# Child Nutrition (CN) Labels

**This course provides 1 hour of CACFP Program Training.**
**Content compiled by Wildwood CACFP 2024**

**The Child Nutrition (CN) Label** is found directly on food packaging and identifies a product's contribution to the meal pattern requirements. The purpose of CN Labels is to identify the meal pattern components of store-bought combination foods that credit as part of a reimbursable meal.

Please note that a nutrition facts label with general serving size and nutritional information is NOT a CN Label. See below for an example of a CN Label circled in red.


## Are CN Labels Mandatory?

Food manufacturers are not required to have their products tested by USDA for CN Labels. While CN Labels are common on products used for school nutrition programs, they can be tough to find in retail grocery stores.

CN Labels are required when a child care home or center chooses to serve and claim store-bought combination foods as part of reimbursable meals or snacks. CN Labels are used to calculate the quantity of food to prepare and serve to participants to meet the meal pattern requirement. If a child care home/center chooses to serve and claim processed, convenience foods, the provider/center MUST keep CN Labels on file for those foods. Along with other CACFP records, CN Labels must be kept for 3 years and 4 months beyond the date of service.

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## Which Products Need CN Labels?

Processed meat/meat alternate entrees claimed as part of the CACFP meal pattern require a CN Label. Examples include cheese or meat pizza, beef patties, frozen burritos, breaded fish and chicken, corndogs and egg rolls. The list could go on and on. Any pre-made convenience food that includes meat/meat alternate and other food, including breading, pasta or vegetables, needs a CN Label when served as part of a reimbursable meal. For example, CN-Labeled pizza may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates, grains and vegetable components. CN-Labeled breaded chicken nuggets may list contributions to the meat/meat alternates and grains components.

There are many products that appear to have only one ingredient when, in reality, there are other ingredients that we might not notice without looking at the back of the package. The meatballs or burger patties that are so quick to heat-up and easy to serve may not be 100% beef. Often, these products include fillers like breadcrumbs, cornmeal or soy protein in addition to beef. Any meat product that is not 100% meat needs a CN Label in order to serve the item as the meat component of a meal that is being claimed.

## Identifying CN Labels

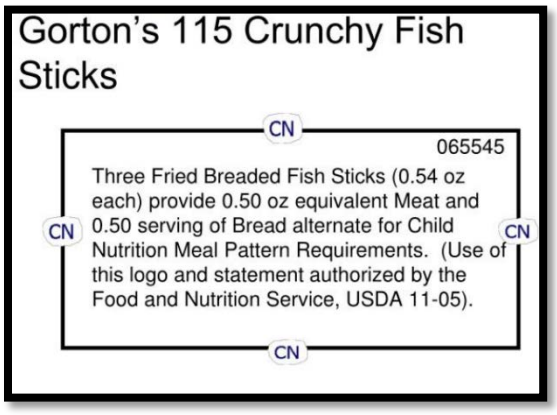
All CN Labels will always have:

- A CN logo with a distinct border
- Details of meal pattern contribution
- A 6-digit product identification number assigned by the USDA
- The USDA Food and Nutrition Services authorization statement
- The month and year of USDA approval

*Note: CN Labels expire 5 years from the approval date or sooner if the manufacturer makes changes to the product formulation.*

## Using the CN Label to Calculate the Minimum Portion For Each Child By Age

For the product shown here, 3 fish sticks provide .5 oz of meat/meat alternate and .5 oz bread/grain. To provide the minimum serving of meat at Lunch/Supper for a 3–5-year-old child (1.5 ounces of meat), 9 fish sticks are needed. After doing the math, the provider/center must determine whether the portion needed is realistic/reasonable for each child and whether serving the needed amount would be cost effective.




In this scenario, 9 fish sticks seems excessive for a preschool-age child. And the cost of serving 9 fish sticks to a group of preschoolers would be far more than the CACFP reimbursement for claiming the meal.

