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# Food & Nutrition

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1985

October 1985 Volume 15 Number 4

★ Winning With ★

## SCHOOL LUNCH





Winning With



# SCHOOL LUNCH

## Some Advice From Three School Food Service Stars...

One of the highest honors in the food service industry is the Silver Plate Award, given annually by the International Food Service Manufacturers' Association.

Every year there are eight Silver Plate winners—one in each of eight categories, including a category for elementary and secondary schools. From these eight, a Gold Plate winner, or Food Service Operator of the Year, is selected.

Winners are chosen not only for their management skills, but also for the training and career development opportunities they give their employees, their participation in professional food service organizations, and their contributions to civic, charitable, and educational activities in their communities.

Competing for the award are the very best food service managers from the nation's restaurants, hotels, resorts, hospitals, public and private institutions, corporations, schools, universities, and colleges.

This year's Gold Plate winner is a school food service director—former American School Food Service Association president Betty Bender of Dayton, Ohio.

The award is a personal achievement for Bender—she is the first woman to receive the Gold Plate Award since 1968 and the second school food service director ever to receive it. Her award is also a tribute to the professionalism of school food service, proving that school food service managers are facing and tackling the same tough challenges as food service professionals everywhere.

### Some advice from the pros

In putting together this special school lunch issue, we began by asking Betty Bender and two other recent Silver Plate winners—Charles Tutt, school food service director for Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Shirley Watkins, director of food and nutrition services for Memphis City Schools, Memphis, Tennessee—their advice on building successful school lunch programs.

While some of their specific suggestions varied, their overall message was the same: Know your customers and involve them in your programs. Give them lots of choices and help them develop skills that will allow them to choose well. Serve attractive food in a pleasant, non-institutional setting. And keep an eye on the competition.

Some of the biggest changes in school food service in recent years are the result of what's been going on outside the school lunchroom. With the growth of the fast food industry, school food service managers have found themselves in stiff competition with slick advertising, fancy food displays, and split-second service. Even in schools where kids cannot leave school grounds for the restaurant down the street, the impact of the fast food revolution is felt.

### The importance of variety and choice

"When I first came here," says Betty Bender, "we offered only one menu and that was what we served and that was that. Those days are long gone. Today kids like to have some say as to what you're going to put into your cafeteria, and they like to have choices as they go through the line.

"With all the advertising and the fast food restaurants that are available, and with families eating out, you find that your young customers

are quite selective in their choice of foods, and they have very definite ideas."

For a generation accustomed to choice, variety is a must. Bender, Tutt, and Watkins all offer salad bars and have one or more other specialty bars, offering such varied fare as deli food, soup and sandwiches, pasta, and Mexican food.

"We've gone to multiple choices of entrees," says Tutt. "Every day in all of our schools we have pizza, and we have tacos. In the elementary schools, we also have hot dogs.

"Plus, we offer a special of the day—districtwide. It is the more traditional school lunch—for example, spaghetti and meat sauce, french bread, tossed salad, green beans and fruits that go along with the entree of the day.

"Another thing we do is offer three different ¼-cup servings of fruits and vegetables instead of the traditional ½ cup of vegetables and ¼ cup of fruit. This gives the kids more variety to choose from."

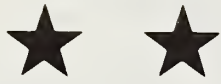
"Offer versus serve," a plan that allows students to take three, four, or all five lunch components, reinforces the concept of choice, since children are no longer forced to take food they do not want to eat.

### Getting kids involved helps

Along with more choices on the serving line, the three award winners also give students a chance to get involved early on in menu planning through taste tests and advisory panels.

This past spring, for example, Watkins had students taste test foods to help determine what items the food service staff would buy for the first half of the coming school year. Keeping tuned in to what kids want is not only helpful, she says, it's essential.

"In the past 10 years we've tried to identify and recognize what



children wanted and we've tried to provide that. Of course, I think the thing that has changed the eating habits of children is the fast food restaurants. Children are now looking for foods they can hold in their hands.

"But I'm not certain that this might not have been true all along. It's just that we were not astute enough at that point to find substitute items for them or to ask them before we planned the menu what they'd like to have.

"As a child, I always liked a sandwich, so maybe kids' tastes haven't changed that much. We just had to change to recognize that. I think we found out we'd better ask them or our programs would go down the drain."

Does giving kids what they want mean compromising nutritional quality? Not if it's done right, the three food service directors agree.

"I'd rather see a child eating good nutritious fast food on a daily basis than eating junk food every day," says Tutt. "We put out good, healthy products for the kids. The taco, for example, has cheese and lettuce, meat and bread product with it. And you can't find a more nutritious product than pizza. It's got a little bit of everything in it.

