
Becoming a WIC Grocer

What are the requirements for becoming a WIC grocer?

To be authorized as a WIC retail Grocer in Vermont, grocers must satisfy these selection criteria:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation** – The applicant must participate in SNAP. Please note that participation in SNAP satisfies only one WIC selection criteria and, by itself, shall not constitute compliance with all other necessary WIC selection criteria.
- **Compliance with WIC and SNAP Regulations** – The owners and managers listed on the application must have an acceptable history of compliance with WIC, SNAP, and other Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Programs.
- **WIC Benefits** – The applicant must have EBT capability and be able to accept WIC benefits by way of a Vermont WIC approved integrated or non-integrated single-function system. See Appendix I WIC Grocer Technical Requirements, for more information.
- **Staple Foods** – The applicant must provide a variety of staple foods for sale including, fresh, frozen, and/or canned fruits and vegetables, fresh and/or frozen meats/fish, dairy products, and grain products such as bread, rice, and pasta.
- **Fresh Products** – The applicant must provide fresh products and maintain adequate stock of WIC approved food items year around, including infant formula (within expiration dates).
- **Mandatory Minimum Inventory** – The grocer must stock the mandatory minimum inventory of approved WIC foods, and infant formula must always be available on the shelves (See Appendix III and IV for Mandatory Minimum Inventory Standards for large and small grocery stores). All applicants will be inspected by the WIC Program to verify that the Mandatory Minimum Inventory of WIC items are in stock. Failure to stock and maintain the mandatory minimum inventory food items, in required quantities, after submission of a vendor application will be grounds for denial.

- Exceptions to the Vendor Selection Criteria and Minimum Stocking Requirement may be granted if the State Agency determines that a vendor is needed for participant access in accordance with the State Agency’s Participant Access policy.

Approval of Minimum Stocking Requirement Exemptions is for a single store location and is for the indicated product(s) or food categories only.

NOTE: The Mandatory Minimum Inventory may be amended by the WIC Program during the Agreement period.

- **Competitive Prices** – The applicant prices must be competitive with other authorized vendors within the same Peer Group. The grocer has competitive prices. Competitive pricing will be evaluated twice a year for price competitiveness during the authorization period and grocers may be terminated for non-price competitiveness. Please note, the Vermont WIC Program also uses Not-to-Exceed (NTE). NTE is the maximum amount that Vermont WIC will pay for specific

food items identified by their Universal Product Code (UPC). The NTE is calculated from the actual prices paid for food redeemed through the WIC Card transactions.

- **Demonstrated Business Integrity** – The grocer has no serious business practice violations. There is no conflict of interest between store ownership and management, and WIC state or local agency staff. None of the current owners, officers, or managers has been convicted of or has had a civil judgment during the last 6 years for the following:
 - Fraud, antitrust violations, embezzlement, or theft
 - Forgery, bribery, falsification, or destruction of records
 - Making false statements, receiving stolen property
 - Making false claims, or obstruction of justice
- **Continuing Quality Standards:**
 - **Continued compliance with WIC regulations** including consideration of business integrity standards. Continued compliance with state and local sanitary codes, licensure requirements, and food safety requirements.
 - **WIC sales volume** – The State will review the volume of WIC sales of each authorized WIC grocer on a periodic basis. Low or zero volume of WIC sales may result in loss of WIC authorization.
- **Percentage of Food Sales from WIC** – WIC sales cannot make up more than 50% of grocer’s total annual food sales. Applicants will not be accepted if it is expected that food sales from WIC will be more than 50% of total food sales. Currently authorized grocers’ volume of WIC redemptions will be monitored six months after initial authorization and annually to determine if they exceed 50% of total annual food sales.
- **Minimum Lane Coverage** – Stores with three or more cash registers are required to have an integrated system and equip all cash registers with the software to process WIC benefits. Stores with one to two cash registers must equip one cash register if the monthly WIC sales is less than or equal to \$8,000 or both cash registers if the monthly sales exceed \$8,000.
- **Email Address** – The applicant must have an e-mail address to do business with the Vermont WIC Program. Failure to have and/or maintain an e-mail address for the store will be grounds for denial or termination of the Grocer Agreement.
- **Incentive Items** – Provision of any incentive items (including but not limited to any food item, merchandise, or service obtained at no cost to the grocer or any food item, merchandise, or service of 1.99 or less) to WIC customers that are not offered to other customers are not permitted.

How do I apply to become a WIC grocer?

An owner of a retail grocery store may request a Retail Grocer Application by contacting the Vendor Manager in the WIC State Central Office at WIC@Vermont.gov.

The owner or business representative must complete and submit all retail grocer application forms according to the instructions. The package will contain:

- WIC Grocer Application (online survey)
- Minimum Stocking Requirements
 - Chains and Large Independent grocery stores
 - Small stores and Coops
- Price Survey

If approved, Grocers will be sent a Retail Grocer Agreement, which will need to be signed and returned to the Vendor Manager.

When can I apply?

Vermont accepts applications from grocers at any time.

How often do I have to reapply?

The standard grocer agreement is for a three-year cycle. Grocers who are authorized mid-cycle will receive a pro-rated agreement, so that all grocers will be on the same agreement cycle.

What happens after I submit an application?

Any grocer who is new to WIC will have an onsite visit by WIC staff prior to authorization. Stores that are re-applying may or may not need an onsite visit.

Once the application is complete and the grocer satisfies selection criteria, WIC staff will schedule a site visit to assess whether the store meets WIC criteria.

The site visit will consist of a review of:

- Handicap accessibility
- Minimum inventory requirements
- Full-service grocery status
- Sanitary and safety conditions

- Store staff knowledge about WIC requirements

How does WIC decide if my store is eligible to be a WIC grocer?

WIC staff will objectively apply the selection criteria to each grocer applicant. Only applicants meeting all the selection and limitation criteria will be selected as eligible WIC authorized Grocers. The determination of eligibility is not subject to appeal. See page 5 of this Handbook for requirements to becoming a WIC Grocer.