

SAN LUIS COASTAL SUPPORTS SUSTAINABILITY

ABOUT THE DISTRICT

San Luis Coastal Unified School District (SLCUSD) is located in California's Central Coast in San Luis Obispo County. The district operates 15 transitional kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade schools serving 7,801 students, of which 33.7 percent were eligible for free and reduced-price meals in the 2022–2023 school year. SLCUSD believes that teaching students about where their food comes from while building respect for the local food system is critical for the future of our planet.

ACTIVITIES

- Sourced local red lentils, wheat buns, and spices for a new vegetarian lentil burger
- Engaged students in recipe taste-testing events
- Offered cooking and nutrition education classes for culinary students
- Provided professional development activities through culinary workshops and the California Department of Education's (CDE's) recipe standardization workshops

LOCAL INGREDIENTS

SLCUSD's Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Erin Primer, recognizes the great importance of building partnerships with local growers, producers, and business owners within the school community. Sourcing local foods for use in school nutrition programs is not only an investment in local communities and families but it is also an act of environmental stewardship. For their Thai Basil Lentil Burger, SLCUSD sourced the red lentils locally from Kandarian Organic Farm, the whole wheat bun from Edna's Bakery, and the spices from Spice of Life.

RECIPE DEVELOPMENT

SLCUSD created a Thai Basil Lentil Burger standardized recipe for their lunch school menu. The entree built on students' interest in having more plant-forward menu options that use local ingredients. The Thai Basil Lentil Burger recipe is similar to a veggie burger but with a complex combination of red lentils, Thai basil, cilantro, and spices such as garlic, ginger and curry powder. The addition of crunchy, house-made coleslaw, and sliced, green, tart apples packed a punch of flavors that delighted students' palettes.

In June 2022, SLCUSD conducted the first taste-test with 1st-4th graders participating in the summer meal program. Of those 43 students, 70 percent either loved it or liked it. SLCUSD then revised the recipe and used a sweet potato with orange flesh instead of a sweet potato with white flesh because the original recipe was too dry and crumbly.

SLCUSD conducted the next taste-test the following month and with older students in grades 5-12. SLCUSD also offered samples to all summer experience students who participated in the summer meal programs. SLCUSD set up a table with tasting trays and stickers for students to vote. The results of this taste-test were an 86 percent acceptance rating among the 206 students.



The Thai Basil Lentil Burger

Getting the recipe just right wasn't easy, but staff training and having the right, easy-to-use tools were critical to success. In fact, the final recipe was such a success that the team served it during a dinner they hosted for California's First Partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, where it was a fine example of a tasty, sustainably sourced school meal!

NUTRITION EDUCATION

For two summers, SLCUSD taste-tested new recipes with students engaged in the Summer Experience Culinary Program. During 2022, the students participated in hands-on taste-testing and culinary experiences, this time focusing on the Thai Basil Lentil Burger. Students were able to grow the unique and flavorful Thai Basil in the school garden, which extended the connection of garden to classroom and cafeteria. Inspired by experiences at the CDE's professional development training, SLCUSD worked with a local spice shop, Spice of Life in Paso Robles, to create mini tasting kits for the culinary students to explore.



Minced garlic, fragrant basil and cilantro, shredded sweet potatoes, rolled oats, and local organic red lentils combine to make the Thai Basil Lentil Burger patty

The kits included several whole spices such as cardamom, peppercorn, coriander, cumin, turmeric, ginger, and cinnamon. The students were guided through a sensory activity to see, touch, and smell each of the spices. Many of the students had never seen these spices in their whole form. Partnering with local businesses further connected students to where food comes from and how it gets to the plate!

The students also discovered that the red lentils were grown at Kandarian Organic Farm in Los Osos, California, which is located just 10 minutes away from the central kitchen where the lentil burgers are made. Farmer Larry made classroom and cafeteria visits offering an "Ask a Farmer" presentation. Students also learned about the power of pulses, their nutritional benefits, and the variety of delicious types to try, including lentils of all colors-red, brown, green, yellow, and even black, and of course, that these superfoods were tasty, affordable, and sustainable.



San Luis Coastal Unified School District

www.facebook.com/SLCUSD/

[@slcusd](https://www.facebook.com/SLCUSD/)

Recipe: Thai Basil Lentil Burger



This publication was created with funding from a 2021 U.S. Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition Grant awarded to the Nutrition Services Division (NSD) of the California Department of Education (CDE). The CDE awarded subgrants to school districts to develop standardized recipes and share their success stories. The CDE is an equal opportunity employer.