"The way we offer this program, what kids take, they eat. I think that's a lot better than the old program we had years ago where 20 percent of the food ended up in the trash can. We've got only 2 percent waste now, and I don't think it's that high."

Some of the new favorites are simply variations on traditional school lunch items. Instead of baked chicken or chicken tetrazzini, for example, kids are going for chicken nuggets or breast of chicken patties. "These are high protein items," says Watkins, "so children are still getting the needed nutrients."

More difficult than planning bal-



Many schools now feature specialty food bars, like this salad bar in an Illinois high school.



anced meals with the new foods is keeping up with the latest trends. "The challenge for us," says Watkins, "is keeping up with what kids *think* they want. An item that's hot today may not be hot in 6 months, so it's up to us to constantly seek out things on the market and find out what our competitors are offering children."

### **There's more to lunch than food**

Part of what their competitors are offering children is a non-institutional, pleasant place to eat. While school food service directors don't usually have the freedom or the resources to make dining areas what they'd like them to be, making a few changes can make a big difference in students' attitudes.

Betty Bender has been looking into how students in her schools feel about the lunch program. A survey at one of the high schools

showed just how important the serving environment is.

"The students' greatest complaints," she says, "were the decorations in the cafeteria, the noise, and the lack of supervision. We had more comments about appearances that we did about food. I was surprised."

In Colorado Springs, some improvements have paid off in increased participation. "We have an advisory committee here," Tutt explains, "and we asked them to go out and convince the principals that they had to give the kids more time to eat and that the kids needed a nice, comfortable environment. They've done this, and our participation is up 8 to 10 percent."

Like many school food service directors, Tutt feels his schools still have a long way to go. "We have not yet been successful in getting into a condition that I would be happy with," he says.

"For example, I have a high school smack downtown with the kitchen and dining area on the fourth floor. There's a beautiful view of the mountains, but the building was built 60 years ago, and the room has not been touched in 60 years—paint or anything. The furniture is at least 30 years old. It's a dungeon up there, and I can't get 150 kids to eat lunch there.

"All the fast food restaurants are across the street, and the kids are going out. We've got kids in that building who have never been up there, and I don't blame them. It's one of our better operations, but I don't want to eat there. It's hard to beat all of that."

Two schools that Tutt is pleased with, however, offer good examples of what can be done. One is a high school that has made the best of an awkward space.

"The room itself is absolutely atrocious," Tutt explains. "It's two-



and-a-half stories high and looks like a gymnasium with lots of metal. But they've sectioned off the room down on the lower level and made it a very warm comfortable area with walnut-grain tables and orange chairs.

"The other school is a junior high that has a regular one-story room with a stage in it. All along one wall there are windows that look out at Pike's Peak. The interior walls are brick and the tables are walnut with bright golden-rod-colored chairs. It's also a very warm, comfortable dining room."

### **Some improvements can be made easily**

Of course, a lot depends on budgetary constraints. Some improvements can be costly, while others can be made for relatively little.

"If you're going for tables and chairs and carpeting, that's a major expense," says Bender. "So is actual physical remodeling. You have to have your school board's approval, your principal's approval, the whole series of steps before you can get all that done."

Even getting a new coat of paint isn't that simple. "If it's not your turn to be painted," Bender says, "you don't get painted until it's time to be repainted."

One less expensive alternative, Bender suggests, is painting murals on the walls. This can be done by art classes and can brighten up and add some fun to lunchroom walls.

Watkins agrees. "Most of our elementary schools have painted murals with some sort of cartoon character on the walls. We asked them to get away from the drab, institution-type effect, and they've responded to that."

When opportunities do come along to redecorate, make the most of them, says Tutt. "You can't win everything," he says, "but you can try." Be especially selective in choosing furniture, he advises.

"A lot can be done with furniture," he says. "One problem in an institutional situation is that you have to have durable chairs, and this pretty much eliminates wooden chairs.

"But rather than dull, blase pink chairs, buy good solid orange ones. Not bright. Not a bumblebee black and yellow, but a warm fall-type color. You know you're still in an institutional atmosphere, but not so strong a one."

### **Serving areas also deserve attention**

Attractive serving displays add color and warmth to a school cafeteria. "I think it's important for school food service people to try and make the serving area appealing," says Watkins. "The way food is merchandised and positioned on the steam table can help remove the institutional atmosphere." For example, she advises, make sure the food on the steam table has varied colors and use garnishes to make food more attractive.

"Merchandising doesn't have to cost a lot of money," she says. "You can use things you already have, such as fresh vegetables and fresh fruits for garnishes. You can perk up any food and make it appetizing and appealing."

