The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a food and nutrition program benefiting infants, children under age 5 and pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women with low to moderate incomes. The National WIC Program was established on September 26, 1972, following a nutrition survey that found anemia (low levels of iron in the blood) and inadequate growth to be common among American children.

This guide is intended for use by grocery store personnel who have a current vendor agreement with the WIC Program using WIC EBT. The information is useful primarily for grocery store personnel as it deals with contracting procedures, payment systems, and monitoring of WIC operations.

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(1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture

    Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

    1400 Independence Avenue, SW

    Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Introduction to WIC

**WIC (Women, Infants, & Children)**
A federally funded program that offers nutrition assistance to pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum women, dads and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.

**Who is eligible and who can apply?**
- Pregnant women
- Women who are breastfeeding babies under 1 year of age
- Women who have had babies in the past six months
- Parents, guardians, adoptive and foster parents of infants and children under the age of 5 can apply for their children
WIC Vendors are grocers and pharmacies that have an active vendor agreement with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission’s WIC program.

Authorized vendors play an important role in helping to improve the health of women, infants and children in Texas. Vendors act as the final service step in the WIC process. Since the WIC foods are designed to promote the healthy growth and development of children, the vendor’s role in the program is a vital one. The vendors are actually the providers of the nutritious foods the WIC recipients have been prescribed.

The WIC vendor may also find the WIC program makes a substantial contribution to their over all store sales. Most WIC customers will shop for all their grocery needs, not just their WIC items, when they use their WIC Smart Cards.
Vendor Training

All established WIC vendors are required to take online training at least once every State Fiscal year. State fiscal year runs from October of the current year through September of the following year. (Example 10/01/17—09/30/18, State Fiscal Year)

New vendors or vendors renewing their contracts must take online contemporaneous (live) training before their Vendor Agreement is executed. The Texas WIC Program has made the training online to encourage as many people as possible to take the training. Best practice is to incorporate the Texas WIC training in your new hire onboarding process.

View online vendor trainings at:

https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/wic-providers/wic-training
WIC Benefits

What do WIC clients receive?
- Supplemental Foods
- Nutrition/Health Education
- Healthcare Service Referrals

WIC clients receive WIC benefits for nutritious foods. These benefits are for specific types and quantities of foods. WIC clients also receive nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to other primary health care programs.

Clients have individual nutritional needs so you may see different food items and quantities authorized. The State Agency (SA) sends updates to each vendor’s point of contact every year a with a list of new WIC approved foods. Vendors can also order training materials (ex: Texas WIC Approved Foods brochure) through https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/wic-providers/wic-vendor-management-operations-unit. The brochures are beneficial to both WIC clients and store because they provide pictures as well as descriptions of WIC Approved Foods.

The WIC EBT Smart Card

The WIC clinic loads the EBT chip card with the food benefits. Generally, a WIC family has 3 months of benefits on one card. In some cases, a customer may have more than one WIC Smart Card. For example, a foster parent will have a smart card for each foster child.
WIC Approved Foods

- Dairy and Eggs
- Fruits and Vegetables
- Juice
- Whole Grains
- Beans and Peanut Butter
- Breakfast Cereal
- Canned Fish
- Baby Foods

All Texas WIC vendors must be in compliance with our Minimum Stocking Requirements of all WIC approved foods.

Per policy WV: 10.0, all Texas WIC vendors must maintain Minimum Stocking Requirements at all times.

For more information on Minimum Stocking Requirements visit our training catalog and view the training New Vendor Training.
The WIC Approved Foods Shopping Guide helps find which brands of foods are approved for purchase. The guide helps WIC shoppers pick appropriate brands and sizes. We recommend keeping a current copy of the shopping guide at each register. The Texas WIC Approved Shopping Guide is published each year, so be sure to have the most current copy at your registers. If you need to order shopping guides for your store, you can do so by calling 1-800-252-9629 or submit your request to WICVendorInfo@hhsc.state.tx.us

To view the most current Approved Foods list, visit our WIC Vendor Operations website at: https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/wic-providers/wic-foods-food-packages/wic-approved-foods.

