



North Dakota WIC Participant Food Shopping and Consumption Habits Spring 2008 Survey Results

WIC Because You Care

NORTH DAKOTA WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)

WIC Food Package Changes

Groundbreaking federal rules released by the USDA in December 2007 will enable WIC households to purchase a variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and baby food. The revisions will bring the WIC food packages in line with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and current infant feeding practices guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics. These new food packages will give WIC families more variety in food choices, with a focus on foods that are lower in fat and sugar and high in fiber.

To prepare for these changes, North Dakota WIC surveyed more than 800 WIC families to learn what foods WIC participants prefer and what they would be likely to choose if WIC offered new foods. The survey results will help establish new food package policies, influence the design of effective nutrition education and promotional messages, and provide baseline information for future assessment of changes in participant preferences and behavior.

"I like WIC cause it helps for food costs and gives my family variety of selection that I may not buy. I like the height and weight of my kids, hemoglobin checks, to be able to know where they're at."

WIC participant comment

The 44-question survey was distributed randomly to families at all WIC clinics, and questions were designed to elicit information on current intake trends and preferences for the new WIC foods including baby foods, soy milk, fruits and vegetables, whole grains and canned beans.

North Dakota WIC Household Characteristics

Average household size is 3.8 individuals

Ranging in size from one to nine people



More than 60 percent are two-parent families.

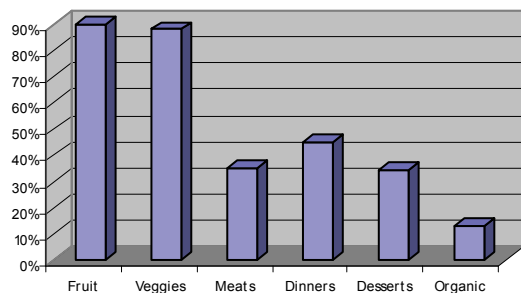
More than 66 percent report one or both adults work full-time, and another 18 percent have adults who work part-time.

Fifty-six percent (56%) receive food stamps, and 80 percent participate in Medicaid.

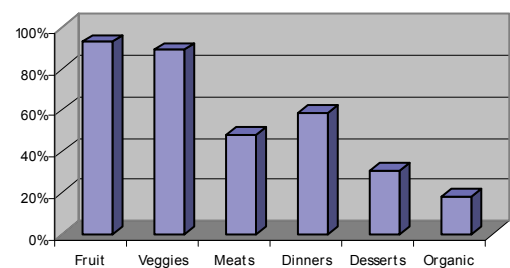
Baby Foods and Other Infant Foods

Almost 75 percent of WIC families with infants purchase baby foods, primarily fruits and vegetables. If WIC included baby food, almost all families would purchase baby food fruits and vegetables similar to their current practice, and about half (48%) would buy baby food meat, an increase from the 35 percent who currently do so. Since such a large portion of WIC families already are purchasing baby food, the inclusion of baby food in WIC may not greatly increase the overall volume purchased. However, the purchasing of a large amount of baby food at one time may place a greater demand on inventory (on the shelf) at time of WIC purchases.

Baby Food Currently Purchased



If WIC checks included baby foods, participant would purchase.



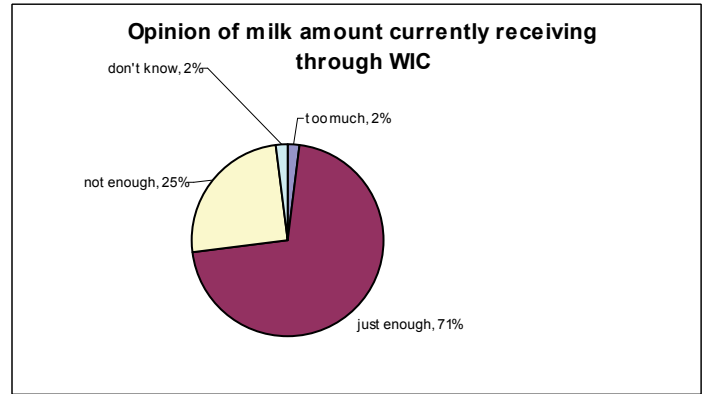
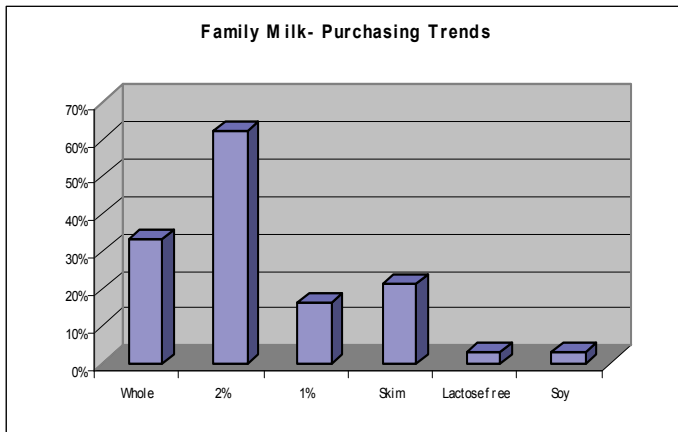
Milk, Cheese, Soy-based Beverage and Tofu

About two-thirds (62%) of North Dakota WIC families purchased 2 percent milk for drinking by both the adults and children in the household. The primary reasons 2 percent was chosen was because they prefer the taste or they think it is a healthy choice. Very few families purchased soy-based beverages (3%) or lactose-free milk (2%).