While everyone agrees that eye appeal is not enough, it does count a lot. "Of course," says Bender, "you've got to have good food. That's a given. Kids are not going to eat if your food's not good. But kids eat with their eyes first. And I have to say that the helpfulness of the employees is also a key, just as the environment is."

Good food. Nice surroundings. Helpful people. What kids want at school is not that different from what any of us wants when we're eating away from home.

"We want to make sure lunchtime is a happy time," says Watkins. "It's the one time children get a chance to really enjoy themselves during

the day, because school really isn't always a lot of fun for children. When they get in the cafeteria, it should be a place that has a good atmosphere and it should be fun."

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*article by Ralph E. Vincent*

## ★ Winning With ★ **SCHOOL LUNCH**

**On the following pages, we look at some ways food service managers are making school lunch fun. Often using the same approaches suggested by Bender, Tutt, and Watkins, they're keeping kids coming back by keeping tuned in to what their customers want.**

**We have examples from every region of the country—in some cases, several short features, in others, single full-length articles.**

**As with other issues of our magazine, we hope this one will serve as a reference tool. To make this easier, we've included at the end of each feature the name, address, and phone number of a person to contact for more information.**

★ Winning With ★

# SCHOOL LUNCH

## Merchandising Plan Is Key to Illinois Manager's Success

Ruth Jonen is responsible for the school lunch program in the five high schools in Illinois' High School District 211. She has been food services director there for 4 years, and in that time has earned a reputation as a first-rate manager.

"It took just 2 weeks on the job for me to find out I had a real problem," she says, "but I enjoy challenges."

Her problem was how to merchandise the school lunch program to high school students who had the option to stay at school for lunch, go home, or patronize one of the many nearby fast food restaurants. Complicating the problem was a need to increase the price of school meals.

"In order to cover the labor and basic expenditures in producing a school lunch, I had to raise the price of the meals," Jonen explains. "When this happened, participation in the lunch program dropped." She found through a survey that "for every 1 cent increase added to the price of a meal there was a 1 percent decrease in participation."

### Made changes with a merchandising plan

Jonen analyzed the situation, came up with a merchandising plan, and put it into effect within her first 5 months as food service manager. She improved and upgraded food

service operations, fought off the fast food competition, and increased school lunch participation even while school enrollment was declining.

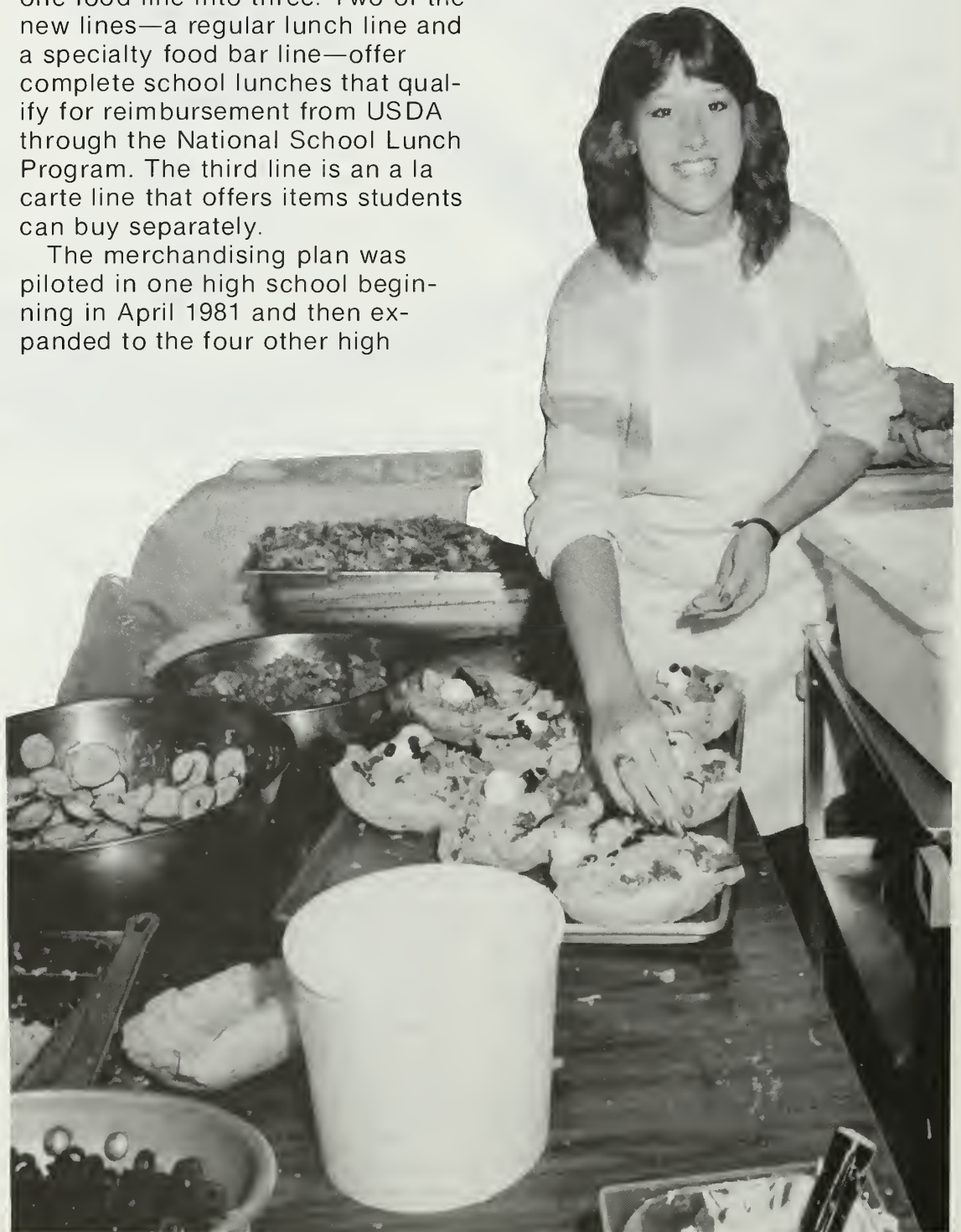
She's not only won back former lunch participants, but has also attracted new customers. And she's had no additional price increases in her program since 1981.

