

BERKELEY FOOD INSTITUTE
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June 25, 2015

Ms. Marie Latulippe
Senior Program Officer
The National Academies
Institute of Medicine
Food and Nutrition Board
500 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Review of WIC Food Packages

Dear Ms. Latulippe:

As the Committee reviews the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food packages, we are writing to provide information from the Berkeley Food Institute (BFI), which is a partnership between the UC Berkeley schools of Law, Public Policy, Natural Resources, Public Health and Journalism. Key to BFI's mission is making the research of our over 105 affiliated faculty available as a resource to policymakers and the general public. We do not represent the official position of the University of California. We envision a world in which nutritious, affordable food is available to all. To these ends, we encourage the Committee to consider:

Expand options for the increasing number of diverse populations through culturally acceptable foods and expand substitutions for special dietary concerns to include food allergies and intolerances.

WIC participants are culturally diverse which is indicated by the fact that California WIC has developed outreach materials in many languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Hmong, Korean, Armenian and more. WIC nutritionists recognize the need to offer a supplemental food package with regionally or locally available and culturally familiar foods that meet nutritional needs and request IOM's assistance in identifying such foods. The prevalence of reported food allergy in children has increased substantially since 1997. By expanding available substitutions, the WIC food package can better meet the nutritional needs of participants with special dietary concerns including celiac disease and food intolerance.

Continue to allow inclusion of organic foods as a State option.

We support continued state flexibility around the selection of organic alternatives in WIC food items where feasible and affordable within the overall cost constraints of WIC food funding. While the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has permitted States the discretion to decide whether or not to allow organic foods on their approved food list, many states currently include explicit prohibitions on access to organic foods for WIC participants. Multiple studies, including research by our affiliated faculty Dr. Brenda Eskenazi at the Center for Environmental Research & Children's Health, have found that brain and nervous system harms to children are linked to certain organophosphate pesticides.¹

¹ Eskenazi, B., K. Huen, A. Marks, K.G. Harley, A. Bradman, D.B. Barr, et al. "PON1 and Neurodevelopment in Children from the CHAMACOS Study Exposed to Organophosphate Pesticides in Utero." *Environ Health Perspect.* Aug 2010 118: 1775-1781.

More research is needed, yet there is growing awareness by consumers of the health risks of pesticide exposure and the desire to avoid that exposure through the consumption of certain organic foods. In a 2009 literature review of studies on organic consumers, the USDA found there was not a strong correlation between consumer interest in organic foods and race, number of children in the household, and family income.² Americans are buying organic food mostly in conventional retailers, and fruits, vegetables, and dairy products (all essential to the WIC food package) are the most popular and widely available organic products. Where the cost is comparable, we support WIC participants having the same access to high-quality organic products as every other American.

We thank you for your consideration of these issues, and Berkeley Food Institute is happy to serve as a resource if further questions arise.

Sincerely,

Nina F. Ichikawa
Policy Director
Berkeley Food Institute

² Dimitri, Carolyn and Lydia Oberholtzer. Marketing U.S. Organic Foods: Recent Trends From Farms to Consumers. Economic information bulletin: no 58. United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. Sept 2009.