**UPDATE FROM USDA FOODS ADVISORY GROUP**

**RECAP OF OUR WORK: September 2022- April 2023**

Earlier this school year School Nutrition leaders representing SNA Vermont, FDA, The Abbey Group, and AOE-CN created a working group to discuss the challenges and opportunities surrounding the USDA Foods ordering process in Vermont. Our intent was to create an advisory group to support AOE-CN in decision making and planning. We began by gathering information from Cheryl Rogers at AOE-CN to better understand the system and the unique challenges in Vermont. It was clear that a primary challenge, attributable to the small scale of Vermont schools, is filling trucks with up to 900-1000 cases. We worked with Vermont SFAs through an extensive survey process to potentially reduce the number of foods ordered through the USDA Food Catalog and increase the opportunity to fill trucks. We had a very high response rate to our survey with clear indicators of where cuts could be made.

In the end we did remove items from the catalog in an effort to load trucks with items that were in greater demand in Vermont. The catalog opened in February and SFAs placed orders. Our group met with Cheryl Rogers and Conor Floyd to review orders and support decisions to meet order requests as best as possible. Finally, through a process of a) combining orders into one delivery date; b)reaching out to neighboring states to fill trucks; and c)ordering some items through a VT “state account” to be offered later as bonuses, only two items were cut entirely because of low volume.

Though Vermont still faces challenges related to filling trucks sufficiently to get USDA products to schools, our group feels the process this year was collaborative and supportive of the complex work that AOE-CN staff put in to manage USDA Foods for our schools. We also hope that we have shed light on the USDA Foods program through information sharing so that our schools have a better understanding of how the system works. Going forward we hope to continue our work with AOE-CN and with SFAs to provide more education, collaboration, and continue to improve how Vermont schools access and use resources through USDA.

**Infographic: What’s Next After I place the USDA order**

An infographic designed to help everyone understand what the **next step is in the process** after all orders have been placed is available to view at <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1IsKLgkcmPULiirwNmNBojaYGikIxC9L7>

You are invited to take a look so you will better understand if items that were ordered have been canceled, increased, decreased or changed to a different date. **It is important to check your USDA Requisition Status Report in WBSCM regularly to keep up with changes in the next few months.** This is really the best way to know what you can plan on for menus in September.

**USDA Food Sharing Opportunity**

Our USDA Advisory Group would like to further assist individual schools/SFAs who may want to share any USDA Foods products they have in **surplus** this year that they do not want to keep. We know that good inventory management is sound practice and this may be an opportunity to end the school year without a large surplus.

We created a simple **USDA Food Sharing Spreadsheet** (attached) for schools to list what they have to share and others to indicate if they want some of those products.

This spreadsheet is NOT BEING MANAGED by anyone. It is a **COMMUNICATION TOOL** designed to connect schools that have extra products to schools that can use the products. If you choose to fill out this form, you must include all contact information so you can make necessary connections and arrangements for product transfer.

***You will need to email Cheryl Rogers, Cheryl.rogers@vermont.gov, to let her know that you would like to make a transfer. She will then transfer the cases in WBSCM, and if the cases are still in the warehouse, notify PFG to also make the transfer in the TRACS system. She may be able to answer questions about the process, but AOE is not managing this effort in any way.***

If you have questions about the Sharing Opportunity Spreadsheet or anything about the work of the USDA Food Advisory Group you may also contact Kathy Alexander at Kathy.alexander@mausd.org.