The merchandising plan Jonen came up with entailed dividing the one food line into three. Two of the new lines—a regular lunch line and a specialty food bar line—offer complete school lunches that qualify for reimbursement from USDA through the National School Lunch Program. The third line is an a la carte line that offers items students can buy separately.

The merchandising plan was piloted in one high school beginning in April 1981 and then expanded to the four other high

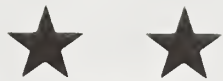
schools. During the pilot test, which lasted 6 months, Jonen found that by adding hamburgers, hot dogs, and french fries to the regular school lunch line, more kids participated. By the end of the test, the regular line had stabilized and there was an increase of 20 percent in participation, a net gain of 606 kids.

The plan is simple and uses the



District schools bake all of their own rolls, breads, cakes, and pastries, including special puff pastries for salads.





same food and facilities already available. The food bar lines are set up in different schools as salad bars, hamburger bars, sausage and hot dog bars, and potato bars with various toppings.

One of the five district schools has an ice cream bar once a year in conjunction with an art festival. "This is 100-percent successful," says Jonen, "and the kids look forward to it each year."

### More opportunities to be creative

Jonen feels the food bar lines are especially good additions to the food service programs because they enable the staff to be creative in food preparation and serving styles. "They allow us to offer kids the food that is the trend in eating habits today," she says.

In Jonen's district, the food bars change with the seasons. In the fall and winter the soup-and-sandwich bar offers students a choice of three soups and hot sandwiches, including grilled cheese, ham, and roast beef. In the spring and summer, there are salads and sandwiches. "Taco salads are really popular in the warm months," Jonen says.

All of the baked goods are baked fresh each day—yeast rolls and bread, cakes, cookies, and puff pastries for the taco shells. Fresh fruits and vegetables are used in season, and a variety of new items appear each year. These are sometimes the cooks' own creations, like the variety of soups available to participants.

"The commodities and administrative funds provided by USDA have allowed us to operate the kind of food program we offer the students," says Jonen.

"Flour and butter are used in the baked goods. Canned fruits and vegetables are used in other items. All of the USDA foods are put to good use." USDA-donated foods valued at approximately \$200,000 were used in the preparation of October 1985



Ruth Jonen is proud of her district's dynamic lunch program. All five schools, she says, have contributed to the success of her merchandising plan.

meals last school year.

### Schools have all contributed

Jonen's enthusiasm about offering nutritious, economical, and attractive meals to students is shared by the food service managers and staff in District 211. Each school has contributed something to the merchandising effort.

■ The William Fremd High School was the site chosen for the pilot project. The oldest school in the district, it has the largest school lunch revenue—\$420,000 for the 1984-1985 school year.

To market the school lunch program, the food service staff participates in an open house hosted by the school each year for parents. This gives them a chance to show parents the spotless cafeteria and

give them a sample of the food by serving freshly baked cookies and fruit punch.

■ Conant High School food service staff developed the spectacular sausage bar with hot dogs, brats, a variety of sausages, and all the trimmings. Since this school has many ethnic groups, they also feature "ethnic food bars," offering Mexican, Italian, Oriental, and other foods.

