

Frequently asked questions – Specialized food products

Q. What is link between nutrition and HIV/AIDS?

A. HIV/AIDS can cause or worsen malnutrition by a combination of reduced food intake, poor nutrient absorption, and metabolic changes including increased energy needs. Malnutrition can exacerbate impacts of HIV/AIDS by weakening the immune system, increasing susceptibility to opportunistic infections, and reducing the effectiveness of treatment.

Q. What is food by prescription (FBP)?

A. FBP is a program approach that provides food and nutrition interventions as part of clinical HIV care and treatment. It is being initiated in a number of countries with PEPFAR support. The objective of FBP is to improve health, nutrition, antiretroviral treatment (ART) adherence and survival outcomes. FBP is designed so that:

- Food and nutrition services are provided as part of care and treatment;
- Clinical nutritional assessment and counseling services are provided at health facilities;
- Food is prescribed for a limited duration, with clear program entry and exit criteria based on anthropometric measures;
- Take-home rations of specialized food products are designed to improve nutrition and health outcomes of targeted clients.

Q. What kind of food products are used in FBP?

A. Food products used in FBP are categorized in two groups: *therapeutic foods* and *supplementary foods*. These foods must be safe, effective, of consistent high quality, palatable, easy to digest, culturally appropriate, cost effective, and feasible to deliver to clients. They must be simple to prepare without requiring large amounts of water, nutrient dense, and free of contamination. Therapeutic foods are prescribed for severely malnourished children and adults at both the health facility and community levels. They include Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTF) and F-75 and F-100 therapeutic milks. Supplementary food (i.e. fortified blended food (FBF)), are flour blends made from soy, wheat and/or corn and fortified with nutrients such as calcium and iron. They are prescribed in conjunction with RUTF, as a palatable complement that is compatible with local diets. Since some patients will consume a combination of RUTF and FBF, it is important to set the recommended micronutrient specifications of FBF at levels to avoid excessively high levels of micronutrient intake. Both therapeutic and supplementary foods should meet acceptable standards for daily energy,

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micronutrient and protein content required for the target population as well as for microbiological safety. Food by prescription involves a combination of both RUTF and FBF products.

Q. What is ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF)?

A. RUTF is an energy-dense, mineral- and vitamin-enriched food specifically designed to treat severe acute malnutrition. It is soft and easier than home foods for severely malnourished children over the age of six months to eat and does not require added water. Because it is not water based, bacteria cannot grow in it, and it can be used safely without refrigeration or under sub-optimal hygiene conditions. RUTF has been shown to be effective in nutritional rehabilitation of HIV-positive and HIV-negative children. RUTF is not as easily consumed by adults (due to its extreme sweetness and pasty consistency); thus RUTF is prescribed in conjunction with FBF for adults and investigation is under way to produce a more acceptable version. Plumpy'nut is the brand name of a common lipid-based RUTF produced by Nutriset and its franchises. Other manufacturers produce similar RUTF products. It may be difficult for adults to consume large amounts of Plumpy'nut; efforts are underway to develop alternative RUTF formulations.

Q. What are fortified blended foods/flours (FBF)?

A. Fortified blended foods (FPF) are blended cereal-based flours that are fortified with micronutrient premix. Careful attention must be paid in determining fortification levels so that clients who consume both RUTF and fortified blended foods do not receive micronutrient levels that are greater than safe intake levels. An example of supplementary foods is high-energy protein supplement (HEPS) produced in Zambia, which is comprised of maize, soy and micronutrient premix, sometimes with milk powder and sugar added.

These FBFs historically come in large packaging. However, the ideal FBF packaging is 100-, 200- or 300-gram sachets or packets because these “doses” discourage sharing and encourage clients to eat the right amounts and view the food as part of their therapy, similar to medicine. This type of packaging also facilitates monitoring of adherence and consumption. Efforts are underway to work with suppliers to make this package size more readily available.

Q. What kind of food products is SCMS allowed to procure? What are the constraints?

A. Contractually, the SCMS program can procure RUTF and fortified blended foods, as part of FBF. Food outside this category is not allowed under our contract. SCMS is currently in the process of evaluating different manufacturers of RUTF and FBF for procurement and distribution options. Challenges associated with these procurements include: verification of quality and manufacturing capacity, in-country registration and waivers, global product demand and lead time.

