

FIVE REASONS POTATOES BELONG IN SCHOOL MEALS

The USDA's proposed rule is based on faulty science and is misguided policy

On January 13, 2011, the USDA issued a proposed rule on mandatory meal plans in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. Specifically, the rule would limit the total number of servings of starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, green peas, and lima beans) to one cup per week. It also would eliminate these vegetables from breakfast altogether. These arbitrary recommendations are not based on sound nutrition science and contradict the recently published 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This proposal would likely have serious unintended consequences for the most vulnerable Americans—children.

Five important reasons

Here are five important reasons why potatoes should be kept in schools:

1. Potatoes fill unmet nutritional needs.

Potatoes contain key nutrients currently consumed in inadequate amounts by Americans—especially children—including potassium and fiber.

- ✓ The recently published 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans identified four “nutrients of concern”—nutrients most likely to be consumed by both adults and children in amounts low enough to be of concern. These nutrients included potassium and fiber.
- ✓ Few fruits or vegetables contain the levels of potassium that potatoes do. In fact, a medium potato (5.3 oz with the skin) is not only a good source of potassium, but contains significantly more potassium (200mg more) than its nearest rival, the banana.
- ✓ One serving of a potato has as much fiber as broccoli and provides 13 percent of the Daily Value.

2. Research shows that eating potatoes at school lunch will result in kids eating more vegetables.

Potatoes do not crowd out other nutritious choices and are a true gateway vegetable.

- ✓ The USDA believes replacing potatoes in school meals will force children to consume a wider variety of vegetables.
- ✓ This is faulty logic. A study by Dr. Adam Drenowski, accepted for presentation at the 2011 *Experimental Biology Meeting*, evaluated whether consumption of white potatoes (baked, roasted, or boiled) displaced other vegetables from the meals of children and adolescents aged 4-18 years old. The results showed school children, whose weekday lunches included baked, roasted or boiled potatoes, consumed significantly more servings of other vegetables at lunch.

3. Kids like potatoes and it's a win-win when they benefit from the key nutrients potatoes provide.

At a time when all Americans, especially kids, are not eating enough vegetables, we should be encouraging more choices, not less.

- ✓ Every major Federal public health nutrition program encourages increased vegetable intake. Taking away a vegetables kids like reduces vegetable consumption and key nutrient intake.
- ✓ Dr. Drenowski's findings also confirmed that meals containing potatoes had significantly higher amounts of potassium and fiber per 1,000 calories than meals that did not contain potatoes.



4. Potatoes are affordable and provide a significant nutritional “return on investment.”

Potatoes are economical and keeping them on the menu will help ease the financial burden being placed on school budgets.

- ✓ Potatoes are a nutrient powerhouse offering 13% of a child’s daily potassium needs for less than 5 cents per serving. Encouraging schools to provide more vegetables is good policy; however school budgets are already tight. It is important for schools to provide vegetables that offer the greatest nutritional value.
- ✓ USDA estimates the proposed meal plan will increase school lunch cost \$6.8 billion over the course of five years. A significant part of this cost increase is due to the limit on potatoes.
- ✓ In addition, potatoes, along with carrots and sweet potatoes, offered the highest score per dollar on nine important nutrients—potassium, fiber, protein, calcium, iron, magnesium, and vitamins A, C, and E. Potatoes also were found to be the lowest cost source of potassium.

5. Removing potatoes from the school meal plate will increase cost and plate waste.

Replacing potatoes with other less popular foods will thwart efforts aimed at reducing waste, decreasing cost, and providing healthy meals for our nation’s kids.

- ✓ The rule will increase the likelihood of kids taking and not eating the vegetables that would replace potatoes.
- ✓ In fact, a recent survey of school foodservice directors and nutritionists—experts on the front lines—confirmed the new ruling would increase the amount of food kids throw in the trash.
- ✓ Similarly, over half (54%) of those surveyed believe the rule will drive up their food service costs, and will NOT have any impact on the health of the students being fed through the school lunch program.

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