

I (A). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To investigate a minimum 5% of the Program's authorized vendors for compliance with federal regulations during the federal fiscal year.

METHODOLOGY: The compliance liaison, under the direction of the unit supervisor, manually selects vendors for investigation based upon participant and local WIC office complaints and high-risk reports generated from The Integrity Profile (TIP) report, Store Tracking and Redemption System (STARS), and/or Crossroads Management Information System. Investigation priority is determined according to the severity of the possible infractions to the program.

The State Agency (SA) will also develop policy and procedure as well as tools to institute inventory audits as a method of compliance investigations. Technical assistance will be sought from other states as recommended by the regional office through technical assistance site visits and/or review of approved procedures and tools.

EVALUATION: Regional office approval of the inventory audit policies, procedures and tools will be secured to initiate use of inventory audits for compliance investigations. The number of compliance investigation letters will be recorded to track the most common state violations or customer service issues. This information will inform quarterly newsletter items as well as state standards.

STATUS: COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted and the State has reopened for in state travel, therefore the Vendor Management Unit will work to complete the needed compliance buys in order to complete this goal. The 5% minimum requirement was met in FY2021 despite the COVID-19 outbreak. The SA continues to utilize Policy 8.09, as well as the Compliance Buy Investigation Standard Operating Procedures, with revised reporting form and notification template letter. Written notification was mailed following every investigation regardless of result.

The development of inventory audit policy and procedure is ongoing and has been progressing slowly since the staff member working on this project resigned in January 2020. All vacant positions within the Vendor Unit have been recently filled and the inventory audit portion of this goal can be worked on again.

This goal of developing policies and procedures for implementation of inventory audits is ongoing for FY 2022.

I (B). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To establish an appropriate number and distribution of vendors for each Local Agency to obtain at least a 1:150 vendor to participant ratio in each county.

METHODOLOGY: The West Virginia WIC Vendor Unit will assess active participation and potentially eligible population as well as distribution of population to determine the vendor:participant ratio per county. The West Virginia University Food Link Portal will be utilized to determine areas of low food access, and map Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) providers already offering fresh fruits and vegetables.

The SA will actively reach out to all SNAP authorized stores currently not participating in the WIC Program to educate about the benefits of being a WIC vendor. In addition, if a vendor inquiry is received personal follow up will occur throughout the application process.

The Vendor Handbook has been revised to develop minimum stocking requirements by vendor peer group, offer exemption application for minimum stocking requirements, and/or outline expectations of providing WIC Approved food items upon participant request when minimum stock is not available.

EVALUATION: The vendor:participant ratio will be calculated and assessed quarterly. The number of new vendor applications will be tracked as well as results of outreach to potential vendors.

STATUS: West Virginia started FY 2021 with 238 vendors and currently, there are 247 vendors statewide. There are still several counties that do not meet the 1:150 ratio and are working on ways to rectify that. Since there is a new Vendor Management Coordinator, this project can get underway again.

The Vendor Handbook and Cashier Training Manual were printed and delivered to all vendors.

The Vendor Advisory Council meeting scheduled for May 2021 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions. A call was held on with all vendors on May 13, 2021 to touch base and assess stock levels due to COVID-19 food shortage issues.

This goal is ongoing.

I (C). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To develop in-store tools to assist retailers with training store personnel with the overall goal of a positive WIC shopping experience for cashiers and WIC customers.

METHODOLOGY: The Vendor Management Unit will work collaboratively with the Vendor Advisory Council, Local Agency Vendor Liaisons, and Food List Committee to help in store tools necessary to support implementation of the revised WIC Approved Food List effective October 1, 2020.

In-store tools of food category aisle signs, floor decals, and other materials utilized by Texas WIC will be reviewed during the Vendor Advisory Council meeting to determine what, if any, materials will be created and used during FY2021.

EVALUATION: A Vendor Advisory Meeting will be conducted to survey the vendors in attendance on what materials they would like to see implemented or piloted in their stores to aid WIC customers and their store personnel with WIC transactions. Final consensus will be made prior to final design and statewide implementation.

STATUS: The Vendor Advisory Council Meeting scheduled for September 2021 was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Food List revision originally planned for 2021 has also been delayed to accommodate potential Federal Food Package changes. Once new dates have been confirmed, we may look at this goal again. It will not be a goal for 2022 and is therefore closed.

I (D). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To pilot the portion of the online Vendor Portal for retailers to be able to complete reauthorization applications and documentation electronically.

METHODOLOGY: The Vendor Management Unit will develop a Vendor Portal User Guide as well as a training program outlining the steps to use the portal for reauthorization.

We are planning to pilot the portal in our Wheeling-Ohio region which currently has 20 vendors. Training will be held in January of 2022.

EVALUATION: The Vendor Management Unit will track when online applications are received and will reach out to any vendors that have not submitted applications as the contract expiration deadline approaches. Staff will poll the vendors that experienced difficulties with the application process to see what problems they had and how the training and materials can be updated to provide more clear instruction.

STATUS: The Vendor Portal User Guide is in development and the Vendor Management Coordinator is working with the Crossroads/MIS Project Coordinator to update the website and to test the portal to ensure that all components are relaying information correctly.

This is a new goal for FY 2022

I (E). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To restart the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) by securing a mechanism to reimburse farmers for their acceptance of participant vouchers. Ultimately, the State Agency's goal is for all participating farmers' markets in the state to have the ability to accept EBT as payment.

METHODOLOGY: The Vendor Management Unit will continue to work collaboratively with Fidelity Information Services (FIS) and other entities, as applicable, to reach a solution for reimbursing farmers after they accept participant vouchers for fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs.

The State Agency will also utilize its relationship with local entities such as the Food and Farm Coalition and the West Virginia Farmers' Market Association to communicate program changes with farmers. Additionally, the State Agency will research the FMNP operating procedures in other states to determine which solutions are producing successful results and may be appropriate for implementation in West Virginia.

West Virginia will be working simultaneously to implement an in-house processing option for paper vouchers and an electronic payment solution (i.e., EBT, participant facing payment app, etc.) while assessing ability to adopt a Management Information System for both WIC FMNP and Senior FMNP.

EVALUATION: Once the program restarts, successful implementation will be assessed by review of redemption rates, number of participants served, and results of farmer surveys at both the mid-point and the end of the program period.

STATUS: **This is a new goal for FY 2022.**