

Annex VII – Inclusion of Milk into the General Food Assistance Programme

1. Introduction

1.1. Background for Project

The original objective for the project was to distribute the milk in the WFP supported schools together with the fortified date bars across two academic years (2016-2017 and 2017-2018). WFP's school activities take place in schools located in areas that have a high prevalence of food insecurity, high number of IDPs and low education indicators; during 2017 the programme aims to reach 800,000 children. To ensure the delivery of a comprehensive package, WFP targets schools already assisted by UNICEF through trainings, teaching material and school supplies. The project is in line with the objectives of the European Commission's Implementing Decision (ECHO/-ME/BUD/2016/01000), *Financing the distribution of dairy products as part of the response to humanitarian crises from the general budget of the European Union*, which state that "The humanitarian actions financed under this Decision shall be implemented in order to address food and nutrition needs of internally displaced persons, refugees and other vulnerable people affected by humanitarian crises" (article 2(1)).

According to Syrian regulations, it is generally not permitted to import liquid milk into Syria from non-Arab countries and WFP therefore had to work with all relevant authorities to obtain an exemption and pave the way for the generous contribution from the European Union.

1.2. Initial Receipt of Milk

As noted in the update on the milk project on 1 February 2017 (see Annex VIII for the full update), WFP made a decision to include a quantity of the milk procured through ECHO funds into its general food assistance (GFA) programme targeting children of 5 to 12 years of age. This decision was necessitated by operational factors mainly linked to the short shelf life of the milk. According to Syrian regulations, there are there are two key stipulations:

- 1) The shelf life of UHT milk in Syria is six months compared to nine months in European Union countries; and
- 2) Food items such as UHT milk need to arrive in Syria with at least half of their shelf life remaining.

The milk that was received into Syria during the fall of 2016 arrived later than planned from the port of origin and thus had less than half of its shelf life remaining and still had to undergo the required testing scheme, including microbiological test that take 21 days. This required WFP to obtain an exemption from all relevant entities to be able to distribute the milk in spite of these delays. Due to the time required to obtain the exemption, combined with a several week long break at the public schools, WFP made a decision to include milk in the general food assistance (GFA) programme rather than moving to destroy it. The decision was made in consultation with the Nutrition Sector, and the milk was distributed to families with children between the ages of 5 and 12 years of age and in areas with a high percentage of IDPs.

[MR2] In total, 4,829.69 mt of milk were distributed since the beginning of the programme in late 2016. Of these, 4,346.993 mt were distributed in schools under the School Meals programme reaching almost 260,000 school children during the 2016-17 academic year. The

remaining 482.697 mt were distributed under the GFA programme reaching approximately 167,000 children aged 5-12 years old once.

2. Future Inclusion of EU Milk into WFP's General Food assistance Programme

WFP remains committed to the original objectives of the project, i.e. distribution of milk together with fortified date bars to pre-primary and primary children attending schools supported by WFP and UNICEF. These schools are selected based on a high prevalence of IDPs as well as low food security and education indicators.

However, as outlined in the communication dated 1 February 2017, the operational context in Syria may necessitate that WFP uses the milk in its GFA programme. This reallocation will only be done, when there are specific criteria as outlined below:

- Inability to distribute within the fortified school snacks programme due to administrative, legal or logistics obstacles.
- If reallocation does not occur, the commodity will have to be destroyed in line with WFP's commodity destruction procedures.
- Other specific cases agreed to in consultation with ECHO.

2.1. Distribution of Milk within GFA Programme

It is WFP's stated objective that in a given academic year (2016/2017 and 2017/2018) during the action, the amount of milk reallocated to GFA will not exceed a total of ten percent, or five percent per each academic year, of the total milk tonnage to be procured and distributed under this action (17,500 mt).

The milk will be distributed in areas with high concentration of IDPs and may also be used for inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach and besieged areas. There are currently no plans to distribute milk in areas covered by cross-border operations from Jordan and Turkey, as WFP and UNICEF are currently not supporting schools in these areas.

WFP GFA targets the most vulnerable people in Syria. Geographical targeting forms the initial level of targeting, prioritizing sub-districts with a high prevalence of food insecurity as identified by the FSS based on the result of the food security assessment, and hard-to-reach areas and besieged locations. This is followed by a household targeting exercise jointly conducted with partners according to vulnerability criteria through a beneficiary selection tool, which enables WFP to ensure that resources are directed where they are most needed. The tool is based on a series of vulnerability indicators identified using evidence from the food security assessment, which enable a further ranking system to identify those showing the highest level of vulnerability to food insecurity.

WFP is an active member of the Nutrition Sector and will continue to liaise with the Sector on any possible inclusion into the GFA programme. Moreover, WFP will sensitize its cooperating partners regarding any upcoming distributions to ensure that beneficiaries are duly informed about the milk distribution and are aware that the milk is intended for children between the ages of 5 and 12. Moreover, WFP will place appropriate stickers/labels on all the distributed milk to avoid misuse of the product.

Prior to carrying out any reallocation, WFP will advise ECHO about the need to do so including the rationale and expected quantity. The initial alert will subsequently be supported by documents as required by ECHO.

[MR2] Part of the milk procured under this action might be reallocated to General Food Assistance if required by the operational conditions described and the maximum percentage of 5% of milk to be reallocated as agreed in MR1 will be lifted.

Nonetheless, the focus of the action will remain the support of the Education Sector through the distribution of milk quantities procured to pre-primary and primary schools supported by WFP's school meals programme. Close coordination is taking place among teams along the whole supply chain system, in order to reduce lead times to the extent possible and minimize delays in the receipt, delivery and distribution of the milk. However, given the complex operational environment in Syria, potential logistics bottlenecks, administrative hurdles and access restrictions may still affect the implementation at planned scale of deliveries under the school meals programme. Accordingly, WFP will maintain a contingency measure to reallocate to GFA quantities that cannot be absorbed by the School Meals Programme within their shelf life due to the abovementioned reasons and would otherwise need to be destroyed.

During the 2016-17 school year, 482 mt of milk were reallocated to GFA, reaching approximately 167,000 children. During the 2017-18 school year, around 9,000 mt of milk, may be reallocated to distributions under the GFA programme. The timeframe and extent of the GFA milk distributions will be determined in line with the operational conditions during the school year. Milk distributions under the GFA programme will reach a maximum of 600,000 children and will take place over a maximum of three monthly cycles. [END]

3. Mitigation Measures

Based on the lessons learned from the batches that were received initially, WFP has already taken several steps to mitigate any further challenges.

The Syria Country Office is currently in dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to:

- Streamline and clarify the documentation requirement for the legalization process;
- Reduce steps to shorten the overall processing time; and
- Adopt the European standard shelf life for milk (nine months) rather than the Syrian standard shelf life (six months) for the milk donated by the European Union to WFP's operations in Syria.

Furthermore, WFP Syria is currently engaged in discussions with the two suppliers in order to:

- Provide consignments in large lots with the same expiry date, rather than numerous small lots of varying expiry dates which cause significant delays due to the extensive testing regime; and
- Improve the consistency and accuracy of documentation to avoid delays in custom clearance process.

Another important measure has been the development of the specification sheet to ensure that suppliers are fully aligned and aware of all Syria standards and regulations.

4. Reporting

WFP commits to sending ECHO a brief monthly report on the action. The report will include the following headings, though the information available may vary from month:

- Quantity dispatched to schools
- Number of children expected to cover by the quantity
- Cumulative dispatches to schools since the inception of the programme (as it applies to an academic year)
- Quantity allocated to GFA (if any)
- Any challenge observed