Call to order the current Texas WIC materials: 1-800-252-9629
Or submit orders to: WICVendorInfo@hhsc.state.tx.us
WIC Approved Foods

In the current WIC Approved Foods Shopping Guides, the WIC approved foods are sorted into 3 different categories:

- **Choose Any Brand**
- **Choose These Brands**
- **Look for the Pink WIC Sticker**

**How to Use Your Texas WIC Shopping Guide**

Make shopping for WIC Approved foods easy. Go through this guide before you go to the store.

When you see:

- **Choose Any Brand**: Choose any brand of this food.
- **Choose These Brands**: Choose food from one of the brands listed in this guide.
- **Look for the Pink WIC Sticker**: Choose brands tagged with the pink WIC Approved Item sticker. These brands may be different at each store. Not all stores will carry every WIC Approved food item in this guide.

**NOT WIC APPROVED**: Foods listed here are not WIC Approved.

**Special Food Package Only (pages 11-12)**: Your WIC staff will explain the Special Food Packages for:

- Fully Breastfeeding Twins, Triplets or More
- Lactose-Free Milk, Soy Milk and Tofu, Evaporated Milk or Powdered Milk
- No Refrigeration
- Kosher Milk and Cheese
Least Expensive Brands

The first food category is the Least Expensive Brands (LEB). WIC requires vendors to declare, label and sell their LEBs for each type and size of WIC authorized food items listed below. For more information on LEBs, refer to WIC Vendor policy WV: 02.0.

- Milk: Gallon, Half Gallon, and Quart. Buttermilk: Half Gallon only
- Juice: Fluid, Frozen & Refrigerated
- Cheese: One or Two pound, block, sliced and string
- Dried Beans: dark red kidney beans, great northern beans, navy beans, light red kidney beans, pinto beans, green-split peas and lentils

Vendors complete the Least Expensive Brand Declaration form at the time of contracting. The form lists the product brand name and the Universal Product Code (UPC) for each product declared. Stores are required to sell their declared LEB food items at least 85% of the time when redeeming WIC EBT.

Cashiers need to continue to enforce the LEB policy as your EBT system may allow all WIC authorized brands carried by the store to be purchased, instead of just the declared LEB. If the store does not enforce the LEB policy, it could result in a monitor finding and store disqualification. Remember these items must be sold at least 85% of the time.

If a store runs out of a declared LEB item, the next approved LEB item available on the shelf should be sold at or below the same price of the declared LEB. The client should not be denied a purchase because the store ran out of the declared LEB item.

It is highly recommended that a current list of the store’s declared LEB items be kept at each register for cashier reference as well as the most current WIC Approved Foods Brochure.

**Note:** In the event a store needs to change an LEB item, the store can submit a change request to the State Agency at any time. The LEB Declaration form is located at:

https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/wic-providers/vendor-management-operations-unit/wic-least-expensive-brand
WIC Approved Foods

The second food category found in the shopping guide allows you to “Choose ANY Brand” of WIC foods. These are WIC approved items that are NOT specific to a brand. Clients may select ANY brand that fits the size, weight, count, and packaging requirements. This includes: Eggs, Peanut Butter, Tuna, Fresh/Frozen Fruits & Vegetables, Baby Foods.

Since these items are not required by the state to be labeled, it’s extremely important that you refer to the Shopping Guide when determining if an item should be WIC Approved or not.

Choose Any Brand

- Eggs
- Peanut Butter
- Canned Tuna and Salmon
- Fresh/Frozen Fruits & Vegetables
- Baby Foods
- Canned Beans
The third category is “Choose These Brands”. These are WIC approved items that are specific to a brand based on the size and weight of the item. Choose these Brands include: Yogurt, Oatmeal, Pasta, Canned Beans, and Breakfast Cereal.

Since these items are not required by the state to be labeled, it’s extremely important that you refer to the Shopping Guide when determining if an item should be WIC Approved or not.

Choose These Brands

- Breakfast Cereal
- Yogurt
- Oatmeal
- Baby Cereal
- Pasta
WIC Special Food Packages

In addition to the standard food packages issued, the following are additional size/types of foods issued by WIC. None of these foods are Least Expensive Brands (LEB).

