

## Just the Facts!

### Serve More Whole Grain-Rich Pastas for Healthier School Meals

As schools transition to offering only grains that are whole grain-rich, consider whole grain-rich\* pasta! Whole grain-rich pastas are a wonderful way to incorporate nutritious and versatile dishes into school meals.

#### Key Points

- ▶ In School Year 2014-2015, all grains served for school lunch and breakfast should be whole grain-rich.\*
- ▶ The grain content of items that meet the whole grain-rich criteria may be made of 50 percent or more whole grains with any remaining grains being enriched meal and/or flour.
- ▶ There is no requirement to offer 100 percent whole-grain items although these items are also an option.

\*Please note that the term “whole grain-rich” refers to FNS criteria for school meal requirements for grains. USDA offered a 2-year flexibility for schools unable to obtain acceptable whole grain-rich pasta products. Refer to Memorandum SP47-2014 for more information on the flexibility for whole grain-rich pasta in School Years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

#### Where To Find Whole Grain and Whole Grain-Rich Pastas

- ▶ **The Whole Grain Resource for the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs** contains information to help you identify foods that meet the whole grain-rich criteria: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/WholeGrainResource.pdf>
- ▶ **The Child Nutrition (CN) Labeling** list of authorized manufacturers and labels includes available whole grain-rich pasta products. Any grain-based product on the CN Labels list meets the whole grain-rich criteria: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnlabeling/authorized-manufacturers-and-labels>
- ▶ **The Alliance for a Healthier Generation** provides a list of verified products that meet Federal meal pattern requirements: [https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/resources\\_\\_tools/](https://schools.healthiergeneration.org/resources__tools/). Manufacturers sign an agreement with the Alliance ensuring their products are processed to meet nutrition standards for school meals. (Products listed on the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Web site have not been reviewed by USDA.)

#### Procurement

Procure pasta products that are whole grain-rich.

- ▶ USDA Foods offers a wide variety of whole-grain options. Schools can order whole-grain pasta through USDA Foods. For a complete list of whole-grain options available through USDA Foods, see the **USDA Foods Available List**:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/school-nutrition-professionals>
- ▶ When soliciting bids from manufacturers:
  - Specify that products must be made from 50 percent or more whole grains, with all remaining grains being enriched.
  - Check the ingredient statement and request any additional documentation from the manufacturer to ensure that the product meets whole grain-rich criteria.
  - Select grains that meet the whole grain-rich criteria and are also low in sodium, added sugars, and saturated (solid) fat, and contain no *trans* fat.

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## Recipe for Success

To provide the best quality whole grain-rich pasta product, follow the tips below.

- ▶ **Follow the recipe or package label instructions to cook whole grain-rich pasta.** Whole grain-rich pasta should be cooked with plenty of water. The water absorption rate of whole-grain pasta is higher than regular pasta; therefore, more water per pound is required.
- ▶ **Use a large cooking pot.** Give whole grain-rich pasta plenty of room in the pot when cooking. Crowding the pasta in a small pot may cause the pasta to become sticky.
- ▶ **Plan your cooking time accordingly.** The larger and fuller the pasta shapes, the longer the cooking time. The general rule for cooking pasta is “al dente,” tender but firm. To improve holding time for whole grain-rich pasta, cook it for a shorter time to start, because the pasta on the serving line will continue to cook. When pasta is to be used as an ingredient in a recipe that will be cooked more, like lasagna or macaroni and cheese, it should be slightly under-cooked (reduce the cooking time by about 2 minutes).
- ▶ **Holding time matters.** Whole grain-rich pasta that is cooked and held for long periods will become stickier and break down more quickly than regular pasta. To extend the holding time, whole grain-rich pasta should be rinsed with cold water after cooking to remove some of the starch and slow any further cooking that might occur while holding.

## Suggestions for Preparing and Holding Whole Grain-Rich Pastas

Pasta that is not cooked enough is tough and chewy. Pasta that is overcooked is soft and pasty. When overcooked whole grain-rich pasta is combined with a sauce, it often becomes mushy and breaks apart more quickly than regular pasta. To prevent this from happening, handle pasta the right way after it is cooked (see chart below for suggestions). Like most foods, pasta is best when it is cooked and served right away. When using whole grain-rich pasta, it is especially important to cook/reheat foods in small batches as needed (batch cooking) for proper food quality. However, it is sometimes necessary to cook it ahead and hold it until time for service. Food safety should be kept in mind at all times. Remember to hold at 135 °F or higher for hot service and at 41 °F or lower for cold service.

### When pasta is to be served immediately:

Drain, add the sauce, and serve.

### When pasta is to be held a short time for hot service later:

Drain, toss with a small amount of oil to prevent sticking, cover, and hold in the warmer.

### When pasta is cooked a day ahead for service in a heated dish:

Drain and cover with cold water just long enough to cool. When pasta is cool, drain the water, and toss lightly with oil to prevent sticking or drying out. Store covered in the refrigerator.

When it is time to use the pasta, immerse it in boiling water until just heated through. Drain immediately and use according to the recipe.

The pasta should not be cooked more; just heat to serving temperature.

### When pasta is to be used in a cooked dish:

Slightly undercook the pasta.

### When pasta is to be served as part of a salad:

Do not combine hot pasta with cold ingredients for a salad.

Cook the pasta a day ahead so it will be chilled when combined with all the other salad ingredients. Drain and cover with cold water just long enough to cool. When pasta is cool, drain the water and toss pasta lightly with oil to prevent sticking or drying out. Store covered in the refrigerator.

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## For More Information

- ▶ **SP47-2014: Flexibility for Whole Grain-Rich Pasta in School Years 2014-15 and 2015-16**  
This memorandum provides guidance to State agencies to address the issues that some school food authorities are experiencing in meeting the whole grain-rich requirements:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/flexibility-whole-grain-rich-pasta-school-years-2014-15-and-2015-16>
- ▶ ***Recipes for Healthy Kids: Cookbook for Schools***  
Get ideas for adding foods that meet whole grain-rich criteria to school menus:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/recipes-healthy-kids-cookbook-child-care-centers-0>
- ▶ ***Team Nutrition Popular Events Idea Booklet***  
Encourage kids to try whole grain-rich foods on your school's menu with taste-tests and nutrition education activities:  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/popular-events-booklet>
- ▶ **Whole Grains Information**  
Find additional resources on whole grains:  
<https://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/resource-library/whole-grains>
- ▶ ***Culinary Techniques for Healthy School Meals: Preparing Pasta, Rice, and Grains***  
Find ways to improve the quality, variety, appeal, and cooking of pasta served to students:  
<http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=293>
- ▶ ***Healthy Cuisine for Kids***  
Check out this culinary manual for information on preparing whole grain-rich foods:  
<http://nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=84>



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