



Potato Monthly: May 2021



Food and Nutrition Policy

USDA Food Assistance Updates

Last month, USDA issued a variety of updates to different food assistance programs. Among these updates, the USDA has extended the waiver on school nutrition meal pattern requirements through June 2022. During a house appropriations Subcommittee Hearing, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack also mentioned that the agency is still considering whether it will continue to provide universal free meals in schools and is re-evaluating nutrition standards for school meals. Additionally, Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) benefits will also be expanded during the summer months for eligible children. WIC participants may also soon see an up to three times increase in cash-value vouchers for the purchase of fruits and vegetables for four months.

USDA Emergency Fresh Produce Package

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has announced plans to purchase fresh produce. USDA will be offering boxes of pre-packaged, fresh produce through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in addition to single varieties that are already available to order. The fresh produce package is expected to have a shelf life of 7-10 days once delivered. The package will include 10-12 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables with a minimum of at least four of the following:

- 3-5 pounds of vegetables (no more than 3 pounds of root vegetables; i.e. potatoes, yams, carrots, onions);
- 3-5 pounds of fruit;
- At least 2 locally grown fruit or vegetable items as available and if not available, the box would include an additional fruit and vegetable item to meet the minimum package weight.

President Biden's Discretionary Funding Request

On April 9th, the Biden-Harris Administration submitted to Congress the President's priorities for fiscal year 2022 (FY22) discretionary spending. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack noted the budget commits to "building back better" and USDA is at the heart of that historic commitment. The FY22 discretionary request includes \$6.7 billion for critical nutrition programs, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), in order to help vulnerable families put healthy food on the table and to address racial disparities in maternal and child health outcomes. This is over \$1 billion above the 2021 enacted level for nutrition programs.

US Allergen Labeling Update

On April 23rd, President Biden signed into law the "Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education and Research Act of 2021" (Faster Act), which will require sesame to be labeled as an allergen on packaged foods. Sesame will become the ninth food allergen for which the FDA requires plain-language labeling. The law provides 20 months, or until January 1, 2023, for manufacturers to include appropriate labeling on any of their products. This would affect any packaged potato products containing sesame-based ingredients. Under the new law, the Secretary of Health and Human Services must issue a report on scientific opportunities related to food allergens within the next 18 months.

USDA AMS BE Labeling Update

After multiple requests from the food industry, the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has formally denied a request for a one-year enforcement discretion period on the National Bioengineered (BE) Food Disclosure Standard, citing that industry has the necessary resources to comply with the labeling regulations by Jan 1, 2022. As a reminder, potatoes are among the list of crops identified to be available in a bioengineered form throughout the world and for which regulated entities must retain records.



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Food Safety + Ag

FDA Action Plan on Heavy Metals Baby Food

FDA announced a new action plan, Closer to Zero, that sets forth the agency's approach to reduce exposure to heavy metals in foods commonly eaten by babies and young children to the lowest possible levels. The action plan includes both short- and long-term goals for improving the reduction of arsenic, lead, cadmium and mercury in these foods. FDA's work will occur in three phases, and the first phase will commence immediately, including a four-pronged approach, which includes evaluating the scientific basis for action levels, proposing action levels, consulting with stakeholders on the proposed action levels, and finalizing the action levels. Pureed vegetables is listed as an example category of food for which FDA may develop action levels.

USDA Food System Supply Chain Efforts

The USDA is seeking comments on a Department-wide effort to improve and reimagine the supply chains for the production, processing and distribution of agricultural commodities and food products. The comments received will help USDA assess the critical factors, risks, and strategies needed to support supply chains for the production of agricultural commodities and food products. The USDA is also requesting public comment to inform how stimulus relief programs and spending related to food supply chain resilience can help to increase durability and resilience within the US food supply. Comments will be accepted until May 21, 2021.

Mexico Supreme Court Ruling on US Potatoes

Mexico's Supreme Court released a unanimous final ruling in favor of the draft rule which would allow US fresh potatoes to be exported beyond the first 16 miles of the Mexico border. USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack noted this is an important effort for American agriculture and for a positive relationship between the US and Mexico.

Nutrition Science

Hot Potato Praise in the Media

Potatoes have shined in recent media coverage, including a feature story in *Men's Health* and on *Real Simple* online. The May issue of *Men's Health* myth-busted some of the misconceptions about potatoes, emphasizing that potatoes are a nutritious vegetable and providing a variety of recipe and baked potato toppings ideas. The article says, "One medium-sized baked potato delivers six grams of protein and four grams of fiber, as well as high amounts of bone-assisting calcium, heart-helping potassium, and immunity-supporting vitamin C- all for just 265 calories." *Real Simple* quoted Potatoes USA partner and registered dietitian Cara Harbstreet saying, "Research suggests that potatoes are one of the vegetables offering the most nutrients per dollar (along with sweet potatoes and carrots) on eight important nutrients, including potassium, fiber, protein, vitamins C and E, calcium, iron, and magnesium."

PHA Launches COVID-19 Fresh Food Fund and Shaping Early Palates Initiative

Last week, the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) launched two new efforts, COVID-19 Fresh Food Fund and Shaping Early Palates, as part of its virtual summit, *PHA 10: Accelerating a Healthier Future*. The COVID-19 Fresh Food Fund aims to provide fresh produce to communities in need during the coronavirus pandemic in partnership with the Produce Marketing Association. The Shaping Early Palates initiative will work with private sector partners and others in an effort to raise visibility around early palate development through advancing the availability and accessibility of veggie-forward baby and toddler foods in the marketplace.

Substituting Potatoes and Risk of Ischemic Stroke

A recent observational study was published in *The European Journal of Nutrition*, which examined replacing potatoes with other vegetables and risk of ischemic stroke and ischemic stroke subtypes. The study included 57,053 participants aged 50-64 years old and diets were assessed from a validated 192 item semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire. Researchers calculated the hazard ratios for the incidence of ischemic stroke and found that replacing potatoes with fruiting vegetables was associated with a lower risk of ischemic stroke.