Do Not label these foods with the pink WIC Approved Item shelf tags. We also recommend that stores not label these with the Texas WIC Logo stickers. This only causes confusion in your store. Below are examples of some of our special food packages. These examples do not show all of the items allowed on these packages.

### Infant Formula

The Texas WIC Program have competitive bids to determine who will be the manufacturer(s) of WIC Approved contract infant formula. These formulas are the primary authorized formulas for the WIC Program. All other formulas require a doctor’s prescription.

If your store elects to carry infant formula, you are required to have 9 cans of powder formula as well as 7 cans of concentrate formula in stock at all times to satisfy your minimum formula stocking requirements.
When it comes to ordering formula, vendors must select from an approved list of manufacturers. The State Agency provides the list of approved manufacturers on the web at:


This list is updated and posted on the website October 1st and is effective through September 30th of each year.

For more information on infant formula, please visit our training catalog and view the training New Vendor Training. Policy is also available as a resource on our website.

Please see WIC policy WV:10.0 for additional information on infant formula.
Returns and Exchanges

Formula Exchanges

If a client requests a different formula other than the brand loaded on the card, please refer them to the local WIC clinic. The clinic will take the old formula off the card and load the new one.

Returns and Exchanges

Vendors may not provide refunds or permit exchanges for authorized WIC foods except for exchanges of an identical WIC foods when the original WIC food is defective, spoiled, or has exceeded its “sell by” or “best if used by”, or other date limiting the sale or use of the food item. An identical authorized WIC food means the exact brand and size as the original WIC food obtained and returned by the clients.
What to do if an item will not scan?

Step 1. The product may not be approved. Check the WIC Approved Foods Shopping guide to determine if the item is approved by WIC.

Step 2. The client may not have the benefits left for the purchase. Check client’s WIC balance slip (beginning balance slip) to see if the card has the benefits remaining for the purchase.

Step 3. If you have checked the first two steps and it appears that the item should in fact scan as WIC Approved, email the State WIC office to have the item added to the Authorized Products List (APL).

The email must include a clear picture of the label, a clear picture of the UPC, and a clear picture of the ingredients found in the item.

- If the item is approved, an email will be sent to your store confirming that the item has been entered onto the APL and there will be a three day deferment before the item will scan as WIC approved.

Card Wipe

When **ALL** benefits have been removed from a WIC customer’s EBT card due to a system glitch or early removal.

- *Refer customer back to the clinic to have benefits reloaded to card.*

Vs.

Card Decrement

When an **Extra** food item has been removed from a WIC customer’s EBT card due to double scanning or system glitch.

- Customer must leave the store with ALL items decremented from the EBT card.
Incentive Items

Per Federal WIC regulations, WIC-authorized vendors must offer WIC customers the same courtesies that are offered to non-WIC customers and vice versa. WIC authorized vendors may not treat WIC customers differently from non-WIC customers by excluding them from in-store promotions.

WIC authorized vendors cannot offer incentive items to WIC customers that are not offered to non-WIC customers. Offering incentive items solely to WIC clients is prohibited by Federal WIC regulations.

**Coupons, Store Specials & Loyalty Card Discounts**

**WIC Vendors should:**
- Accept coupons on WIC allowable items
- Allow store specials on WIC-allowable items
  - Buy one, get one (BOGO)
  - Free ounces added to food item by manufacturer (bonus size items)
  - Transaction discounts
- Provide loyalty card discounts on WIC-allowable items, if applicable

Please see WIC policy WV: 09.0 on the requirements for incentive items.
Labeling Guidelines

**LEB Labeling**
WIC policy requires that vendors label the declared Least Expensive Brand (LEB) items on store shelves with pink “WIC Approved Item” shelf tags available from the State Agency. If the store does not label these items properly, it could result in a monitoring finding. Stores may request approval from the State Agency to use WIC Approved Item labels which they design and produce.

**Non-LEB Labeling**
Although WIC policy requires stores to label their declared LEB items, stores do not have to label cereals, oatmeal, canned beans, peanut butter, eggs, tofu, soy milk, lactose-free milk, infant formula, infant cereal, infant fruits & vegetable, infant meats, tuna, pink salmon and frozen or fresh fruits & vegetables.

