

# Voices from the Nation's Cafeterias

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A new survey of school district food service directors found that a majority are concerned about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) proposed rules on school meals and the effects it would have on costs, variety and health.

The USDA oversees the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) and has a mandate to ensure school meals are in line with current Dietary Guidelines for Americans.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the USDA released proposed regulations for changes to the NSLP and SBP,<sup>2</sup> which were

based largely on a report issued by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) in 2010.<sup>3</sup> The USDA's *Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs* received more than 130,000 comments, and the USDA expects to release the final rule by the end of 2011.

## School Meals Already Rock

The proposed USDA regulations on school meals would limit the amount of times certain vegetables, such as potatoes, corn, lima beans and peas could be served. Under the proposed rules, ½ cup of starchy vegetables can be served up to 2 times per week – that's one **total** cup of potatoes **and/or** corn **and/or** lima beans **and/or** peas.

Without a doubt, a varied diet is good for health. But according to the district school food service directors surveyed, serving a variety of healthy vegetables is already the norm in most school cafeterias.<sup>4</sup>

## Kids Need More Vegetables, Not Limits on Vegetables

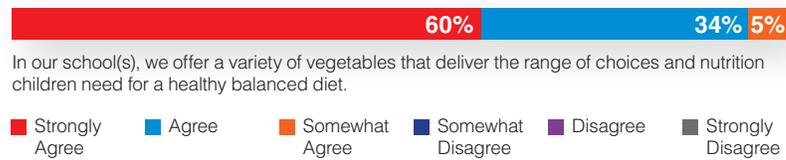
At a time in which 90 percent of children are not getting enough vegetables,<sup>5</sup> limiting vegetables like potatoes, corn and peas in schools does not make any sense. And school food service directors and managers agree. Only 5 percent of school district food service directors believe that the proposed USDA rules will increase the quality of children's overall health and **40 percent believe that the quality of children's health would decrease if the recommendation were adopted.**<sup>4</sup>

## Response from School Food Service Directors on USDA's Proposed Rules on School Lunches

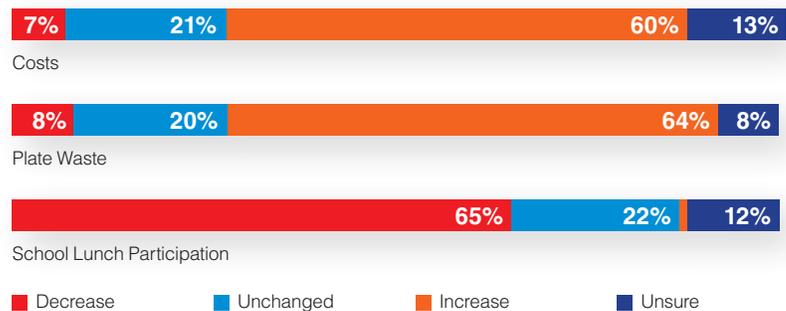
### On Improving Kids' Health



### On Increased Variety



### On Impact to Schools



### School Lunch Participation



The survey of district school food service directors also found that:<sup>4</sup>

- 60 percent expect costs to increase
- 64 percent anticipate increased plate waste
- 65 percent believe that the rules will result in decreased school lunch participation

At a time in which vegetable consumption is low and the need for critical nutrients such as potassium and fiber is high,<sup>6</sup> getting nutritious foods into children's stomachs is school food service directors' top priority.

## The Power of the Potato

At 110 calories per serving, a baked potato is a fat-free, sodium-free nutritional powerhouse contributing 22 nutrients to the diet, and provides 75 percent more potassium than a banana and a similar amount of fiber to a serving of broccoli.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, **9 out of 10 potatoes served in schools are baked, boiled, mashed or otherwise prepared without a fryer.**<sup>4</sup>

In fact, school district food service directors report that **only 11 percent of their school kitchens have fryers.**<sup>4</sup> So-called “French fries” on lunch menus are now typically oven-baked and contain between 80 and 110 calories per ½ cup serving.

Not only do potatoes provide essential nutrients, but baked potatoes can serve as the foundation for a healthy entrée. Salad bars and potato bars have sprouted up in schools across the country as foodservice directors search for innovative ways to balance independent choice, nutrition and taste.

Students frequenting school food service baked potato bars top their potatoes with nutritious foods including a lean protein such as beans or chicken, other vegetables such as broccoli and tomatoes, lowfat or reduced fat cheese, or vegetarian chili.

Easy to pair with other nutrient-dense vegetables and proteins, fun to eat and nutritious, potatoes are a favorite vegetable for students and school food service directors alike.

## The Role Potatoes Play in School Food Service Operations



Baked and mashed potatoes can be a “center of plate food” that encourages kids to eat other nutrient dense foods



Potatoes can be used to introduce kids to other types of vegetables



Potatoes are kids’ favorite vegetable



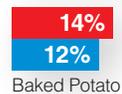
### Percentages of Potato Types Served on the Lunch Line and A La Carte Line



Baked French Fries, Wedges or Tater Tots



Mashed (from a dehydrated mix)



Baked Potato



Roasted



Deep Fried French Fries



Mashed (from fresh potatoes)



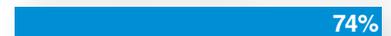
Boiled

Other

### Baked Potato Bars Feature a Number of Low/Reduced Fat and Nutrient Dense Toppings



Low or reduced fat cheese



Low or reduced fat sour cream



Vegetables, such as tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, or spinach



Butter/Margarine



A protein, such as chicken, pork, or beef



Meat-based chili



Vegetarian chili

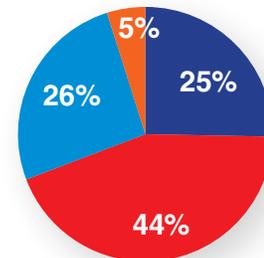
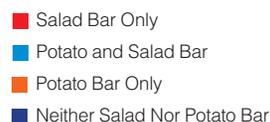


Other



Gravy

### Percent of School Districts with Salad Bars and Baked Potato Bars



## References

- Section 9(a)(4) and 9(f)(1) of the NSLA (42U.S.C. 1758(a)(4) and (f)(1)).
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- U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010.
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