The focus is on sports in this school, so on any given day during football season one will find Cougar Pizza (named for the football team) on the menu. During National Education Week, the school hosts the Schaumburg Rotary Luncheon. This gives the school food staff the opportunity to introduce their program to business leaders in the community.



Palatine High School started the soup-and-sandwich bar, the potato bar, and the once-a-year ice cream bar. Palatine has the most flexible off-campus policy in the school district and the most fast food chains nearby for students to patronize.

However, participation in the lunch program has increased from 400 to 700 per day while enrollment has been steadily decreasing. "Merchandising has really paid off for this school," says Jonen.

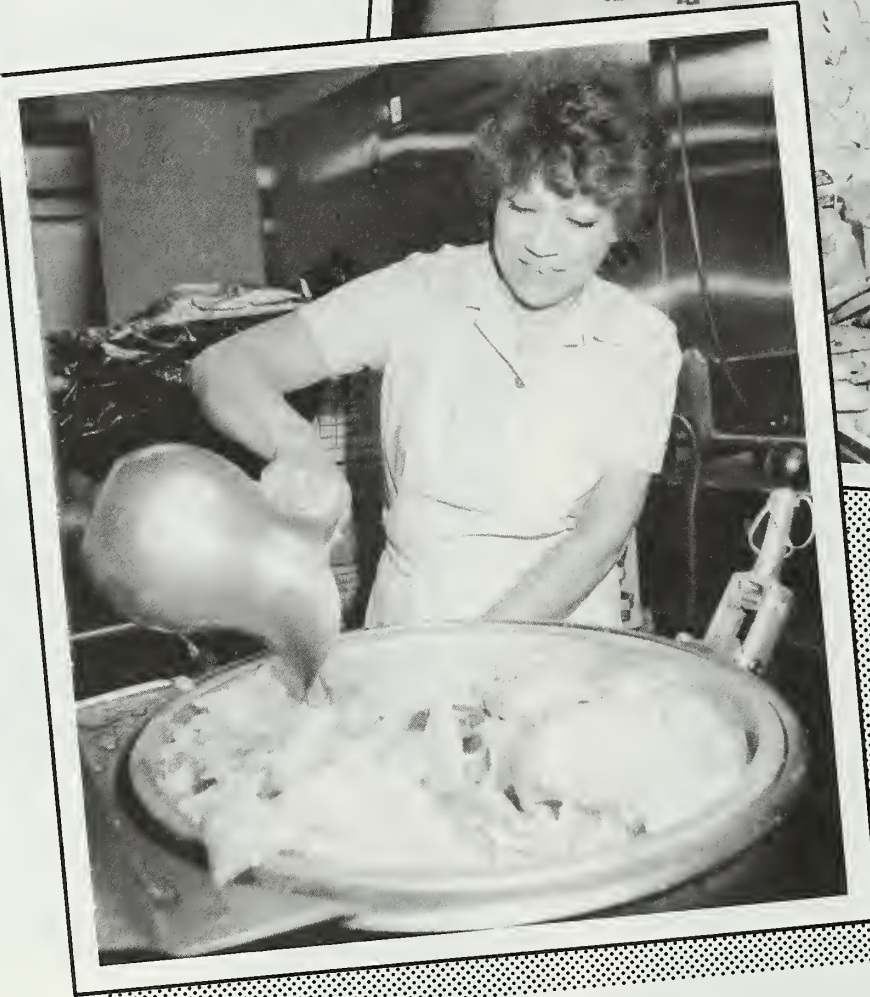
The staff works harder here to keep the students in school for lunch. When an ethnic bar is featured, bright decorations adorn the cafeteria. Palatine High also boasts the honor of having received the Illinois School Food Service Association's Karat Award given for providing a nutritious and quality school lunch to students.

Hoffman High School's lunch program is the fastest growing in the district because the community is the top growing community in the district. The varied menu offered to students keeps participation high.

Students from the advanced food class work in the cafeteria as part of their lab training. The fresh baked goods are the big attraction here. "At a recent dinner," says Jonen, "the food service staff served store-bought bread and were chided by the attendees wanting to know where 'the good stuff' was. They're spoiled by the excellent baked goods produced by the cafeteria staff."

Hoffman High School is one of 212 schools nationwide and one of four schools in Illinois named as a model school in the 1984-1985 National Secondary School Recognition Program. The program is sponsored by the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education.

Schaumburg High School students like what they get for a



Lunch preparations begin early at Schaumburg High. Home-made pizza and fresh salads are two favorites here.

dollar in the regular school lunch line. More than 1,200 meals are served in this line each day. The food service staff spend much of their time planning the menus for this food line.

"A favorite food here is pizza, and that is because it is homemade," says Jonen. "The food service cooks make it from scratch starting with the crust, homemade sauce, and USDA cheese."

