

RIVERSIDE CREATES CULINARY HARMONY

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

Riverside Unified School District (RUSD) is located in Southern California in Riverside County. The district operates forty-nine transitional kindergarten-through-twelfth grade schools serving 40,049 students of which 72 percent were eligible for free and reduced-price school meals during the 2022–2023 school year.

ACTIVITIES

- Sourced local radishes through a partnership with Black Sheep Farms
- Hosted recipe taste-testing opportunities with students
- Provided nutrition education through school-based garden education and booths at community events
- Provided professional development through the California Department of Education's (CDE's) recipe standardization workshops

“The partnership between Riverside Unified School District and Black Sheep Farms was instrumental in broadening students' horizons and cultivating a genuine appreciation for local farming practices”

Ginko Lueder, Nutrition Specialist,
Riverside Unified School District

LOCAL INGREDIENTS

The Spicy Tuna Fusion Bowl recipe featured local radishes as well as romaine lettuce. Local ingredients were paired with brown sushi rice, spicy canned tuna, fresh carrots, jalapeño peppers, and cucumbers for the finished recipe.

RECIPE DEVELOPMENT

RUSD chose an Asian fusion recipe to honor the Asian culture and food traditions of many members of their school community. This decision successfully fostered a deeper connection between students, nutrition services staff, and the local agricultural community, all while promoting healthy school meals and engaging students in the culinary experience.

Five culinary classes at RUSD's Ramona High School participated in an extensive taste-testing session. RUSD encouraged students to provide feedback on various aspects, including appearance, taste, and spice level. Their responses exceeded expectations initial expectations, with 150 students submitting surveys yielding an 81% approval rating.



Spicy Tuna Fusion Bowls in serving cups

The students offered invaluable feedback, including culinary advice! One student commented, "I like how you can see every one of the ingredients in the display, which is good," while another pointed out, "If you boil the rice, then refrigerate it, the rice will come out cold and dry, and overall cause the dish to fail."

RUSD adjusted the recipe based on the students' survey results and feedback. To increase the spice level, they incorporated more sriracha and fresh jalapeño. The rice preparation was modified to be cooked the same day of service and chilled in an ice bath to maintain its desired texture.

When RUSD conducted the taste-test once again, they were happy to see a significant boost in student satisfaction, resulting in an impressive 92 percent approval rating, with 68 of the 74 students rating it highly. The newly developed recipe, incorporating Black Sheep Farms' produce, was featured on a promotional poster with a Quick Response code strategically placed near the lunch line.

One valuable lesson learned was the importance of involving students during the early stages of the development process. In hindsight, the RUSD child nutrition team realized it would have been beneficial to survey several students before establishing connections with local farmers. Moving forward, RUSD has decided to continue incorporating student input to create a more student-centered and collaborative approach to menu development.

The Spicy Tuna Fusion Bowl evolved into a triumph, thanks to the invaluable contributions of Ramona High School students, whose opinions and preferences were at the heart of their journey.

NUTRITION EDUCATION

In partnership with RUSD, Black Sheep Farms hosted two educational booths at RUSD community events reaching over a thousand community members and giving students and their families a deeper understanding of the origins of their food.



Ginko Lueder interacting with students at the "You are Enough" event

RUSD also served as a peer leader to other districts developing standardized recipes and was instrumental in developing the standardized recipe training workshops they attended.

Riverside Unified School District

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Recipe: Spicy Tuna Fusion Bowl



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