If a store chooses to use the pink “WIC Approved Item” label on WIC-allowable items other than the declared LEB items, then all WIC-allowable items in the category must be labeled; not just the store brands. For example, if a store uses the pink label on the house brand of peanut butter, then the store must also label all authorized brands of peanut butter that are within the WIC Not to Exceed (NTE) amount on the APL.

The only exception to this is the labeling of infant formula. If a vendor chooses to label the formula, only label the current contract brands of formula in powder and concentrate.

**Texas WIC logo for non-LEB items**
The official Texas WIC logo graphic can be used to label non-LEB items. This allows the vendor to identify other WIC items (excluding LEB) without the penalty associated with LEB labeling. If a vendor chooses to use the Texas WIC logo, they are responsible for printing their own. The Texas WIC Logo label cannot be used in place of the pink label on LEB items or on a food item which has not been approved by the WIC Program.

**Fillable Labels**
Another option is the fillable "WIC Approved Item" and “Texas WIC Smart Choices Healthy Families” labels which include spaces for entering the size, brand and type of items being labeled.

The logo and fillable labels should be printed in color and are available for download on WIC’s webpage at:

1. The WIC client receives a WIC Smart Card loaded with up to 3 months of food benefits from the WIC clinic. The “smart” electronic chip on the card stores the food benefits in its memory.

2. The WIC customer shops with the WIC Smart Card to redeem their benefits. The store’s Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system accesses only the current month’s benefits on the card and processes the transaction.

3. The store’s EBT system then sends an electronic claim of all transactions redeemed that day to the State Agency for claims processing and downloads from the State the latest Authorized Product List (APL), Hot Card List (HCL) and Auto Reconciliation File (ARF) containing processed claim information.

4. The State processes the claim, posts the “processed” claim, and submits payment via direct deposit to the vendor’s bank account.

**WIC EBT Receipts**

WIC requires that grocers provide the WIC customers with a three-part receipt of each WIC transaction:

**Part 1:** *Beginning WIC Food Balance receipt*. This receipt shows the benefit balance the customer currently has on the card.

**Part 2:** *WIC Foods Purchased Receipt*. This receipt shows the allowable items just received during this transaction. **Note:** Cashiers must have WIC customers review paper receipt or checkout display screen before the customer accepts the transaction. Once the customer presses the “accept” or yes button, **no changes can be made.** However, prior to pressing the “accept” or yes button, **changes can be made.**

**Part 3:** *Ending Balance Receipt*. This receipt shows the final balance after the purchase is deducted. The system your store uses may produce receipts that look different; however, they must contain the same information described above.
EBT System Claims Process

After a WIC sale is completed, the sale is automatically stored ("bundled") in a claim file by the store’s cash register system and submitted to the State for payment electronically. The claim file is normally submitted at a pre-determined time of day by the store’s cash register system to the State’s claims server. The State’s claims server performs certain edits and verifications on the claim file to ensure its validity and integrity.

Simultaneously, while the vendor’s claim is submitted to the State, the vendor’s system also downloads the current APL and the Hot Card List (HCL) for EBT cards reported as lost or stolen. The Auto-Reconciliation File ("ARF"), which tells the vendor what they will be paid for the claim submitted the day before is also downloaded. Following the edits/verifications, the State’s server forwards payment directly to the vendor’s bank account through the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts’ payment system. The next time the same vendor’s system connects to the State, the State downloads an ARF that advises the vendor of the specific amount of the claim paid, if there was any part of the claim not paid, and/or the reason for any non-payment.

**These claims transactions are all handled electronically without human intervention.**

How often a vendor is paid depends on how often a vendor submits a claim; typically one claim is submitted per day. Final payment to the vendor is usually completed within 3-5 days.
Hot Card List (HCL) & Lost Cards

The Hot Card List is an electronic file that lists WIC Smart Cards that have been reported lost or stolen. The State requires the store to download an updated HCL every 48 hours. However, the State recommends vendors check the HCL file date every day to ensure that it is not older than 48 hours.

