

Healthy Kids, Strong Parents
WIC Works Wonders!

Introducing the WIC Vendor Team

Did you know that Oregon WIC spends over \$45 million a year on foods at grocery stores and pharmacies? You might be wondering who monitors all those stores. Well, I'll tell you who...the WIC Vendor Management Services Team. This article will help shed some light onto what specific team members do. With 638 vendors, they have their work cut out for them!

Sarah Rosenberg is the WIC State office *Operations Manager*. Part of her job is to assist the vendor team by helping to prioritize and resolve any issues that arise. As *Vendor Team Coordinator*, **Maria Menor** tracks and facilitates the projects of Vendor Team staff to make sure they are on track. Maria also coordinates the Farm Direct Nutrition Program for WIC families and seniors.

Colette LaDue, the *Vendor Systems Specialist*, is responsible for replacing vouchers (anywhere from 40-80 each day!) that can't be cashed by vendors due to a number of problems. Colette also answers questions daily from vendors, and provides clerical support to the vendor team.

Gina Carter, the *Vendor Contract Specialist*, is responsible for authorizing and renewing contracts for stores. Gina prepares the contract and a vendor guide for each store, every three years, which is taken to the store via Michelle Aarhus to be signed. **Michelle Aarhus** is the *Vendor Trainer*, and it is her responsibility to personally ensure that all vendors receive proper, interactive training. Michelle conducts three types of trainings: trainings for new stores, contract renewal trainings, and requested trainings.

Vendor Team in Brief: Vendor Team ensures that clients can get the WIC foods to meet their nutritional needs. They do this by authorizing, training, and monitoring vendors so that WIC clients purchase the right foods in the right amounts, by ensuring that vendors are reimbursed appropriately, and by helping design tools so that you can educate the clients. This article will describe to you what each team member does, in a little more detail. Stay tuned for future articles about the other teams working at the State WIC office.

Team Photo

Pictured clockwise, starting from far left - Tami Olsen, Matt Sorenson, Jazette Johnson, Colette LaDue, Michelle Aarhus, Sarah Rosenberg, Gina Carter, and Maria Menor.



Introducing the WIC Vendor Team - cont.

Jazette Johnson is the *Vendor Program Representative*. Using TWIST, Jazette pulls together lists of high-risk stores and then makes recommendations as to which vendors need further investigation to Matt Sorenson, WIC's *Investigator*. Matt conducts vendor compliance investigations - where he acts as a client and goes shopping. Last year, he found two stores that were charging for items not actually sold. To confirm this, Matt bought only three of the five formulas listed on the voucher and later, using TWIST, found that all 5 on the voucher were reported as purchased - naughty, naughty vendor! Matt explained to me that the most common error is selling items not on the food list, usually due to staff not being trained properly. It is Matt who also investigates dual participation, lost or stolen FI's and tracks breast pumps. These last two items are much easier to do now with TWIST - yeah TWIST!

Tami Olsen, the *Compliance Coordinator*, sends violations to vendors identified by Matt. Tami issues sanctions - letters that state the necessary corrective action to be taken, or disqualifying individual vendors or clients. USDA requires that we report any type of abuse and that anyone whose abuse is over \$100 be disqualified. Tami also is writing the State's administrative rules for Farm Direct, Participants and Vendors, all of which are interpreted from Federal regulations. Bet you can't wait to read those!



New Kid on the Block

Having started July 31st, Jazette is Vendor team's latest addition. Jazette just finished her MPH at Portland State University, where she focused on Child Development and Research. Jazette worked for Clackamas Early Intervention Programs for 7 years prior to working at the State.

When local agencies enter complaint information into TWIST, it is Jazette who looks at this information (daily I might add!) and then acts upon it as necessary.

Note: Being as specific as possible when entering complaint information into TWIST is optimal, especially when documenting the "person involved" portion of this screen.