Chapter 3

Selecting Software and Hardware for Nutrient Analysis

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will understand how to:

- **Select software and hardware for nutrient analysis.**
- **Explain the various functions that USDA-approved software programs allow.**
- **Choose an approved nutrient analysis program.**

USDA-Approved Nutrient Analysis Software Programs

USDA approves software to be used for SMI nutrient analysis to ensure valid and consistent nutrient data.

- SFAs/schools must use USDA-approved software programs to plan menus when using NSMP and ANSMP approaches.
- State agencies must use USDA-approved software to conduct nutrient analyses when monitoring SFAs using Food-Based Menu Planning.
- SFAs/schools using Food-Based Menu Planning options who conduct their own nutrient analysis must use USDA-approved software if they want the State agency to accept their nutrient analysis for the SMI Review.

CN Database in Approved Software

To be eligible for USDA approval, the nutrient analysis software program must contain the current CN Database developed specifically for analysis of school meals. Software manufacturers are expected to update their software within 90 days of the date a new CN database version is released.

NOTE: Although federal regulations do not require SFAs to update nutrient analysis software programs with each CN Database revision, SFAs are encouraged to use software with the most current CN Database version. Each revision contains updated nutrient data and new commercially prepared items, and saves data entry. A list of USDA-approved software is available on the Healthy School Meals Resources for Software Web site: http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/software/index.html.

USDA-approved software programs allow you to:

- Enter the nutrient data of a new food item from a Nutrition Facts label or from a manufacturer's nutrient analysis data report.

- Enter, modify and analyze recipes.
- Plan, copy, or modify menus for a 3- to 7-day school week.
- Customize nutrient standards for a specific age grouping (only NSMP/ANSMP may customize age groupings).
- Compare a menu to a specific nutrient standard and indicate when standards are not being met.
- Search the database for food items containing specific nutrients in order to modify menus to meet the nutrient standard.
- Print reports, such as nutrient composition, menus, and recipe analysis.

A more detailed description of the software program requirements and functions is provided in Appendix C.

Choosing an Approved Nutrient Analysis Software Program

Differences in Software Programs

While the USDA-approved software programs must include the functions outlined in Appendix D, there are still many differences between the USDA-approved software programs.

- Some programs perform only nutrient analysis.
- Some programs are part of a larger system that include many other school foodservice software modules, such as Free and Reduced Price modules, Food Production modules, and Inventory modules.
- Operating system and hardware requirements vary.

The SFA/school and State agency will need to do some research to find the program that best meets the needs of your school district/school or State agency. Confer with your computer personnel to ensure software compatibility with existing hardware.

CAUTION
Some programs will not run on older computer operating systems.

Questions to Consider When Selecting Software

- Do you need software that does only nutrient analysis, or do you want related program applications that perform multi-functions such as procurement, inventory, enhanced production records, etc.?

- Do you want a Windows-based system? A networked system?

- What are the hardware requirements? Will current hardware support the software requirements? Check with your technology support team in the SFA or State agency for guidance.

NOTE
USDA only reviews and monitors the CN Database and the software functions that relate directly to nutrient analysis. USDA does not review or approve other functions added by the software vendor.

- Are you able to participate in a demonstration of the software program at a conference or through other means?

- Can you visit a site that is using the software program in which you are interested?

- How easy is the program to use for entering data? Consider who will be using the program and staff computer literacy.

- How efficient is the overall nutrient analysis process? How well does the "search" feature help you locate food items (ingredients) and recipes in the database?

- Are reports easy to understand? Is it easy to interpret the results of the nutrient analysis and modify the recipes and menus to adjust results?

- How often is the software updated? Will the updates be provided as part of your initial cost or be separately priced? What are the update costs?

- Will the analysis be done at each school or centrally by the SFA?

- Is the software capable of combining breakfast and lunch analyses if this is a desired feature?

- What will the software package initially cost for one school/for the district? Consider how many copies or licenses for the software will be needed.

- What support is available? Online, telephone, on site? What does it cost?

- How accessible is the support? Are technicians available when needed?

- Is training available? What does it cost?

- Are there other services available, such as individual school set-up, data entry, recipe entry, menu analysis, etc.?

- Are references provided of other school districts using the software? When you contact references, do they provide positive feedback on services and support?

- Does the company have a trial period during which you can return the software program for a full refund if it does not meet your needs?

A comparison chart of the approved programs with information about the costs, functions, and services related to each program is available on the Healthy School Meals Resources for Software Web site:
http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/software/index.html.

Hardware Selection

Use the following guidelines to select hardware.

- Confer with your technology support personnel when selecting hardware.
- Select software first if possible.
- Consult with the software company for recommendations on hardware capabilities and compatibility and efficiency of future software upgrades.
- Identify and discuss all equipment needs, including printers, and hardware technical support availability with the vendor.