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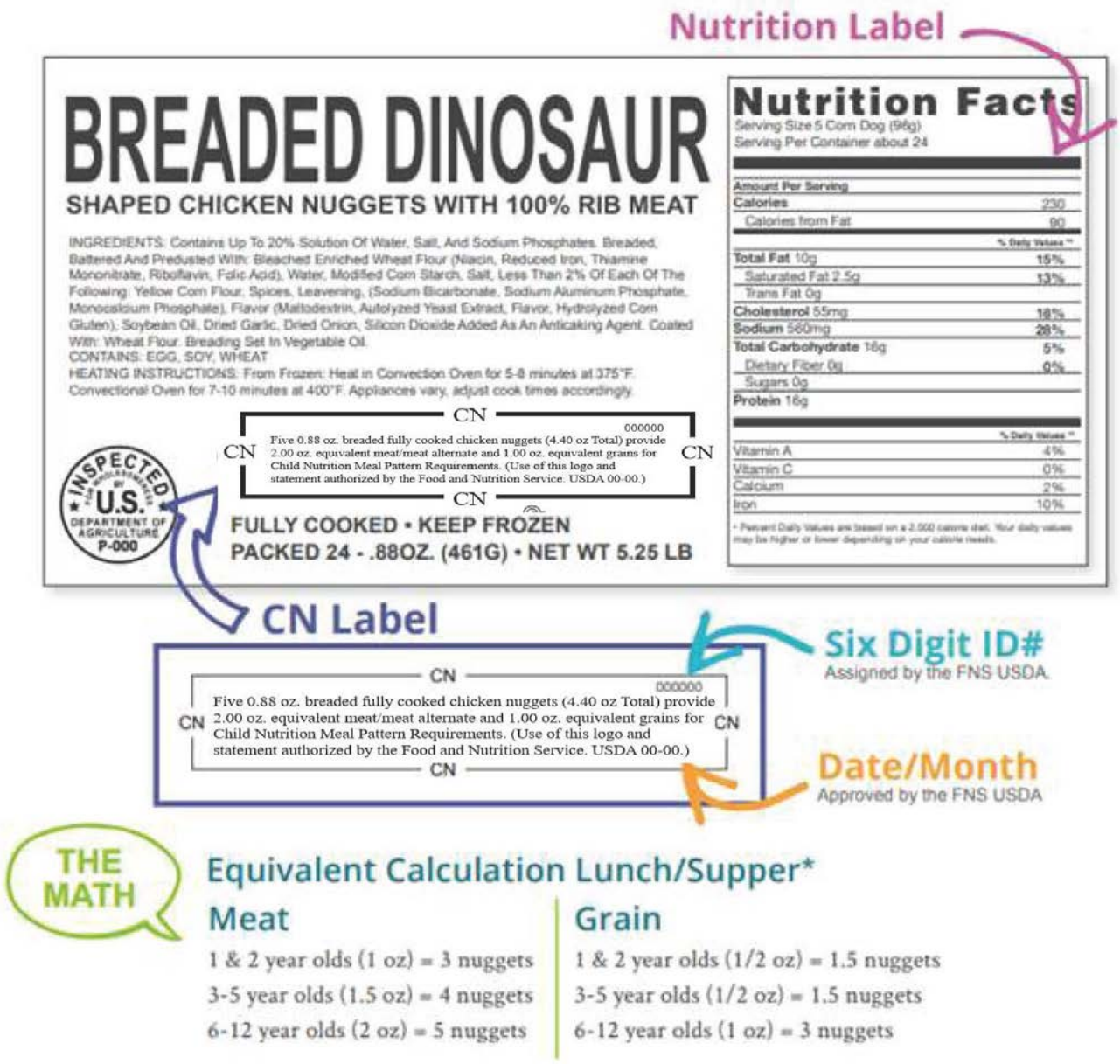
**Example of CN Label for Dinosaur-Shaped Chicken Nuggets.**




THE MATH

## Equivalent Calculation Lunch/Supper*

### Meat

1 & 2 year olds (1 oz) = 3 nuggets
3-5 year olds (1.5 oz) = 4 nuggets
6-12 year olds (2 oz) = 5 nuggets

### Grain

1 & 2 year olds (1/2 oz) = 1.5 nuggets
3-5 year olds (1/2 oz) = 1.5 nuggets
6-12 year olds (1 oz) = 3 nuggets

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## Challenges of CN-Labeled Foods

While it may seem simple to choose a chicken nugget, meatball or fish stick that has been tested by the USDA for your menus, the reality of finding that exact product in the retail market is often much more complicated than it might appear. This is because the list of currently approved CN-Labeled products is 500+ pages and continually changing, with new items added as others expire. Finding the exact brand, style and package size that matches the approved product you plan to serve can be challenging if not impossible.