Q. Where can I buy these products?

A. SCMS can procure or assist with the procurement of these products from local and international manufacturers. Certification procedures for these suppliers are currently underway. Please contact us with specific questions at: SCMSInfo@pfscm.org.

Q. What are the criteria for vendor/producer pre-qualification?

A. Prequalification standards for PEPFAR-funded programs are currently under review by USAID and SCMS. Presently, for international programs, the UNICEF qualification process is accepted by all UN agencies, as well as Clinton Foundation (CHAI) and Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF).

Q. What Quality Assurance (QA) is required in terms of testing and certification?

A. There are many international standards that detail QA requirements for testing and certification of food (e.g. Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) Principles, ISO standards, Codex Alimentarius, and Code of Practice for Food Premix Operations). UNICEF currently has manufacturing standards for RUTF production which have been adopted by all UN agencies (such as the World Food Program). USAID and SCMS are currently working closely with UNICEF, Clinton Foundation (CHAI) and the World Food Program in determining USG QA testing and certification requirements. SCMS is able to conduct testing of food products through a laboratory.

Q. What product specifications must I know in order to submit a price request?

A. The required specifications for price request submittal include: product type, quantity, pack size, required delivery date, available budget, and required delivery location. It is also important for us to understand your storage and handling capabilities prior to placing your order.

Q. What must I consider in terms of freight and logistics?

A. Freight and logistics considerations of this product are different from other products you may have procured through SCMS. Key considerations include: lead time (product will be moved by ocean freight if sourced internationally); registration and clearance requirements for your country; storage and handling at either a regional distribution center or service delivery point (this product has different storage and handling requirements than ARVs, OI drugs, test kits or lab equipment and may require a separate storage site); and final destination (delivery to a distribution center, hospital or clinic). In terms of shelf life, based on currently approved manufacturers' specifications, RUTF has a shelf life of 24 months and FBF has a shelf life of 9 months.

Q. How do I determine the appropriate quantities of this product?

A. The Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance II Project (FANTA-2) can assist in projecting food requirements for FBP programs. Please contact FANTA-2 (www.fanta-2.org) for more information. Clinton Foundation (CHAI) has also developed a quantification tool that it is using to determine quantities of RUTF needed for children. It is advised that you engage in a dialogue with both the SCMS quantification advisors and FANTA-2 to develop quantification, forecast and supply plans.

Q. What are the average warehousing costs for these types of products? What are the warehousing requirements?

A. Warehouse and handling requirements for fortified blended foods are detailed in Food for Peace's Commodities Reference Guide (see url below; section III addresses commodity storage and shelf life issues). RUTF handling requirements will depend on the product specifications and will be issued by the manufacturer and can be reviewed with support from SCMS. Ideally, food products should not be stored in the same warehouse as pharmaceuticals (due to risk of rodent and/or insect infestation), but in some FBP programs facilities have been using the same stores for both types of products.

Q. What is the average lead time for these types of commodities?

A. Lead time will depend on where the product is sourced from and whether or not the manufacturer has the capacity to produce the requested quantity of product. Product sourced overseas will average 10 weeks of ocean shipment time, whereas product sourced locally will have little to no transit time. Allow for 20+ weeks for international procurements and 4+ weeks for local procurements. SCMS is investigating regional procurement options with a transit time between 4 – 20 weeks. (Please note these lead times are estimates; actual lead time will vary by order depending on specific requirements and manufacturers' order books at the time when the order is placed.)

More questions?

Refer to the following documents:

- FANTA-2 website: <http://www.fanta-2.org>
- PEPFAR Policy Change in Food and Nutrition Programming (October 2007): <http://www.pepfar.gov/guidance/index.htm>
- PEPFAR Policy Guidance on the Use of Emergency Plan Funds to Address Food and Nutrition Needs (September 2006): <http://www.pepfar.gov/guidance/77980.htm>
- USAID Food For Peace Commodities Reference Guide: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/ffp/crg/intro.htm

Contact us, or see our other FAQs and links:

- About SCMS <http://scms.pfscm.org/scms/about/faq>
- E-catalog <http://scms.pfscm.org/scms/ecatalog/faq>

For more information email: SCMSInfo@pfscm.org

Acknowledgements

FANTA, *Guidelines for a Food by Prescription Program in Zambia*, Draft, September 2008.
PEPFAR, *Policy Guidance on the Use of Emergency Plan Funds to Address Food and Nutrition Needs*, September 2006.

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