What Happens if a Customer Tries to Use a Hot Card?

If a customer tries to use a WIC Smart Card found on the current HCL, he/she will receive the system message “Card Error—Return to Clinic”. The system also locks the card if it is on the HCL and the customer will not be able to use it anywhere else.

Please refer the customer to the local WIC clinic. The same message appears if the card is damaged; the cashier will not know the reason for the card problem and should avoid any confrontation in the lane with the customer.

What Happens if the Store Accepts a Hot Card?

As long as the store has downloaded the HCL within the last 48 hours, the WIC State Office will honor and pay hot card transactions. However, if a store’s Hot Card List is over 48 hours old, the store is liable for any hot card transactions accepted. The WIC State Office will not pay for these transactions and there is no appeal process for this issue.

WIC Smart Cards Found in the Store (Returning Lost Cards)

If a customer leaves their WIC EBT Smart card in your store:

1. Hold the lost card for 24 hours. If the customer does not return within 24 hours, drop the card in any U.S. mailbox for return to the State. You do not need a stamp or envelope. Please hold the cards for at least 24 hours and do not return them to the WIC clinics.

2. If the customer returns to claim the lost card, insert the card into the terminal and have the customer enter their PIN number. If the system accepts the PIN number and generates a beginning balance receipt, you may return the card to the customer.
Vendor Monitoring

On-Site Vendor Evaluation

This type of evaluation is performed as part of the initial application process and your store is given two attempts to pass. This evaluation is performed by the Local Agency (LA) WIC staff in your area or by State Agency (SA) staff. This evaluation will determine if your store will be allowed to accept WIC at that specific location. There are specific criteria that is looked for when the On-Site Vendor Evaluation is conducted. Minimum stocking requirements, expired foods, labeling and pricing are all checked. If the evaluator identifies one or multiple issues while performing the evaluation, then an F (finding) or O (observation) will be placed in the corresponding section. It is encouraged that a store manager accompany the evaluator during the evaluation. Please note, the reviewer will be checking the prices of some WIC items by using a WIC training card; make sure your staff know how to place the register in training mode. For more information, refer to the WIC Vendor Monitoring Guide and Policy Number WV:01.0, Section IV.

In-Store Review

In-Store Reviews take place after your On-Site Evaluation. If you are a brand new account, you can expect to have your first store review at least six months after passing your On-Site Evaluation. This type of evaluation is performed by the Office of Inspector General, Monitoring Oversight Group or your LA clinic staff. Store management does not have to participate in the review; however, it is encouraged to have a staff member accompany the auditor so there are no surprises when the review is complete. The auditor will ask the manager to sign off on the report. For more information, refer to the WIC Vendor Monitoring Guide and Policy Number WV:01.0, Section II.
Vendor Monitoring

Compliance Buy

A covert, in-store investigation by one or more State Agency (SA) representatives posing as WIC clients or the parent/guardian/proxy of WIC clients using WIC EBT food benefits to test the vendor’s compliance with the Vendor Agreement, program policies and/or rules. The SA representative does not reveal to store personnel that he/she is a SA representative during the visit. For more information, refer to the WIC Vendor Monitoring Guide and Policy Number WV:01.0, Section V.

Invoice Audit

The State Agency (SA) Representative may request up to 12 months’ purchase invoices from a vendor for analysis to determine that all claims submitted by the vendor are supported by invoices. For more information, refer to the WIC Vendor Monitoring Guide and Policy Number WV:01.0, Section IV.

Note: The WIC program shares information with SNAP (formally known as food stamps)
State Contact Information

Inquiries and Material Request:
WICVendorInfo@hhsc.state.tx.us
Or

For WIC Training:
https://hhs.texas.gov/doing-business-hhs/provider-portals/wic-providers/wic-training

Contract Support: WICVendorRelations@hhsc.state.tx.us
Training Support: WICVendorInfo@hhsc.state.tx.us
LEB Support: WICLEB@hhsc.state.tx.us
EBT Support: WICEBTSupport@hhsc.state.tx.us

Or call us at 1-800-252-9629