Hidden Vs Visible Vegetables

Vegetables are a required component for reimbursable meals in Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs). Learn more about the art of serving vegetables in various forms, and how to credit them in CNPs!

What is a "Hidden Vegetable"?

Hidden vegetables are mechanically altered to blend seamlessly into a dish, masking their appearance and texture. They are usually effective in overcoming picky eating habits and boosting nutrient density by reducing friction or hesitiation with eating visible vegetables.

Hidden

- Boosts the vitamin, mineral, and fiber content of foods like mac and cheese or pasta sauce.
- Helpful for those with sensory processing sensitivities.
- Reduces power struggles and negotiation tactics often seen with picky eaters.
- Blending, grating, or pureeing vegetables into various foods can be simple!

VS

Visible

- Normalizes presence of vegetables on the tray, making them a standard part of a meal.
- Trains palates to appreciate different flavor profiles and textures.
- Encourages interaction with food, allowing individuals to make choices at their own pace.
- Can be consumed raw or cooked, making them customizable for all preferences!

Crediting "Hidden Vegetables"

While incorporating hidden vegetables in CNPs can be creative, there are certain restrictions, as adequate and visible amounts of vegetables must be considered in menu planning to ensure a well-balanced meal while meeting meal pattern requirements. Dishes such as carrots blended into cheese sauce or mixed into macaroni and cheese do not automatically qualify towards program requirements. To credit the blended or hidden vegetables, a dish must also include at least ⅛ cup of a visible vegetable per portion. Here are some extra strategies schools can employ to creatively incorporate creditable hidden vegetables:

Veggie Flour Pastas: Products made from one or more types of 100 percent vegetable flour(s) can count towards the vegetable requirement. For instance, a 1/2 cup of pasta made entirely from vegetable flour(s) is credited as 1/2 cup of vegetables. Pasta made from a blend of various 100 percent vegetable flours from different subgroups can also be credited, provided there is a Product Formulation Statement that specifies the exact volume of each vegetable flour per serving.

Smoothies: When added to a smoothie, pureed vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned) are credited as juice and must adhere to the regulations concerning juice frequency. Additionally, beans, peas, and lentils can contribute to the vegetable component as vegetable juice when included in a smoothie.

Pureed Vegetables: Pureed vegetables may contribute to meal pattern requirements, provided that the dish that contains the pureed food also provides an adequate amount of recognizable, creditable fruits or vegetables.

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Source: To learn more, visit USDAs *"Crediting Vegetables in the Child Nutrition Programs Tip Sheet"*