

## STARCHY VEGETABLE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL MEALS: CLOSER TO CURRENT MEALS THAN YOU THINK

- The Institute of Medicine’s *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children* report recommends that revised standards for Federally-funded school meals should limit the service of potatoes and other starchy vegetables at lunch to no more than one cup per week.
- These limits are reflected in USDA’s proposed rule to update school meals nutrition standards. Some have raised concerns that these limits would result in dramatic reductions in the amount of such vegetables that can be used in school meals, with a related increase in cost as other, more expensive foods are substituted.
- However, data from the latest School Nutrition Dietary Assessment, which examined the nutritional content of school meals during school year 2004-2005, shows that most elementary schools are already offering and serving amounts of starchy vegetables that are near or below the limits recommended by IOM:

Amount offered* at lunch, per week	MEAN			MEDIAN		
	Grades K - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades K - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Starchy Vegetables – total (cups)	0.81	0.98	1.41	0.71	0.92	1.28
Potatoes (cups)	0.52	0.68	0.93	0.43	0.52	0.90
Other Starchy Vegetables (cups)	0.29	0.30	0.48	0.21	0.25	0.31

Amount served* at lunch, per week	MEAN			MEDIAN		
	Grades K - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12	Grades K - 5	Grades 6 - 8	Grades 9 - 12
Starchy Vegetables – total (cups)	.86	1.18	1.44	.78	1.09	1.47
Potatoes (cups)	.61	.95	1.12	.54	.73	1.03
Other Starchy Vegetables (cups)	.25	.24	.32	.18	.17	.21

\*Note that the differences between offered and served reflect the fact that each of the vegetable varieties offered on a given day is given equal weight in counting the quantities offered. But amounts served reflect student choice, which may tend towards starchy vegetables more frequently than other options.

- While high schools are, on average, exceeding the IOM-recommended limits, these schools account for only about 20% of the students that receive meals supported by the programs. To the extent that there is an impact in the use of starchy vegetables, our data suggests that it may be quite limited overall.
- USDA is working to finalize the rule now. It is our goal to prepare a final rule that meets our commitment to develop science-based nutrition standards that are practical for schools and reinforce the healthy eating habits that begin at home.