#### Managers plan more changes

With a solid record of achievement behind them, Jonen and the staff in District 211 have ambitious goals. The number one goal is keeping the kids and the revenue in the schools.

"The only way you can keep lunch prices down is to increase participation," says Jonen. "The

more food you prepare, the less it costs to prepare it."

She has more ideas for attracting kids. "Next year, we will offer multiple entree lunches. For example, on the Mexican food bar, the four entree items might be tacos, enchiladas, tostadas, and burritos, and the students can choose two."

The key to a successful program is keeping kids interested. "And to keep kids interested," says Jonen, "you must offer them something interesting."

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article by Eunice Bowman  
photos by Michael Fluharty

# Quality Comes First For San Antonio-- From Start to Finish

Getting back to basics: using quality ingredients, serving freshly prepared food, and making kids feel welcome and at home. These are the secrets to successful merchandising for San Antonio, Texas, school food service administrator Don Stinson.

Over and over again, the students in his district prove that Stinson has hit upon a winning formula. The district has a total enrollment of 56,000 students. Fifty thousand of them participate in the school lunch program every day.

Things weren't always this good, though. Stinson came to the San Antonio Independent School District in 1968, just as the district had decided to join the National School Lunch Program. He did double duty for the first few years: laying a solid foundation from which to build a top notch operation while overcoming some fairly tough resistance to the program from the community.

## Schools prepare food on site

"The first thing I did was to spend the entire reserve account on quality equipment," Stinson says. Today each of the 90 schools in his district has a self-contained, well-equipped kitchen.

"All of our meal preparation is done on site," Stinson says. "I tried the central kitchen route once, and as the food was delivered to the school, the kids would say, 'Here comes the garbage wagon.'" While kids can sometimes be overly dramatic, Stinson says in this case he almost had to agree with them.

"I don't know of any food that improves with age," he says. "Keeping or holding a food can ruin a perfectly good dish in a hurry.

"Take a hamburger, for instance. You've got to serve a hamburger within a minute or two after it comes off the grill for it to be really good. From that time on, the lettuce and tomato get warm and the bun

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gets cold. "We cannot serve a really good hamburger because of the lag time between cooking and serving, but we do a pretty good job in most other areas," Stinson says. "We try to keep our cooks free from serving duties in order that they can continually prepare food and bring it up on the steam table just as it's needed for serving."

Stinson recognizes that eating is as much a psychological experience as a physical one. The smell of good food cooking in the kitchen can be a powerful appetite builder. "We doubled participation overnight just by baking bread in the schools," he says.

## Staff maintains high standards

Maintaining quality standards of this caliber demands an exceptionally skilled food preparation staff. "We have both a basic and an advanced cooking school for our employees," says Stinson.

The kitchen staff at each school consists of a manager, a pastry cook, a chief cook, and any number of food service assistants. Participation in the year-long training is on a voluntary basis and includes a one-semester apprenticeship.

Stinson and his staff do everything they can to create a cheerful lunchroom environment—one that is warm and caring, where children are treated with respect. The cafeteria managers in each of the elementary schools teach a special nutrition education course for all first and second graders.

"This way the children get to know the managers, they learn all about the kitchen, and become familiar with eating in the cafeteria," Stinson says. All this is in addition to learning some basic nutrition concepts.

"The manager is an expert in the eyes of those students," Stinson adds. That relationship goes a long way when it comes to building better eating habits and cultivating a taste for new foods. "A lot of times we will serve just a tablespoon of something new like broccoli or brussels sprouts so the kids can have a chance to try it."

Stinson used that same philosophy, trying new ways in sample-sized doses, to win the support of the community. "The community and even some of the school officials were against the school lunch program when we first started out,"

he explains. To convince them, I quoted nutrition experts who tied the learning ability of children to their eating habits."

He also tried to go along with parents' wishes as much as he could, rather than fight them, and he always kept the lines of communication open. "At one time a lot of the parents wanted us to serve only Mexican food. They wanted their kids to eat the same things at school that they had at home," Stinson says. "Well, we tried it, and within a couple of weeks they were asking me to go back to our regular menu."

## Students show their approval

In today's fast-paced, high-tech world, Stinson's operation is testimony to the fact that the basics, done well, can be highly successful.

Stinson credits his many years of entrepreneurial experience as partly responsible for the success of the school lunch program he manages today. Even though he had never eaten school lunch with any regularity until he became school food service director, he was no stranger to the food service industry.

As a school boy, he spent his lunchtime and after school hours working in his father's ice cream shop. The Double-Dip, which was strategically located across the street from Amarillo High School, Stinson's alma mater, originally sold homemade chocolate and vanilla ice cream. A formidable competitor to the school system's lunch program, the Double-Dip became a drive-in offering the usual hamburgers and french fries and eventually added inside seating.

