

Summary of Minutes of Software Vendor Meeting

Database Issues:

Everyone agreed to the use of the Healthy School Meals Resource System Website to post the updates to the Child Nutrition (CN) Database.

Everyone agreed that the current format was fine and no changes were required. It was also noted that the fewer format changes made during updates, the better.

If the CN database is released annually there was general agreement that the March-April timeframe would be best. We will attempt to work towards this time frame in the future.

It was suggested that the CN database be updated monthly, certainly more often than annually. This suggestion was not unanimous, and several timeframes were suggested. FNS will have one release in 2000 and will work on increasing the frequency in the future if we hear from the software vendors or elsewhere that this is needed, and if our contract can be amended to allow it.

A range of CNP numbers was chosen that USDA will not use so that local input will not be overwritten or have to change their CNP number. The range was from 900,000 to 999,999. If the CN database gets large enough to reach 900,000 we would increase the data field to seven digits and leave the designated range for local input undisturbed.

Software vendors requested FNS to allow them to reduce the CN Database to items used by their clients. This was not seen as a problem if the entire CN Database was available **and** the user was aware that items had been made unavailable **and** the user had the ability and the instructions to add the unavailable items back into their database. It was also recommended that a list of the items made unavailable be provided.

Deletion of items can cause problems. Vendors requested FNS to designate a replacement item if one is deleted. FNS will have to review this possibility.

It was pointed out that the nutritional data from CN4 should be incorporated quickly because there were some problems found in the CN3 nutritional data.

Many changes will be found in the long description of the CN4 release. FNS has attempted to group items within the long description so that all similar items will be found in a search. (It was found that many different search programs exist and several search only by the first letter/word.) FNS is open to any additional changes with the long descriptions or any other part of the database that would ease the burden on the software vendors or the users.

Vendors suggested that the Food Buying Guide data be included for each include item in the database. This will have to be reviewed by FNS.

The fact that the database often has the same type of item listed several times, either as a separate item or as an include item was discussed. FNS will work on getting as many food items as possible grouped into the includes files. It was explained that the includes are the same nutritionally, and may even be produced by the same manufacturer. FNS is hesitant not to maintain all of the items just because they are nutritionally similar. It would be difficult to choose what one to keep or what generic name to use and we believe the users would be more comfortable if they can pick the exact item they are using.

FNS was asked to explain how the recipe nutrient data were derived and to list the CNP numbers for the items to make it easier to create new recipes. While FNS can give the items used in each recipe, the nutritional profile of the recipes was originally derived taking many factors into account. Simply combining the ingredients would not result in the same nutritional values as those found in the database. It is best to use the method of copying and modifying the recipe for the best estimate of the finished nutritional profile of the recipes when making changes, such as substituting ingredients or adding optional ingredients.

Some nutritional differences were noted between a company's fact sheet and the CN4 data. We can only report what the company gives us, but we ask the vendors to please report any significant differences so that we may investigate.

FNS requested that any vendor suggestions for changes to the documentation be forwarded to Bill Wagoner.

Software Issues:

There was a question on the USDA approved software site, <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001/>, and how it connected to another NAL website listing all kinds of software programs and vendors. Please contact Eileen Ferruggiario if there are any questions on the NAL website.

Eileen maintains the approved listing as well as the comparison chart. Please inform Eileen if you find anything incorrect on either chart and inform Eileen if there have been any changes.

The question was posed that if the nutritional percentages come up to greater than 100%, for example 102%, can the software vendors convert this to 100%. FNS will have to review this issue.

It was stated that the "moving RDA", when breakfast and lunch are combined, causes confusion. Training is needed to help people understand why the RDA changes.

It was agreed that all software programs would be submitted to Eileen at least every three years for review. Updates could be presented to Eileen on an ongoing basis with an explanation of what was changed. If this is done, Eileen will be able to review the software whenever it is necessary. It was also agreed that any major rewrite or change in platform should be sent to Eileen for review.

Policy Issues

The FNS policy on requiring local users to enter nutrient data when an item already exists in the CN Database was discussed. If the item is a single ingredient item (cut of meat), a fresh or canned fruit or vegetable (green beans) for which an item with nutrient values already exists in the CN Database, FNS suggests the CN Database item be used. If this is consistently not done in one state or area please let Bill know so the situation can be looked into with the State. There was a memo sent to FNS regional offices on this issue and a copy was handed out in the meeting. Please feel free to copy the memo. Be aware, the States do have the authority to set up stricter rules/policy.

The customizing of nutrient levels not specifically required by regulation to a particular State's request was discussed. The nutrients requested are sodium, cholesterol, and fiber. Since there is no specific level set by Federal regulation the States are not prohibited from setting a specific level.

It was suggested that States be re-trained on a regular basis and that some incentives be made to move schools to nutrient standard. It was felt that some individual reviewers were too hard on schools using the nutrient standards approach.

FNS currently has no all day nutrient standards. If the software vendors want to provide all day nutrient standards for a client, FNS has no problem as long as the nutrient standard information required by FNS can still be separated out and supplied to FNS. All day nutrient standards would be considered outside of our requirements.

Other

A speaker from the Office of Analysis, Nutrition and Evaluation explained a project in which FNS is trying to find out from States if they can collect, compile and submit to FNS the nutrient data gathered by nutritional analysis reviews.

A speaker from the Food Distribution Division explained the USDA commodity program and how the schools use it.