

# MENU PLANNING TIP CARD



Minnesota Child and Adult Care Food Program

## Reduce Food Waste with Smart Planning

### \* Buy versatile ingredients.

Choosing foods that can be prepared in several ways will help ensure you have basic ingredients on hand.

### \* Check your storage.

Determine what you have and still need to purchase in order to limit over-purchasing of food.

### \* Store wisely.

When unpacking groceries, move the older products to the front of the pantry, fridge, or freezer. This will help you use the older products before they expire.

### \* Watch expiration dates.

Decrease the amount of food that is thrown away due to spoilage.

### \* Plan a cycle menu.

Cycle menus repeat on a regular basis which help control food purchases, leading to less waste.

### To Do:

- Learn the difference between “sell-by,” “use-by,” “best-by,” and expiration dates.  
[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov) (type: “food product dating” in search area)
- Keep a list of the ingredients that are purchased regularly. That way, you will not forget key meal components when shopping or ordering.
- Put up a reminder to check expiration dates on packaged food at least every few weeks in order to avoid throwing items away.

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## Spend Less on Fruits and Vegetables

### \* Purchase seasonal fruits and vegetables.

Seasonal items generally cost less due to their abundance.

### \* Plant a garden.

Fruits and vegetables can be grown in a pot or in a yard for fresh, inexpensive additions to meals.

### \* Be creative.

Get the most out of your fruits and vegetables by preparing them in different ways –raw, cooked, or in combination dishes.

### \* Prep yourself.

Buying dried beans, peas, and lentils in their raw or uncooked form cost less than the packaged versions.

### \* Remember frozen.

Frozen fruits and vegetables store well and can be easily added to recipes.

### \* Chop your own.

Cutting up fruits and vegetables yourself is less expensive than purchasing pre-cut produce.

### To Do:

- Check prices for frozen and canned foods compared to fresh.
- Use a produce seasonality list to know what is in season. <http://minnesotagrown.com/whats-in-season/> (download PDF)
- Compare prices for various grocery stores, vendors, and farmers markets to find the best prices.

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## Incorporate Cultural Recipes into your Menus

### \* Understand preferences.

Learn about the eating patterns of your participants including cultural, religious, and family traditions.

### \* Gather input.

Talk to children and adults about items they would like included in the planned menu.

### \* Test recipes before adding them to the menu.

Verify the dishes are tasty and feasible to make.

### \* Respect.

Encourage children who are unfamiliar with a new item to try a bite or two in order to see if they like it.

### \* Ensure Compliance.

Verify that all menu items are creditable and the quantities comply with CACFP meal pattern requirements.

### To Do:

- Identify the number of new menu items to test for your next menu cycle. Gradually add new items as you are able.
- Tell children and parents about the new menu items.
- Gather feedback after new items are served and modify as necessary.
- Identify substitutions that may be needed for children with special dietary requests.

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## Involve Children and Parents in Menu Planning

### \* Collect suggestions.

Ask for menu suggestions from parents and children. Review suggestions to see which menu ideas are practical and if they would meet CACFP regulations.

### \* Hold taste testing events.

Offer a nutrition lesson for a new item. Taste the items and gather feedback verbally from young children or on paper from older children.

### \* Get creative.

Ask children and parents for ways to celebrate special events or theme days.

### \* Invite parents.

Allowing them to see your mealtime might be interesting and informative for them.

### \* Inform.

Provide updates to parents about what their children ate. They might be surprised with the information.

### To Do:

- Take time each month to review suggestions from children and parents.
- Order free taste test stickers from the Team Nutrition Resource Library:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/resource-library>
- Invite volunteers to assist with taste testing events.

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