

# Family Style Meal Service

## USDA FNS Instruction 783-9, Revision 2

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) has long been recognized for its nutritional goals of providing nutritious meals to children and helping them establish good eating habits at a young age. Family style meal service provides a further opportunity to enhance these goals by encouraging a pleasant eating environment that will support and promote mealtime as a learning experience.

Family style is a type of meal service which allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults setting the example. In A Planning Guide for Food Service in Child Care Centers (FNS-64), the chapter, "Make Mealtime a Happy Time," provides guidance for family style meal service in the CACFP. Family style meal service encourages supervising adults to set a personal example and provide educational activities that are centered around foods. This approach allows children to identify, and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus, while developing a positive attitude toward nutritious foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits.

Unlike cafeteria lines, unitized meals, and pre-set service, the family style method affords some latitude in the size of initial servings because replenishment is immediately available at each table. Even when a complete family style service is not possible or practical, it may be useful to offer a component or components in a family style manner particularly when smaller children are being served or when a new food item is being introduced. This latitude must be exercised in compliance with the following practices, at a minimum:

- 1) A sufficient amount of prepared food must be placed on each table to provide the full required portions (§ 226.20) of each of the food components for all children at the table, and to accommodate supervising adult(s) if they eat with the children.
- 2) The family style meal service allows children to make choices in selecting foods and the size of the initial servings. Children should initially be offered the full required portion of each meal component.
- 3) During the course of the meal, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each child to accept service of the full required portion for each food component of the meal pattern. For example, if a child initially refuses a food component, or initially does not accept the full required portion of a meal component, the supervising adult should offer the food component to the child again.
- 4) Institutions which use family style meal service may not claim second meals for reimbursement.

5) Meals served which follow the guidelines laid out in this Instruction are eligible for reimbursement.