Most families (70%) think they got enough milk from WIC, although one out of four thought it was not enough.

When asked to create WIC checks with a combination of cow's milk, soy milk, cheese and tofu, most (88%) would choose mostly cow's milk with some amount of other options, primarily cheese (95%).

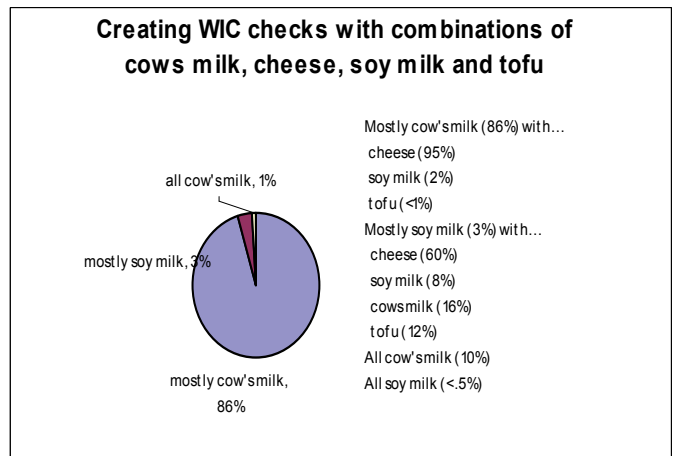
A very small number of families purchase soy milk, and only less than one half a percent would choose only soy if offered. Like soy, only a fraction of a percent would choose to add tofu.



Considerations for North Dakota WIC:
Since most participants prefer 2 percent milk, switching to lower-fat milk may not be too challenging.

Families like cheese and may be disappointed to learn that the maximum they can have is one pound.

Tofu and soy beverages do not appear to be common choices among our families



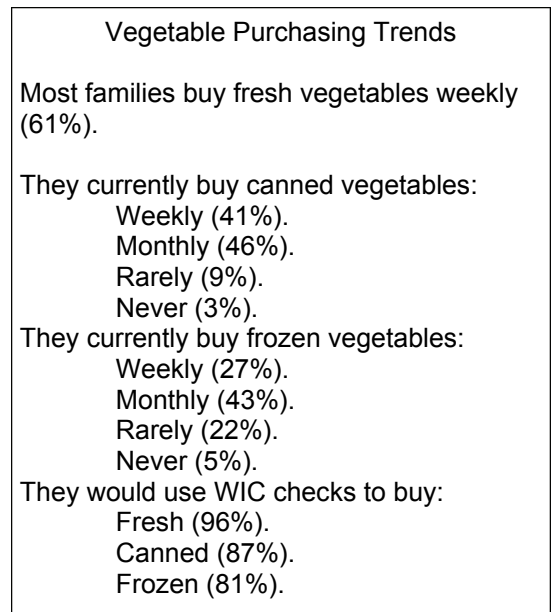
Fruits, Vegetables and Juice

Most WIC families buy fresh fruit (61%) every week and vegetables (58%) every week; and about half reported they purchased canned or frozen fruits and vegetables monthly.

When asked, 10 percent of families thought they got too much juice from WIC and 65 percent thought the amount was just right.

Considerations for North Dakota WIC:
WIC families already buy fruits and vegetables.

Because participants are consuming quantities of juice that are much higher than recommended education will be needed to emphasize appropriate quantities.



Whole Grains

White bread (79%) and whole wheat/grain bread (70%) are most commonly purchased by WIC families. In addition, many families reported purchasing flour tortillas (78%), white rice (80%) and oatmeal (63%).

For those who did not choose to eat whole wheat bread, the primary reason was that they did not like the taste. The main reason participants did not eat whole wheat tortillas or brown rice was that they had never tasted these items.

Considerations for North Dakota WIC:

Most participants are either choosing whole wheat bread or think they are doing so, indicating they have a positive attitude about whole wheat bread.

Participants are open to eating more whole grains if offered.

Whole Grains and WIC Checks

If WIC offered whole grain products, participants would use their checks to buy:

- Whole wheat/grain bread (85%).
- Oatmeal (74%).
- Tortillas (70%).
- Brown rice (52%).
- Barley (15%).



Beans and Peanut Butter

Fewer than half the respondents (41%) purchased canned beans, indicating that their families did not like them. And for those who ate canned beans, most were able to indicate a favorite brand but more than three-fourths would be open to buying a different brand if WIC offered.

If they could create their own WIC checks with a combination of canned beans, dry beans and peanut butter, nearly three-fourths of participants would use the checks to purchase canned beans, and 86 percent would purchase peanut butter.

Beans, Peanut Butter and WIC Checks

If WIC offered a combination of canned and dry beans and peanut butter, participants would use their checks to buy:

- Peanut butter (86%).
- Canned beans (72%).
- Dry beans (14%).



Conclusions and Next Steps

The survey results provided a snapshot of current shopping and consumption practices and preferences among North Dakota WIC families. We are heartened with the families' enthusiastic support of making healthier choices with updated WIC checks, and recognize that careful and strategic nutrition and consumer education will be needed to promote the new WIC food packages.

North Dakota WIC will continue to gather additional information for informed decision-making about the new food packages. It is important that WIC staff, as front-line ambassadors, have an in-depth understanding and appreciation for what WIC soon will be offering. To gather input from our WIC vendor community, a North Dakota WIC vendor advisory group is being established.

North Dakota also will continue to pursue other activities as appropriate.

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