



Consumer Focus

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National School Lunch Program: USDA makes permanent meat and grain serving flexibilities

Agriculture Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services Kevin Concannon announced Jan. 2 that USDA would make permanent the current flexibility that allows schools to serve larger portions of lean protein and whole grains at mealtime.

Based on public feedback

“Earlier this school year, USDA made a commitment to school nutrition professionals that we would make the meat and grain flexibility permanent and provide needed stability for long-term planning. We have delivered on that promise,” Concannon said.

USDA has worked closely with schools and parents during the transition to healthier breakfasts, lunches and snacks. Based on public feedback, USDA has made a number of updates to school meal standards, including additional flexibility in meeting the daily and weekly ranges for grain and meat/meat alternates, which have been available to schools on a temporary basis since 2012.

USDA is focused on improving childhood nutrition and empowering families to make healthier food choices by providing science-based information and advice, while expanding the availability of healthy food.

Data show that the vast majority of schools around the country are successfully meeting the new meal standards.

- Last month, USDA awarded \$11 million in grants to help schools purchase needed equipment to make preparing and serving healthier meals easier and more efficient for hardworking school foodservice professionals.
- In November 2013, USDA issued an additional \$5 million through the Farm to School grant program to increase the amount of healthy, local food in schools. USDA awarded grants to 71 projects spanning 42 states and the District of Columbia.
- USDA awarded \$5.6 million in grants in FY 2013 to provide training and technical assistance for child nutrition foodservice professionals and support stronger school nutrition education programs, and plans to award additional grants in FY 2014.



► USDA's MyPlate symbol and the resources at [Choose MyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov) provide quick, easy reference tools for teachers, parents, healthcare professionals and communities. Schools across the country are using the MyPlate symbol to enhance their nutrition education efforts.

Collectively, these policies and actions will help combat child hunger and obesity and improve the health and nutrition of the nation's children. This is a top priority for the Obama administration and is an important component of First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative to combat the challenge of childhood obesity.

Legislative, public concerns

The announcement was welcomed by school nutrition professionals, parents, schoolchildren and Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.) and Mark Pryor (D-Ark.), authors of the Sensible School Lunch Act, introduced in December 2012. In a release from his office, Sen. Hoeven said, “Today (Jan. 2), the USDA made the permanent changes we have been seeking to the school lunch program. A one-size-fits-all approach to the school lunch left students hungry and school districts frustrated with the additional expense, paperwork and nutritional research necessary to meet federal requirements. These are exactly the changes included in our Sensible School Lunch Act.”

The USDA informed Hoeven Jan. 2 that it plans to publish a final rule in the Jan. 3 *Federal Register* on Certification of Compliance with Meal Requirements for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. Under the final rule, schools will be considered compliant with the new meal requirements if they meet the weekly minimums for grain and meat/meat alternatives, as well as the total calorie range.

The original guidelines limited total meat/meat alternative to 10-12 ounces (oz.) per week for high-school students, with smaller portions for younger students. The guidelines were initiated to limit fat and salt, reduce portion sizes, and increase fruit and vegetable servings. Initial reactions to the guidelines included a video parody created by students at Wallace County High School in Sharon Springs, Kan., titled *We Are Hungry*. The video, which went viral, was based on a song by the band FUN. titled *We Are Young*. (See the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=do3Se8owzLY.)

Hoeven and Pryor said their effort was prompted by numerous correspondences from parents, school board members, superintendents, and other concerned community members expressing their frustration as the new rule was rolled out. The rule became effective in March 2012 and was implemented for the 2013 school year. The senators got the agency to lift its strict limitations on caloric intake of grains and starches, as well as protein, but only for the 2012-2013 school year. The move gave significantly more flexibility to schools and students, especially athletes.

Senators John Thune (R-S.D.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Daniel Coats (R-Ind.), Angus King (I-Maine), Tom Udall (D-N.M.), James Inhofe (R-Okla.), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.), and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) co-sponsored the Sensible School Lunch Act.

More information about the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 is available in a November 2013 article that appeared in the *Angus Journal*. Find it online at www.angusjournal.com/ArticlePDF/School%20Lunch%2011.13.pdf.

