

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-103949](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD's food program policy is to provide high-quality and cost-effective food service to military and civilian personnel. To fulfill the objectives of its food service program, DOD relies on multiple food supply chains and dining facilities at military installations worldwide.

Two congressional committee reports included provisions for GAO to report on DOD's menu standards, coordination with private industry on food ingredient changes, and military services' use and costs of dining facilities. This report evaluates the extent to which 1) DOD developed and implemented processes to determine and revise menu standards and food ingredient requirements; 2) the military services track the use of their dining facilities by servicemembers with a meal entitlement; and 3) the military services track the costs of their dining facilities to develop budget requests. GAO reviewed laws and guidance; administered questionnaires; and interviewed officials from DOD, other agencies, and private industry.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 11 recommendations to DOD, including that DOD coordinate its revised food ingredient process with all stakeholders and formalize it; track servicemembers' use of meal entitlements; and identify and report standard data on food program costs. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-22-103949](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Field at (202) 512-2775 or [FieldE1@gao.gov](mailto:FieldE1@gao.gov).

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## FOOD PROGRAM

### DOD Should Formalize Its Process for Revising Food Ingredients and Better Track Dining Facility Use and Costs

## What GAO Found

Since 2017, the Department of Defense (DOD) has been working to develop a new process for making food ingredient decisions, based on its menu standards for providing nutritious food to servicemembers. However, GAO found that DOD has not coordinated with all stakeholders or formalized the process. In response to concerns voiced by food industry representatives that DOD was not sufficiently transparent in making food ingredient decisions, such as prohibiting certain ingredients, DOD drafted a process map for including food industry and other federal agency stakeholders in those decisions. However, while DOD actively sought input from the food industry, it did not similarly engage with other federal agencies—such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture—and some DOD components in developing the new process. DOD also did not formalize its food process map by, for example, clearly identifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities in the proposed process. Coordinating with all stakeholders and formalizing the process would help ensure that DOD has a more transparent and reliable method for making informed food ingredient decisions.

GAO also found that DOD does not track key information about its food program. For example, while the military services track head count data—numbers and types of diners who purchase meals at their dining facilities—most do not track the extent to which servicemembers with a meal entitlement use their benefit. Tracking these data would help DOD meet its goal of providing nutritious meals to servicemembers and assess its food program's effectiveness.

Ship's Cabin Galley (Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia) and Kiosk (Fort Carson, Colorado)



Source: U.S. Navy (left); U.S. Army (right). | GAO-22-103949

In addition, the military services do not track complete and consistent information on key costs, such as food costs and equipment maintenance costs. Further, the military services reported food costs differently in their fiscal year 2021 budget justifications. Specifically, the military services varied in the line items they used in their respective budget exhibits to report food costs for basic trainees or personnel in non-pay status. By collecting standard data on food program costs at military installations, DOD would improve its ability to measure food program performance, compare operations across installations, properly allocate resources, and control or reduce costs. Further, by reporting more consistent information about food costs in its budget submissions, DOD would improve budget transparency and enable Congress to conduct more effective oversight.