If the product you want is out of stock or discontinued, suddenly the Lunch menu needs to be adjusted. Even worse, the meal may not be creditable if you purchase a different brand that is not CN-Labeled. Each variety of chicken nugget will credit differently, while some are not creditable at all.

The testing is expensive and takes time. After a product has been tested by USDA and approved for CN Labeling, the certification lasts for 5 years before the CN Label expires. Any small change to the product formulation (the recipe used to create the product) nullifies the CN Label, which restarts the entire process.

## Other Options for Crediting Store-Bought Convenience Foods

As an alternative to using CN Labels, Product Formulation Statements are another way to determine whether a combination food may be creditable and, if so, calculate the portion size needed to meet the meal pattern requirements. Product Formulation Statements (PFS) do not require testing by the USDA and instead come directly from the food manufacturer. A PFS is a written document stating the contribution of the ingredients to the meal pattern. The PFS must be on company letterhead, signed by a company official and dated. Like CN Labels, PFS expire 5 years from the date they are issued or when the product formulation changes. Also like CN Labels, PFS are only valid for the exact brand, style and package size that matches the product you plan to serve.

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The benefit of PFS is that many companies will email a PFS after receiving an online or phone request from the provider/center. Below is an example of a PFS for a commercial meat/meat alternate product:

ABC Chicken Company

**Product Formulation Statement for Documenting Meats/Meat Alternates (M/MA) in Child Nutrition Programs**

Program operators should include a copy of the label from the purchased product package in addition to the following information on letterhead signed by an official company representative.

Product Name: Grilled Chicken Nuggets  Code No.: 123456

Manufacturer: ABC Chicken Company  Serving Size: 4 nuggets (2.6 ounces)

**I. Meats**

Fill out the chart below to determine the creditable amount of Meats.

| DESCRIPTION OF CREDITABLE MEAT INGREDIENT PER FOOD BUYING GUIDE (FBG) | OUNCES PER RAW PORTION OF CREDITABLE MEAT INGREDIENT A | MULTIPLY | FBG YIELD[1] B | CREDITABLE AMOUNT A x B |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Boneless chicken | 2.88 ounces | x | .7 | 2.016 |
| | | x | | |
| | | x | | |
| | | | C. Total Creditable Meats Amount[1] | 2.016 |

[1] FBG yield = Additional Information column.

Total weight (per portion) of product as purchased 2.6 ounces

Total creditable amount of product (per portion). (Reminder: total creditable amount (per portion) cannot exceed the total weight (per portion).) 2 ounce equivalents

I certify that the above information is true and correct and that a 2.6 ounce serving of the above product (ready for serving) contains 2 ounces of equivalent meat/meat alternate when prepared according to directions.

I further certify that any APP used in the product conforms to the Food and Nutrition Service Regulations (7 CFR Parts 210, 220, 225, 226, Appendix A) as demonstrated by the attached supplier documentation.

John Smith
Signature

President
Title

John Smith
Printed Name

12/09/2022
Date

(800) 123-4567
Phone Number

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## What Does It All Mean?

Although CN Labels are helpful, they do not indicate that a product is healthier, safer, of higher quality or appropriate for children. The purpose of CN Labels is to see how much of a creditable food item is in a processed food to determine the amount to serve. A CN Label does not state whether a food is free of pathogens or allergens.

When cooking from scratch, one can easily measure the amount of chicken, beef or turkey in a casserole or on a sandwich. When serving combination foods that are not made-from-scratch, it is important to know the rules about what food can be counted toward a reimbursable meal and what portion size is needed to meet the meal pattern, as well as to have the documentation on file. Child Nutrition (CN) Labels and Product Formulation Statements (PFS) provide the details to show the foods that count as a meat/meat alternate component of CACFP meal patterns and the serving size needed to count for each component listed.

## Here Are Some Resources to Obtain the CN Label or PFS:

- https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/labeling/usdausdc-authorized-labels-and-manufacturers
- https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/cnl-manufacturerssep.pdf
- https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/cnl-verificationreportsep.pdf

# Child Nutrition (CN) Labels

After reviewing the course content, click HERE to take the online test.
(or you can type this address into your browser: **https://forms.gle/hF1nNNZbazYT2BJC8**)

Read and complete each question carefully to ensure an accurate certificate.

Thank you for choosing us for your training needs

Wildwood CACFP

...for those who care for children

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