

D. AVAILABLE COMMODITIES:

Schools are eligible for a certain dollar level of commodity, referred to as Planned Assistance Level (PAL), based on the number of reimbursable lunches served during the prior year (July 1 through June 30) times the mandated rate of assistance established by Congress. Commodities that are offered to SFAs against the dollar amount of their PAL are considered entitlement foods. Other foods offered to SFAs that do not reduce the PAL are considered bonus commodities. All foods are offered or made available on a "use without waste" basis.

Entitlement and Bonus foods are divided into two groups, Group A and B. Group A Foods include fruits, vegetables, meats, and poultry. These are purchased through various divisions of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to remove surplus farm products and to meet the nutritional needs of the program recipients. Purchases are made seasonally rather than continuously. Occasionally, "Group A" items are offered as a bonus.

Group B foods include grains, oil, dairy and peanut products. These foods are purchased under price support authority by the Consolidated Farm Service Agency (CFSA) and are available on a year-round basis.

The commodities that USDA donates may vary from time to time depending on what food products are available. Because of nutritional needs of participants in programs such as the NSLP, USDA purchases and makes available specific types of commodities.

Commodities generally available for the NSLP include frozen and canned meats and poultry; canned, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, juices, dairy products, cereals and grains, vegetable oil, shortening, and peanut products.

USDA has been increasing the types of commodities available for donation. Today more than 100 different commodities are donated for distribution to the various food assistance programs.

All of the commodities that USDA purchases must be certified by the USDA's inspection services to assure they meet established specifications. Only high grades of meats, fruits and vegetables are accepted. Specifications for the quality of the commodities purchased are constantly updated. Recently revised specifications have reduced the fat, sugar, and salt contents of food purchased. For example, USDA is buying unsalted peanuts, canned meats with less salt, ground beef, cheddar, and mozzarella cheese with a lower fat content, and fruits in light syrup or juices. Updated specifications also improve the cooking quality of the commodities purchased.