

## ***Evaluation and Approval Process***

*All certification software systems approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for use in Certification of Compliance with New Meal Patterns will undergo testing and evaluation by the USDA.*

### **Certification Software Evaluation Project**

The primary purpose of the Certification Software Evaluation Project is to conduct the testing and evaluation of commercially available software systems designed to assess meal pattern requirements for certification for the additional six cents per meal reimbursement available for school meal programs. Certification software is submitted voluntarily by software developers.

The Certification Software Evaluation Project is part of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Child Nutrition Division, including the Certification Software Evaluation Coordinators (CSEC) and evaluators.

The evaluators test and evaluate the commercially available software to verify that the specifications and requirements have been met. Before software can be approved by USDA, all required functions must be incorporated and working correctly in the software. The evaluators also make recommendations for improvements.

The approval process will move most quickly for developers who incorporate the specification requirements during product development; add the test food items, recipes, and menus provided by FNS; check the software prior to submission to be sure the specifications and requirements have been met; and address suggested improvements or modifications quickly between evaluations. Evaluations may be delayed when a large number of software have been submitted at the same time.

There are two parts to the certification software evaluation; the menu worksheet and the Simplified Nutrient Assessment (SNA). Software submitted for evaluation may include one or both of these parts. The SNA part is an option for SFAs in lieu of submitting a full nutrient analysis, using USDA-approved nutrient analysis software, as part of their certification application. Using the simplified nutrient assessment is not an option for States conducting reviews.

The Simplified Nutrient Assessment is meant to be a proxy for a full nutrient analysis. The tool will provide estimated calories and saturated fat (% of calories) for milk, fruit, and vegetables. Similar to the Menu worksheet, SFAs must submit a Simplified Nutrient Assessment for each menu type or a full nutrient analysis to the State agency for certification for the additional six cents.

## Support materials

Support materials for certification systems, including the specifications document, are provided on the FNS Nutrition Standards for School Meals website.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/Legislation/nutritionstandards.htm>

The CSEC is available to answer questions and address concerns as the software developer moves through the evaluation process.

It is required that before submitting a program for evaluation and approval, software developers evaluate their software using the checklist evaluation document.

## Checklist evaluation

When the software developer is ready to submit their software, the developer first completes the preliminary checklist evaluation using the checklist evaluation document and sample test menu available from the FNS Nutrition Standards for School Meals website. The developer must provide written documentation that the preliminary checklist evaluation was completed. The developer must add brief text that points the evaluator to the program functionality that meets each requirement to a copy of the checklist evaluation document.

After completing the preliminary checklist evaluation on the software, the software developer sends the completed checklist to the CSEC. The developer then makes arrangements to provide the software to the CSEC at FNS. The software developer is responsible for providing access to the software for all evaluators for all evaluations. The software program may be provided via Web access or a developer-owned laptop. The evaluators have limited capabilities to install software on their computers. If the developer cannot provide the software by Web access or a developer-owned laptop, the developer must contact the CSEC to discuss options for installation. The developer is responsible for shipping costs for all software and hardware sent to and returned from the evaluators.

The CSEC and other certification software evaluators will determine if the requirements have been met by the software before issuing an approval letter and listing the system on the official online list of systems approved for six cents certification requirements.

If the evaluator determines that the specifications and requirements have not been met, the developer must make corrections and pass the checklist evaluation before continuing through the evaluation process. The time frame for making the corrections is at the discretion of the developer. After the program passes the checklist evaluation, the evaluators will notify the developer of its approval status.

## Final Approval

After the software program passes the evaluation, the CSEC or FNS representative sends the reports to the FNS national office to request approval of the software. If the FNS staff concurs with the results of the evaluation, the software developer will be notified by email message that FNS has granted approval of the software by USDA for six cent certification purposes. The software will be added to the list of approved certification software on the HMRS web site, as soon as the email message is sent and the software developer provides the correct contact information. A follow-up approval letter on FNS letterhead will be issued after the process is complete.

## **Marketing of Approval Status**

Software developers may not market their software as approved by USDA for certification purposes until the email message granting approval has been received by the software developer. Developers are discouraged from selling or distributing their products for certification purposes until the software is approved.

USDA highly recommends that State Agencies or School Food Authorities (SFA) do not purchase software until it is on the approved certification software list on the HMRS Web site.

The only marketing language permitted by FNS for both print and electronic product literature is as follows: "This software system is USDA-approved for Certification of Compliance with New Meal Patterns." The developer may refer to the approval as "approved by USDA for use in Certification of Compliance with New Meal Patterns." The marketing language may not imply that more programs or modules are approved in addition to the Certification of Compliance with New Meal Patterns software. Please consult with the CSEC if you need assistance with acceptable marketing language.

USDA symbols or logos are intended for the official use of the USDA only and must not be used for software marketing materials or websites; logos are expressly excluded from use to imply endorsement of a commercial product or service. The USDA symbol or logo may not be used by anyone outside of USDA without permission. Modified logos that have the appearance of an endorsement made by the Department are also not permitted.

Please ensure that all product literature for the software system approved by USDA for Certification of Compliance with New Meal Patterns is compliant with the marketing language and use of logos requirements.

## **Major Changes in the Approved Program**

The software developer must resubmit the software if there is a significant change in the software, such as a change in platform, operating system, major upgrade, or new

software. Additional examples of significant changes include phasing out old software and introducing new software, change to a Web-based software, creation of a scaled-down or enhanced software for use by selected customers, or modifying a program for use by a specific audience. The CSEC will help the software developer determine if the software must be evaluated and re-approved.

## **How to Submit Certification Software System for USDA Approval**

Once the developer has completed the checklist and in-house testing, please contact the following Certification Software Evaluation Coordinators to indicate that you are ready to submit the certification software and to discuss any technical requirements for the review process by calling Ann Hall or Angela Leone at: (703) 305-2590.