

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 Food Delivery Portal, 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: The 5% minimum requirement was met in FY2022 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 November 2021. 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 2023.

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 reached 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 2022 with 248 vendors and currently, there are 248 vendors statewide. The Vendor Unit is working on a How to Become WIC Vendor Video which will be continuously available on the website to encourage more retailers to participate.

This goal will be closed.

I (C). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

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

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

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 Management Unit piloted the portal in the Wheeling-Ohio Local WIC Agency region which provides services in six counties. The pilot went well. The Vendor Management Unit has since authorized another region using the portal and will continue to roll out as each region comes up for reauthorization. The Vendor Portal User Guide has been developed 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 and new functionality works as described.

This goal is closed as this transitions to standard operating procedures.

I (D). 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: **The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program is set to resume in West Virginia. Although the season is starting later in the season this goal is closed.**

I (E). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To begin using an electronic signature platform for vendor agreements and applications.

METHODOLOGY: The Vendor Manager will research external platforms as well as continue to work with the Crossroads contractor to assess the best method to distribute documents, have vendors sign electronically, and receive and store documents without the need for paper mailings.

EVALUATION: Once the electronic platform has been decided upon, the Vendor Management Unit will assess the timeliness and ease of distributing and receiving documents and will poll vendors for feedback.

STATUS: **This is a new goal for FY 2023.**

I (F). VENDOR MANAGEMENT

GOAL: To modernize the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) so that participants can purchase fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables from authorized farmers via electronic benefit transfer (EBT) through CDP's Farm Market Direct program.

METHODOLOGY: The Vendor Management Unit, the WIC Program Specialist, and the Food Insecurity Partnership Liaison will work with CDP to implement the Farm Market Direct program with all WIC participants and farmers' markets participating in the WIC FMNP during FY 2023. This will be a fully mobile and electronic solution for transacting FMNP benefits, eliminating the need for a banking contract and paper vouchers.

EVALUATION: Successful implementation of the electronic solution will be assessed by review of four indicators: number of participant users, number of farmer users, benefit dollars issued, and benefit dollars redeemed.

STATUS: **This is a new goal for 2023.**