

# Supply Chain Considerations

## Support for the 2021-2022 School Year



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues into the 2021-2022 school year, we are aware that sponsors may be experiencing supply chain challenges that can impact their child nutrition programs. This document summarizes the supply chain information the School Nutrition Unit has received to date and provides tips and best practices to help sponsors navigate supply chain challenges that may arise.

## Communication

### Your School Community

- Communicate menu changes and challenges to your school community. It's important to keep families and district leadership in the loop so they understand the situation and are aware that substitutions may happen.
  - Setup recurring meetings with district leadership.
  - Provide email updates to district and school staff.
  - Continue to update online and paper menus as you make menu changes.
  - Use existing district communication channels to reach families (ie, texts, newsletters, website, etc).
  - Advocacy groups active in your district may be able to help communicate to families.
  - Sample messaging to families:
    - Please note that there will be a menu change for {date}: instead of {entrée 1}, we will be serving {entrée 2}. Thank you for your patience and flexibility as we work to continue to provide high-quality, nutritious meals to our students.
- If you are short staffed, consider starting a volunteer sign-up document so district staff may help fill the gaps during service times.

### Existing Vendors

- Keep open lines of communication, even if you don't have all the answers.
- As you update your menu plans, keep your vendors in the loop so they are aware of short and long-term purchasing needs.
- Exercise patience and civility – we are all in this together.

### New Vendors

- Contact local producers and small businesses who may be able to support a portion of your supply needs.
- Consider casting a wider net when you release solicitations. For example, use an online service like Bid Net to increase the pool of potential vendor responders for your solicitation.

### What we know

- Sponsors across the state are reporting current or projected supply chain issues for certain products needed to operate their foodservice program.
- Due to labor shortages, manufacturers have not been able to operate as many product lines, causing some commonly used items to be discontinued.
- The switch for many districts to grab-and-go/individually packaged meals last year caused additional strain on the supply of individually wrapped products and packaging materials.
- The price of some products has increased based on vendor material cost increases.

### What is uncertain

- How many products will be impacted by the current strain on the supply chain.
- How long certain products will be unavailable or available in reduced quantities.
- How supply chain issues will impact meal participation.
- How and when different meal service types may need to be utilized.

## Flexibility

### Meal Pattern Waivers

- [Request a meal pattern waiver](#) when supply chain challenges make it difficult to meet the meal pattern requirements. Meal pattern waivers may be requested to waive the sodium, whole grain-rich, vegetable subgroup, milk variety, and age/grade group requirements, and allow sponsors to offer low-fat flavored milk.
- In cases of emergencies not covered with the meal pattern waivers, document the situation, including the product shorted or missing, the product served in its place, and keep all product information. [Notify Erin Opgenorth](#) of the situation.

### Menu Planning

- Offer fewer menu options each day to reduce the number of products you need to manage, while also reducing kitchen labor. Focus on student favorites to maintain participation.
- Do not wait for a vendor to be out of a key product you need. Develop backup plans so that you are prepared for any situation.
  - Consider updating your standardized recipes with these plans so your kitchen team knows what to do when the product arrives.

### Existing Vendors

- Use like products if a vendor is out of what you normally use. For example, substitute chicken tenders for a chicken patty normally used for a crispy chicken sandwich.
  - All forms of whole fruits and vegetables are creditable, including fresh, frozen, canned, and dried. If your vendor is out of your usual product, consider the same or similar product in another form.
- Ask your vendor what products they have in excess inventory and work these into your menu planning.
- If you have the storage space, maximize your deliveries by ordering a little more than usual – some distributors are increasing their drop minimums.
- Negotiate new delivery windows – some vendors are experiencing driver shortages, so may not be able to deliver during your contracted delivery window but may be able to make the delivery at another day/time.
- Consider reducing the number of drops a vendor needs to make for your district, and transport product between schools yourself.

### Additional Funding Support

- The USDA Equipment Grant can provide funds to increase storage space or purchase additional equipment needed to operate your program. More information will be released for this round of funding in early October.
- ESSER funding may be used to support COVID-related costs increases in your food service operation. Any ESSER-funded activities must be reasonable and necessary to respond to, prepare for, or prevent the spread of COVID-19. Please connect with your district business official to understand what may be covered by ESSER.
- If you are operating the Seamless Summer Option this year, your meals will be reimbursed at a higher rate than in NSLP. This increase could help offset some of the higher prices you may see this year.



## Forecasting and Planning

### Menu Planning

- Review your existing inventory and work those products into your menus. Maintain variety by using different cooking methods, sauces and seasonings, or accompaniments.

### Existing Vendors

- Send your projections to vendors as early as possible. Product lead times have greatly increased for some items, so having your projections in advance can give vendors the time needed to receive the product.
- Request your vendors provide information on projected product shortages later in the year, so you can plan to address menu changes and substitutions. Some sponsors may find benefit in setting up a regular meeting with their vendors to touch base on product availability.

### New Vendors

- Non-competitive procurement can be used when goods or services are needed immediately during a public emergency which doesn't allow time for a competitive solicitation. This procurement method can be used to quickly replace unexpected contract gaps with alternate sources or products; a waiver is not required. Non-competitive procurement can only be used for a contract period of 1 year.
- Consider micro-purchases and small purchases when possible. These methods require minimal recordkeeping.

## Additional Resources

- [View existing waivers](#) for the 2021-2021 school year
- CDE School Nutrition [Back to School Planning webpage](#)
- CDE School Nutrition [Procurement webpage](#)
- CDHS [USDA Foods webpage](#)
- [Procurement and the 2020-21 School Year: Back to School Considerations](#)
- USDA's [Planning for a Dynamic School Environment webpage](#)
- CDE [Allowable Expenditure Matrix](#) (for ESSER funds)
- No Kid Hungry [Communication Tips for Supply Chain Shortages](#)

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

If you have questions or need more information, please reach out to our team:

For meal pattern flexibilities: Erin Opgenorth – [Opgenorth\\_E@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Opgenorth_E@cde.state.co.us) or 720-822-1883

For procurement topics: Jenny Herman – [Herman\\_J@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Herman_J@cde.state.co.us) or 720-812-3119

For USDA Foods: Deborah Cameron – [DeborahA.Cameron@state.co.us](mailto:DeborahA.Cameron@state.co.us) or 720-413-3592

For ESSER funds: Nazanin Mohajeri-Nelson – [Mohajeri-Nelson\\_N@cde.state.co.us](mailto:Mohajeri-Nelson_N@cde.state.co.us) or 303-866-6205