

# Federal Nutrition Standards

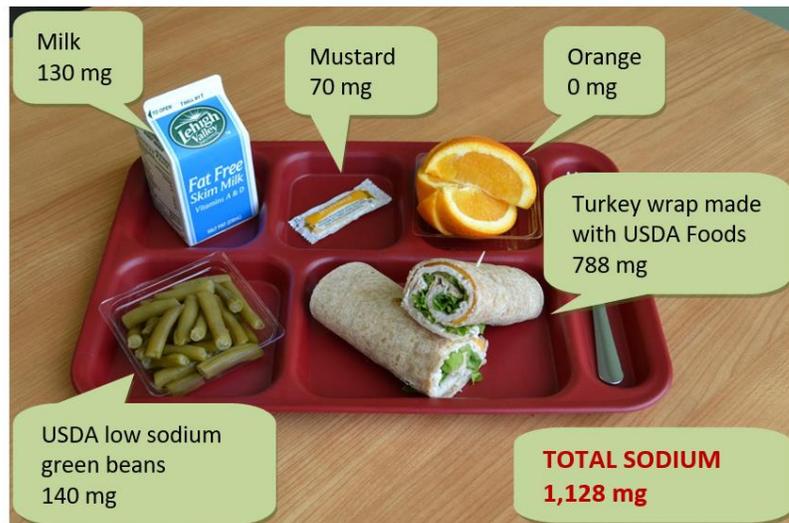
## *Provide Schools Practical Flexibility for Healthy Menu Planning*

### Background:

SNA supports maintaining robust federal nutrition standards to ensure all students receive healthy, well-balanced meals at school. However, some overly prescriptive rules have resulted in unintended consequences, including reduced student lunch participation, higher costs and food waste.

USDA is modifying federal nutrition regulations to help school menu planners manage these challenges and prepare nutritious meals that appeal to diverse student tastes. An interim final rule on school meal program flexibility was published in November; the final rule will be published in fall 2018. Congress should monitor the rulemaking process. The final rule should:

**This healthy lunch exceeds Target 2 sodium limits.**



### Maintain the Target 1 sodium levels and eliminate future targets:

Schools made significant sodium reductions to meet Target 1, effective July 2014. The Institute of Medicine warned that **“reducing the sodium content of school meals as specified and in a way that is well accepted by students will present major challenges and may not be possible.”** (*School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children, 2010*)

A recent School Nutrition Association (SNA) [survey](#) found that 92% of responding school districts are concerned about the availability of foods that will meet future sodium limits and are well accepted by students. Naturally occurring sodium present in meat, milk and other low-fat dairy foods will force schools to take nutritious choices off the menu, including many soups, entrée salads and low-fat deli sandwiches.

The [Government Accountability Office](#) warned that forthcoming limits on sodium would remain problematic with cost and product availability making sodium targets difficult for many schools to implement.

## **Restore the initial requirement that at least half of grains offered with school meals be whole grain rich:**

The current mandate that *all* grains must be whole grain rich has increased waste and costs, while contributing to the decline in student lunch participation. A recent SNA [survey](#) found that despite widespread efforts to increase student acceptance of whole grain foods, 65% of responding school nutrition directors reported continued challenges with the current whole grain mandates. A majority of school meal programs struggle with students' regional and cultural preferences for specific refined grains. Schools should be permitted to serve white rice, pasta, grits or tortillas on occasion, just like most families do.

USDA established a whole grain waiver allowing struggling schools to serve select foods that do not meet the standard, but the waiver process is inconsistent across states. Several states do not readily offer the waiver to struggling schools, or have made the application process so cumbersome that schools overwhelmed by administrative duties are discouraged from applying. Overly burdensome mandates, including required documentation that some schools have no means to collect, have severely limited the availability of this much-needed regulatory relief. In addition, the waiver process consumes limited State Agency resources that would be better spent providing technical assistance to school districts. ***The most effective solution is to restore the 2012 requirement that at least half of grains offered with school meals be whole grain rich.***



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