



January 15, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of School Nutrition Association's 55,000 members, I write to request prompt action to issue guidance for State Agencies wishing to grant exemptions for School Food Authorities (SFAs) struggling to meet the July 2014 whole grain mandates under the new nutrition standards for school meals.

SNA members greatly appreciate the flexibility USDA provided for SFAs struggling to acquire acceptable whole grain rich pastas. However, the availability of acceptable whole grain rich foods varies nationwide, and student acceptance of certain whole grain rich foods is often influenced by strong regional preferences. As a result, while SFAs have made tremendous progress in increasing student consumption of whole grains, many still struggle with acceptance of a variety of whole grain rich foods beyond whole grain pasta.

As you know, Section 751 of the FY 2015 Consolidated Appropriations bill ([Public Law No: 113-235](#)) calls for the creation of an exemption to the July 2014 whole grain requirements, allowing States to "establish a process for evaluating and responding, in a reasonable amount of time, to requests for an exemption."

SNA has heard from members who are eager to apply for this exemption, but whose State Agencies are awaiting guidance from USDA. We urge you to take prompt action to assist State Agencies in establishing an exemption process.

In addition, SNA strongly recommends that USDA establish a simple, standardized template for State Agencies to use in granting exemptions for SFAs. Providing a sample online form would ease burdens on State Agencies, speed the exemption process and avoid potential confusion in the application of this exemption.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your continued support for SFAs and State Agencies as they work to meet the nutritional needs of America's students.

Sincerely,

Julia Bauscher, SNS
President

Patricia Montague, CAE
Chief Executive Officer