



## National Food Solution

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### 1. How are the recommended foods selected to be in the weekly packs?

Blessings in a Backpack's overall objective is to provide the best nutrition and "brain food" possible for the dollars spent on food. With input from our nutrition advisors, we look to maximize proteins, fibers and nutrients while minimizing sugars. Kid-friendly foods are selected—individual servings that a child can prepare for themselves without a can opener, microwave or stove. All at an economical price point.

#### 2. Why do meals feature items like Kellogg's Froot Loops and Apple Jacks? I thought those are high in sugar?

By working with a national food distributor which serves a large number of school food programs, Blessings has access to foods that aren't available in retail grocery stores. Most of the foods offered are USDA approved for use in school nutrition programs. As a result, the products typically are low sugar and higher nutrient version of the products the kids know and love from the grocery store. Also, we feature varieties of cereals that are tasty when eaten out of the box: we can't assume the kids we serve have access to milk at home. (Let's avoid dry Raisin Bran.)

#### 3. Can I start using the new food solutions anytime during the school year?

Yes, we will add new programs and continue to convert existing programs to the new solutions over the course of the year.

Prepackaged meals. Generally, lead time will be no longer than three weeks to get the first order delivered.

Line items menu. Generally, lead time will be no longer than four weeks to get the first order delivered.

#### **4. Are delivery charges extra?**

Sysco pricing, whether prepackaged meals or line items, includes delivery. Pricing will vary based on the available delivery method in your area and may be slightly higher west of the Rockies. Additional information on pricing Tiers is available in the PC Toolkit or can be confirmed by your Blessings Program Manager.

#### **5. Will Sysco deliver to a residential address?**

Sysco trucks will not deliver to residential addresses. (You and your neighbors probably wouldn't want a big Sysco delivery truck on your street, anyway.) You can select an alternative delivery point besides the school where the program is offered, if needed.

Tier 3 prepackaged meals, delivered by UPS or FedEx, may be shipped to a residential address. (See the PC Toolkit or talk to your Program Manager for more details.)

#### **6. I already work with my local Sysco Rep. Can I continue to do so?**

If you have a good working relationship, you may continue to work with your rep. Sysco Operating Companies ("OpCos") already working with Blessings in a Backpack have been notified of the new program and have ready access to contracts and pricing.

If you have been challenged in working with the local Sysco OpCo in the past, please notify your Blessings Program Manager so appropriate outreach can be made to make sure the local OpCo is aware of the new Sysco program with Blessings in a Backpack.

If you are switching from line item to prepackaged meals, please work with your Blessings Program Manager so we can coordinate availability of products.

**7. I saw that line item orders require 400 students. If we order for two weeks at a time, can we use that option?**

Yes, absolutely. If you feed 100 kids and can take a monthly delivery that works too. Menu items are shelf-stable with expiration dates of six months or more so there shouldn't be concerns about distributing expired food. Just make sure you have appropriate storage space.

Guidance from the USDA includes “store canned foods and other shelf stable products in a cool, dry place. Never put them above or beside the stove, under the sink, in a damp garage or basement, or any place exposed to high or low temperature extremes. Temperatures below 85°F are best. Check your [storage space] every few weeks and use canned goods you have had on hand for awhile. Don't use bulging, rusted, leaking, or deeply dented cans.” [USDA](#)

**8. What if my program isn't large enough to meet the minimum Sysco Delivery requirements but I am interested in line item products?**

Programs that can't meet the minimum case requirements for delivery may have the option of Will Call pickup at the local Sysco OpCo. You may purchase select items (or approved substitutes) from the line item menu, subject to local availability. Please contact your Blessings in a Backpack Program Manager for further details and allow us to coordinate outreach to local Sysco OpCo reps.

**9. The local grocer we've worked with for years has been good to us. What do I tell them? Is there a way I can use new solutions and continue to work with my local grocer?**

We understand that many programs have good relationships with their local grocers. After all, in the early days of the Blessings in a Backpack program, that's how we encouraged our program volunteers to obtain food. Here are some ways you can try the new food solutions this year while keeping your local grocer involved.

- Whether you use the line item menu or a prepackaged meals, if your funding allows, will your grocer donate or economically provide an item such as fresh fruit to add to the weekly distribution?
- For school breaks, such as holiday vacations and Spring breaks, can the grocer supply extra food to supplement the usual weekly distribution?
- For the current school semester, can you rotate the new solution with what you're used to getting from the grocer? (Keep in mind, products with the best nutritional value, developed specifically for the school feeding programs, likely won't be available at your local grocers.)
- Mini kits, with high protein, individual size servings not available in grocery stores, expected to be available in October 2018, can be combined with items from your grocer.

Keep in mind, your local grocer is probably not making a lot of money from your program. Rather, they believe in the cause. So, if they understand you are making changes to provide the best nutrition options possible for the kids, they will likely understand. Also, they will understand if you are able to have products delivered to the local school, making food acquisition easier for you to offer the Blessings in a Backpack program.

#### **10. What about food safety and allergens? My school requires allergen reports.**

An advantage of using the national distribution solution is that every product is tracked from its source to its distribution to the children. In the event of a recall issue, for example, there will be a ready trail of what product was distributed where. For all our solutions, allergen reports will be available to distribute to your local schools.

**11. Will the prepackaged solutions allow substitutions for allergy concerns?**

Our recommended menus do not contain peanuts, the most prevalent allergy concern. At this time, accommodations for other allergies will likely require separate shopping as has been the practice of many Program Coordinators in the past. As participation in our solutions reaches critical mass, we will have more flexibility in the future to offer alternative menus to accommodate demographic, religious and allergen preferences.

**12. Why doesn't Blessings just get food donated?**

Typically, donated food comes from manufacturers' excess inventory and may be approaching the expiration date. In order to ensure consistent availability of product, purchasing food is the most reliable approach. Note, however, that we receive "preferred" pricing from some food manufacturers such as Kellogg's and Conagra because they believe in the Blessing in a Backpack program. That means we get even better pricing than what the standard distributor pricing would be. The more we can consolidate our purchasing, the more likely we can continue to improve pricing in the future.