

Feed More Kids for School Lunch Success:

Fruits and Vegetables

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You can get more kids to eat at school and earn more money for your program! Read how it is being done in some California

schools by increasing the **fruits** and **vegetables** served with school meals.

What are your big dreams for the school meals you offer? Make a plan and work with others so you can make these dreams come true. Start with small changes and soon you will have made a big change!

Fruits and Vegetables

Why More Fruits and Vegetables?

Parents always say, “Eat your fruits and vegetables, they are good for you.” It’s true! Fresh produce has so many good nutrients that the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* urges us to eat about 4 cups of fruits and vegetables every day. Yet only about half of children eat even one serving (about ½ cup) of fruits and vegetables each day. It’s time to make a change so that students are better prepared to excel in school.

Eating a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables is important to good health now and in the future. Here’s why:

- **Key nutrients.**

Fruits and vegetables are loaded with key vitamins and minerals, including vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, and potassium.

- **Disease prevention.**

Diets rich in fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as stroke, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer.

- **Healthy weight.**

Kids can fight obesity by eating flavorful, low-calorie fruits and vegetables instead of high-fat and processed-sugar snacks.

Appearance and Menu Matter

To boost the eye appeal of school meals, serve fruits and vegetables in a variety of creative and appetizing ways. We all eat with our eyes first. If food looks good, we’ll taste it. If it tastes good, we’ll eat it.

MYTH

Kids don’t like fruits and vegetables—I can’t change that!

FACT

Kids will eat fruits and vegetables when they are prepared and presented in an appealing way.

- **Keep meals colorful.**

Offer different types of fresh produce every day as a part of colorful menus.

- **Perk up the packaging.**

Place colorful, cut produce in clear cups so the beautiful colors shine through.

- **Focus on fresh.**

Serve fresh whenever you can. Fresh produce has brighter colors and more variety in texture.

- **Tempt them with taste.**

Conduct taste tests to learn what students like to eat. Reflect their preferences in your meal programs.

- **Take fruits and vegetables to the customer.**

Many high schools have successfully gone to the food-court-style operation or use satellite carts, kiosks, cafés, walk-up windows, and vending machines.

Example: Elk Grove Unified School District staff promote fruits and vegetables in cafeterias and classrooms. Their Harvest Bar of Choices offers a fresh fruit, fresh vegetable, fruit juice, cooked vegetable, and canned or dried fruit. Each prepackaged fruit or vegetable is served in its own colored tub that displays a picture to advertise the day’s selection, helping to shorten long lines. The Harvest of the Month program



helps teachers include nutrition education and food grown in school gardens in classroom lessons. Workshops for teachers show how nutrition education can be aligned with the academic standards.

Create Salad Bars

Fruits and vegetables are fun “show stoppers” on a salad bar or on a plate with their dazzling array of colors, sizes, shapes, textures, and tastes. Today’s kids are familiar with salads-to-go and salad bars from the restaurants they visit.

MYTH | Salad bars are not worth the effort.

FACT | Salad bars prepared and set up right are a great way to get kids to eat more fruits and vegetables and increase participation in your school lunch program.

Here are a few ideas about how to start and market a salad bar at your school:

- **Increase variety.**
Offer a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Conduct taste tests of new fruits and vegetables and feature those most accepted.
- **Plan menus carefully.**
Follow the basic menu planning principles: offer variety and choice, add texture and color, and balance nutrient standards.
- **Train your staff.**
Discuss how to:
 - ◆ Receive, store, and prepare produce for the salad bar.
 - ◆ Take accurate meal counts.
 - ◆ Encourage students to make healthful, balanced selections (choosing a variety of foods) and to follow good etiquette.



- **Advertise and promote.**

Post the salad bar menu in the cafeteria, classrooms, and teachers’ lounge. Inform the principal, teachers, students, parents, and custodial and food service staff about the new salad bar.

- **Monitor results.**

Request feedback from everyone, especially students. Keep track of costs and compare to benefits. Be flexible and make changes when needed.

Example: Since 1997 Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District has had a Farmers’ Market Salad Bar, where the produce comes from the local farmers’ market. The fruits and vegetables are high quality and fresh. Students can choose either the salad bar or the hot lunch entrée. One-third of the students choose the salad bar. Students make healthful choices and meet school lunch requirements with the help of a salad bar coordinator. Student visits to the farmers’ market, nutrition education in the classroom, and school gardens are also part of the program. For example, students plant lettuce in the gardens

throughout the year. If their lettuce is used on their school salad bar, they receive a free salad bar lunch.

The district received a start-up grant for the program, but now food and nutrition services staff develop and manage the budget to include the salad bar program. They receive the same reimbursement for all meals served at the salad bar.

Expose Kids to New Foods

Serving fruits and vegetables offers an opportunity to get students excited about school meals. By adding even one fruit each day to their meals, children are far more likely to meet their nutritional needs and to develop healthful, life-long eating patterns.

MYTH | Kids only like the old standbys—carrots, corn, apples, and oranges.

FACT | The more exposure that kids have to a variety of fruits and vegetables, the more likely they will try them.

- **Use monthly promotions.**

Fruit and vegetable promotions, such as Harvest of the Month, can feature produce that is new to your students.

- **Connect with the classroom.**

Recruit teachers to conduct taste tests and lessons about the fruit or vegetable’s history, growing patterns, and cultural uses.



- **Grow it in the garden.**

Work with the teachers and students to harvest, prepare, and feature school-grown foods in your program. If you do not have a garden, look into creating one.

Example: Riverside Unified School District staff encourage student participation in their all-you-can-eat salad bar program in different ways: tours to local farmers and farmers' markets, physical activities for students while they visit school gardens, cooking classes with farmers, and nutrition lessons in many classrooms. The district markets the salad bar program to parents at back-to-school nights and PTA meetings by giving them the opportunity to see, taste, and experience the salad bar. Overall, the salad bar has reduced the cost of a traditional school lunch from \$0.98 to \$0.58—making up for the initial investment. Since the introduction of the salad bar program, the school lunch program participation has increased by 13 percent.

Look for Partners

Many programs throughout California and the United States help schools successfully incorporate fruits and vegetables into their meal programs. Take advantage of their help and use their creative buying ideas.

MYTH | Fresh fruits and vegetables cost too much to serve regularly.

FACT | With careful planning and creative purchasing, you can stay within your budget.

- **Farm-to-school programs.**

By working with local farmers and farmers' markets, schools receive products closer to harvest time and at bulk rates while supporting the local economy.

- **Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Program.**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has established a partnership with the DoD, which uses a network of produce suppliers to distribute produce items to schools.

- **School/district purchasing co-ops.**

Increase your buying power, attract more bidders, and receive more competitive prices by joining with other school districts to coordinate purchases of fruits and vegetables.

Example: Ventura Unified School District staff use a farm-to-school program to procure their fruits and vegetables. Commodity money is used to purchase meal entrees; cash is used to purchase produce.

Resources

- *Fruits and Vegetables Galore*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/meal_appeal.pdf
- Harvest of the Month
<http://www.harvestofthemonth.com>
- Department of Defense Fresh Program
<http://www.dscp.dla.mil/subs/produce/school/index.asp>
- California School Garden Network
<http://www.csgn.org>
- Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)
<http://www.caff.org>
- Elk Grove Unified School District
Ann Gaffney, (916) 686-7735, ext. 7863
- Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District
Dona Richwine, (310) 450-8338, ext. 259
- Riverside Unified School District
Rodney Taylor, (951) 352-6740, ext. 110
- Ventura Unified School District
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