the Register
Retailers with:

- The data needed to understand which WIC foods are the most popular
- Enough information and lead time for retailers to make shelf set decisions (e.g. reimbursement rate changes, package size requirements)
- The flexibility to allow manufacturer support of approved WIC tag placement
- Clear guidelines on approved ways to help alert clients to food list changes and support state or local agency outreach efforts

Manufacturers with:

- The data needed to make WIC friendly products and packaging
- Estimated timelines for food list reviews
- Opportunities to share WIC consumer insights on their foods
- The data and lead time necessary to make enough approved food to meet demand and prevent out-of-stocks
It’s All About Communication…

“THE SINGLE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN COMMUNICATION IS THE ILLUSION THAT IT HAS TAKEN PLACE.”

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

© Lifehack Quotes
Can we develop a better process together?
What information do you need to create a food card that excites clients and encourages redemptions, and program retention?

- What information do you have or require on client wants and needs?
- What information do you need about the food
  - Why do you need it?
  - When do you need it?
- How will this process affect your retailers?
- How will reimbursement rates be affected, if at all?
Determine the scope of the review

- USDA Mandate?
- New foods added to Food Package?
- Current Food list is more than 2 years old?
- Ready for a reprint?

- Get a general idea of what you want so you can ask for it.
Notify Stakeholders

- Build Contact List
- Via email, snail mail, or website:
  - Scope of review
  - Timeline for review
  - Submission Deadline – allow at least 30 days for most submissions
  - Product requirements
  - Submission requirements/formats
Getting the information you need

- Consider providing a spreadsheet if you would like to combine all submissions together.
  - Format questions/columns as listed in USDA Regulatory Requirements or as listed on the label.
  - Looking for something special? Consider adding some columns that are optional.
  - Prices – Cost vs Retail Price; Average vs Promotions
  - Availability – Be specific, but realize submitters have limited data
Review and Implementation

- For states with fewer staff members, consider creating a committee that may include a collaborative group of diverse members.
- If your scope changes during the review process, notify submitters.
- Consider what neighboring states are doing.
- Send a preview to submitters.
- Whatever files you send to the printer, send to submitters and corporate contacts.
- Include summary of changes as well as updated minimum stock requirements and peer group definitions.
- Advanced notice of 60 days is ideal, or give a grace period.
How can state agencies make this process more effective?

- Post the food list review schedule and policies online
- Use a committee if your staff is limited
- Consider sending out a spreadsheet for submitters to complete
- Create a generic or shared email inbox for submissions
- Consider requesting images after you know what you want to feature in the food guide
- Help submitters help you by providing a draft of the new food list
- Allowing size ranges (where possible)
How can submitters make this process more effective?

- Create a spreadsheet or database of all of your company’s WIC eligible products with micronutrients and ingredient lists
- Notify state contacts of product changes
- Create a generic WIC inbox
- Keep records of WIC eligible items, contacts, past submissions to pass on if the WIC contact changes
- Create an FTP site or webpage where State Agency staff can download labels, jpegs, and logos
- Avoid piecemeal or duplicate submissions
TOWN HALL: What are other ideas or questions?

Thank you!
Emily Gomez - Vendor Training Coordinator, MN WIC
  - Emily.Gomez@state.mn.us

Becca Polk – WIC Manager, Supervalu, Inc & Save-a-Lot Food Stores
  - Rebecca.A.Polk@supervalu.com

Melanie Hall – Manager, National WIC Partnerships, Kellogg Company
  - Melanie.Hall@Kellogg.com

Marc Walkin – Brand Manager, WIC, Beech-Nut
  - mwarkin@beechnut.com