

Monthly Update on Milk for WFP Syria's School Meal Programme

December 2017

Background

Since August 2014, WFP Syria, in cooperation with UNICEF and the Syrian Ministry of Education, has been implementing a school meals programme aimed at encouraging enrolment and regular attendance among pre-primary and primary school children in Syria. Initially providing fortified date bars only, thanks to a generous contribution from the European Commission, starting in the 2016-17 school year, WFP introduced UHT milk of European Union origin as part of the nutritious snacks provided to children.

Due to operational challenges linked to the nature of the commodity as well as the challenging context in Syria, WFP maintains the possibility of reallocating part of the milk quantities to the General Food Assistance (GFA) programme as a contingency measure.

Implementation to date

Arrival of milk shipments

WFP procured some 19,500 mt of milk for the 2017-18 academic year. The first batches of milk started arriving in Syria on 5 November. As of the end of December 2017, a total of 3,271.92 mt of milk have arrived in country. All of the quantities received have a packaging size of 200 ml.

In January 2018, additional shipments of 5,196.142 mt of milk are expected to arrive at the Syrian ports. The clearance for these shipments is expected to be received in February, subject to positive lab test results.

Milk Shipments, December 2017	
	QTY-MT
Milk received in country	3,271.92
Milk expected in January	5,196.142

Dispatches to schools

In December, WFP received clearance for a total of 1,117.924 mt of milk following the issuance of positive lab test results for these quantities. These cleared quantities were among the first shipments that had arrived at Syrian ports in early November, which were initially expected to be cleared by end of November or early December. However, due to lengthy clearance procedures (see below section on Challenges), clearance for dispatch started to be obtained only in mid-December, when only small quantities of milk received the green light. However, it should be noted that the large majority of the quantities was cleared only in the last days of December, hindering the ability to dispatch all quantities during the same month. In light of these challenges, WFP could only dispatch 166.644 mt of milk to schools in Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Dar'a governorates in December. Dispatches of the remaining cleared quantities have resumed on 06 January 2018 and will be absorbed through January plan.

The 166.644 mt of milk dispatched to schools in Aleppo, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Dar'a governorates are estimated to benefit some 21,288 school children. This is calculated based on a daily ration per child of 400 ml of milk (two packs of 200 ml). Upon the receipt of the milk in schools, the distribution to school children was initiated by the school principals. Distribution reports will be shared by the Ministry of Education once finalised.

Milk Dispatches, December 2017	
	Dispatched to Schools (MT)
Quantity of milk dispatched in December	166.644
Number of children benefitting from the dispatched milk in December	21,288
Cumulative quantity dispatched since the beginning of the 2017-18 school year	166.644

Planning ahead

Due to the cumulative effect of delays caused by several factors including delays in the procurement process and administrative procedures, as outlined in detail in previous updates – milk deliveries and distributions could not be implemented at planned scale to date. While maintaining the existing plan to prioritise distributions of available milk quantities, WFP foresees that some quantities will need to be reallocated to the General Food Assistance (GFA), in order to absorb all the available and incoming quantities ahead of their Best Before Date (BDD) and to avoid any commodity losses.

WFP is developing a contingency plan based on several factors, including operational and logistics considerations, school absorption capacity in the various geographical areas and BDD dates, in order to conduct necessary reallocations in a timely and systematic manner. The reallocated quantities will be distributed to vulnerable households already targeted through GFA. The plan is currently being prepared, and the first reallocations are expected to take place end of February or early March. Additional details will be shared in the upcoming updates.

Challenges

Following initial challenges with the procurement process (see October update for details) and a resulting late arrival of the first batches of milk in Syria, delays are now being experienced in the clearance of shipments that have already arrived in country.

The delays are mainly linked to the legalization process of the milk shipments, requested by the Syrian authorities. This process requires the receipt of original shipping documents, which have to be signed by several countries and consulates. In addition, further delays are experienced inside Syria where the shipping documents need to go through several government institutions, including the Chamber of Commerce and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. WFP only receives clearance of the milk shipments once the legalization process is finalised, which poses additional challenges for the timely dispatch and distribution of the milk to beneficiaries. Accordingly, WFP has extended a request for an accelerated procedure (a waiver) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has underlined the importance of a swift release and dispatch of the sensitive milk commodity in a meeting with the Ministry of Education on the topic.

WFP received the verbal approval for the waiver on 08 January 2017, and is expecting the written approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This allows WFP to dispatch the milk directly after receipt of the positive lab test results (the lab test takes on average 21 days) and before the original shipping documents arrive in Syria. At the same time, WFP commits to submit the original shipping documents within a period of one month upon receipt of the positive lab results.