"It was a 'Happy Days' kind of atmosphere," Stinson says. "We packed the kids in by the droves."

Based on his school lunch participation rates, he still knows how to please the kids and keep them coming back for more.

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article by C. Kay Blakley

★ Winning With ★

# SCHOOL LUNCH

## Second Graders Serve Up An "Awesome" Lunch...

Neal, Denise, Andy, and Melissa were hungrier than usual as they carried their trays to a table in the Stratham, New Hampshire, elementary school cafeteria recently. The four second graders had just completed a task they described as "awesome:" serving a meal to 175 of their schoolmates.

For Joan Sewall, the school lunch manager at Stratham Memorial School, the challenge was strictly routine. At least once a month, she invites students from grades one through six into her kitchen to help prepare a meal.

"It is the best way I know to allow youngsters to actively participate in

the school lunch program and to learn about nutrition at the same time," she says.

### Planning menus is the first step

The key to working with children, says Sewall, is organizing carefully in advance. She first invites each class to select a date to play host to their schoolmates. She then visits the children in their classrooms to advise them on writing menus. She talks to them about the types of food required for a balanced meal and hands out copies of sample recipes from each of the four food groups.

"We give them a free hand on planning," she says. "They are not limited to items we list. Sometimes they pick up ideas from television food product commercials. All we require is that our nutrition guidelines be met."

Pizza is a reliable favorite as a main course, although one class chose a traditional meal of pork chops, mashed potatoes, and gravy.

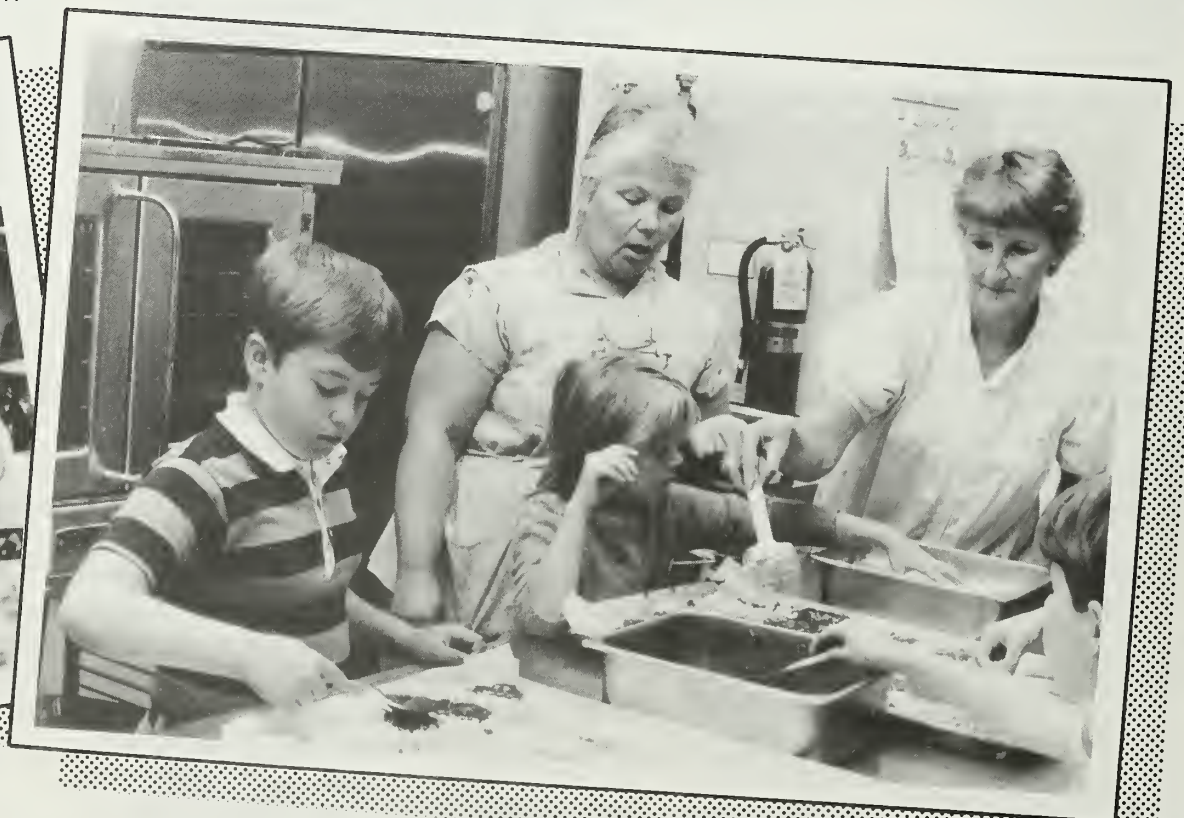
Lasagna is also popular. Desserts selected have included red-and-green layered jello and yellow cake that is striped by filling in holes with jello.

