



USDA Foods: Healthy Choices for Our Schools

Nutritious food is essential to a healthy life. The USDA Foods program provides our Nation's school children with nutritious, safe, appealing, and 100-percent American-grown food.

USDA leads the way in fostering healthy kids by:

- » Ensuring the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs meet strong nutrition standards,
- » Using the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to direct food offerings and programs,
- » Participating in the *Let's Move!* initiative,
- » Developing and implementing the *HealthierUS School Challenge* (HUSCC), and
- » Offering nutritious USDA Foods, which help provide healthy school meals.

Our youth rely on USDA. More than half of all school children (nearly 32 million) participate in USDA's National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

For many of these children, the food they receive in school is their primary source of nutrition. Today's students need wholesome food more than ever – over 17 million American children live in food-insecure households and one in three children is considered overweight or obese. USDA's efforts help create the healthy school environment needed to ensure our children are engaged and productive learners.

Serving Up Nutritious Options

The USDA Foods program helps improve the nutritional value of school meals by offering more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains than ever before. Not only do these healthy foods taste good, but they are also lower in sugar, salt, and fat.

- » **Fruits and Vegetables:** Over \$326 million in canned, fresh, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables was purchased for schools through the USDA Foods program and the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in Fiscal Year 2010.
- » **Whole Grains:** USDA offers many whole-grain options including quick-cooking brown rice, rolled oats, whole-grain dry kernel corn, whole-wheat flour, and whole-grain pancakes, pastas, and tortillas.
- » **Sugar:** USDA canned fruits are packed in extra light sucrose syrup or slightly sweetened fruit juice; and all applesauce is unsweetened.
- » **Sodium:** USDA has reduced sodium in all canned beans and vegetables to 140 mg per serving. This greatly exceeds the Food and Drug Administration's "healthy" labeling standard for sodium



The Right Choice for Our Schools

To help ensure that America's children receive the healthy food they deserve, the USDA Foods program:

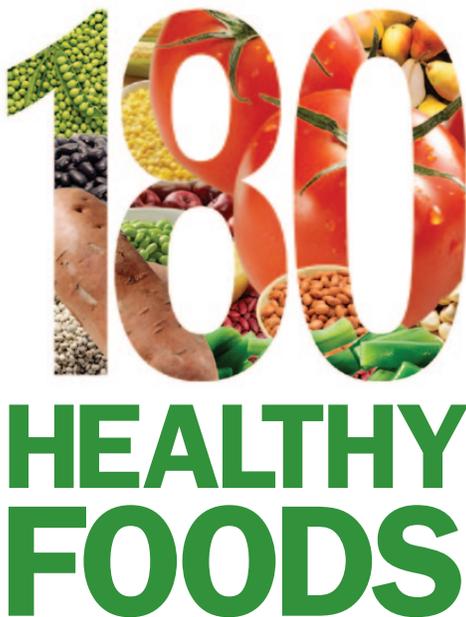
- » Makes up approximately 15 to 20 percent of the food served in each school lunch.
- » Provides a variety of healthy food choices, including fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, dairy, and grains.
- » Includes a selection of more than 180 nutritious food items—fresh, frozen, packaged, canned, dried, and bulk.
- » Meets rigorous food safety standards set by Federal regulatory agencies and USDA's two purchasing agencies – the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Farm Service Agency.



(480 mg per serving) and is in line with the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommendation to reduce salt intake. Frozen vegetables with no added salt are also available.

- » *Fat:* Low-fat meats and lean poultry products, as well as fat-free potato wedges, are available to schools. Shortening and butter were eliminated long ago from school purchasing options.

The improved nutritional value of USDA Foods will help support USDA's strengthened school meal standards and continue to reflect current nutrition science and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.



“Over the years, [USDA Foods] have become increasingly more nutritious. Improved quality and appeal has led to greater use of these products by schools.”

–Alliance for a Healthier Generation

Schools Get Creative With USDA Foods

Schools are choosing to use USDA Foods in more healthful ways. Many schools have eliminated fried foods and have opted to convert USDA Foods into lower fat, lower sodium menu items that children still find tasty. For example, schools can process USDA bulk chicken into unbreaded, roasted pieces rather than the traditionally fried version.

More and more, USDA's whole-grain products are featured on school menus. Stir-frys using USDA quick-cooking brown rice, sandwich wraps with USDA whole-grain tortillas, and USDA whole-grain pasta and vegetables are popular menu offerings. Schools can top USDA's whole-grain rotini with USDA's low-sodium spaghetti sauce and use whole-wheat flour for breadsticks.

These innovative changes are taking place across the country. More and more, the 101,000 schools and institutions that participate in the National School Lunch Program are thinking creatively about how to serve healthful options that kids will enjoy.

What Can You Do?

Spread the word about the nutritional benefits of school meals and the healthy food available through the USDA Foods program by:

- » Planning events such as taste tests at assemblies or health fairs;
- » Including messages in school newsletters and Web sites, or on the back of lunch menus;
- » Teaching your students about the importance of nutrition using USDA Foods; and
- » Partnering with teachers in your school to develop nutrition education lesson plans.



For more information on USDA Foods resources to help plan healthy and tasty meals, visit www.fns.usda.gov/USDAFoods.