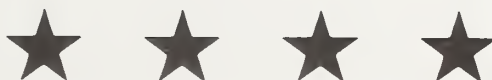
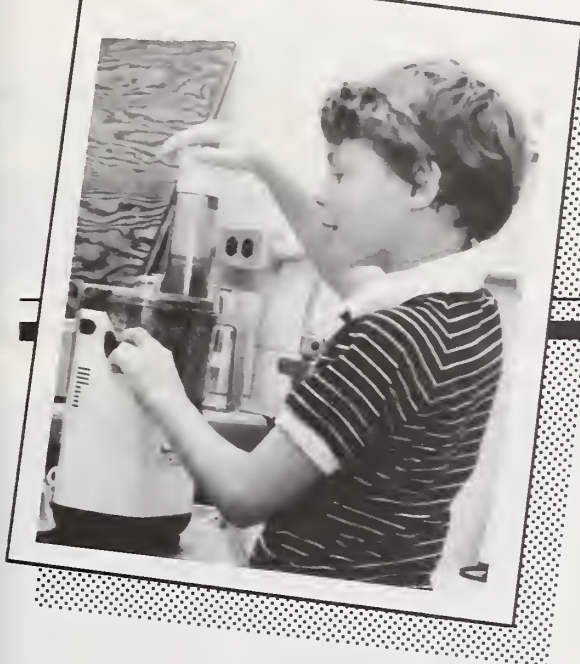
### Tasks simplified and spread out

When the chosen date approaches, Sewall spreads the tasks of preparing a meal over several days.

"For a typical menu," she says, "the children might prepare dessert one day, clean and cut up salad greens the next, and on the third day, prepare the main course. When that task is done, another group serves the meal. A different team takes on each assignment. This keeps the kitchen from becoming too crowded and also reduces time away from studies."

With a little help from Joan Sewall (left) and her assistant Dorothy Bragdon, the second graders put the finishing touches on their chosen meal.





Sewall and her assistant, Dorothy Bragdon, simplify the tasks beforehand so that even the youngest children can take a hands-on role. For instance, they buy prepared pizza and have the children add more tomato sauce and extra sprinkles of USDA-donated cheese. With lasagna, children mix prepared sauces, and layer them with cheese and noodles.

Teachers of the younger children are especially enthusiastic about the meal project because the activities can be readily built into their lesson plans. "As soon as school starts each fall, one of our teachers is waiting to reserve a date for her class to host the lunch," says Sewall. "Her students begin far in advance making place mats and lunchroom decorations."

### **Other activities are also popular**

The class-sponsored meals are not Sewall's only effort to keep up interest in the lunch program. Monday is "lucky tray" day, and the two children who find stars on their trays win a special treat—such as an extra dessert—and a free meal for a guest. Students invite their parents or, if their parents are working, a grandparent or sibling.

"This is a good way to show parents what their children are eating, and to bring into the schools parents who might not come otherwise," Sewall says. "When our building was enlarged recently, it was partly because visiting parents had seen how crowded the classrooms were and spoke up for us at the town meeting."

Sewall has introduced for educational purposes a salad bar, which

is very popular with the children. Not only does it teach the value of fresh vegetables, but it reduces plate waste by allowing children to select their favorites.

Another teaching device is a "good and bad snack" tray that may be requested for classroom use. The children are given tasty snacks that have been prepared to teach them about good nutrition.

### **Training is a source of ideas**

Sewall reports that many of the ideas she uses for menus and services were developed during a unique training course for food service managers sponsored by the New Hampshire Department of Education several years ago.

For the course, the University of New Hampshire equipped a special mobile unit as a combination classroom and test kitchen. Sewall was among the managers who took the 8-week course when the teaching van was parked in their area of the state.

She, in turn, shares her practical experience in food management and her skill in working with children with other school food managers. Recently, Gwen Copeland of the state department of education videotaped Sewall and the children at work in the kitchen at Stratham.

"The state officials who were present at the taping were nervous about having young children chop vegetables," Copeland says. "But Joan has only as many children as she can instruct and supervise carefully, and there have been no cut fingers."

"Children can handle more than people give them credit for," Sewall says. "I learned that from my years of experience as a local 4H Club leader."

Several years ago, Sewall served on a task force that prepared a booklet on improving school food service. The University of New Hampshire distributed the pamphlet

free in the state and offered it for sale nationwide while supplies lasted. The booklet included ideas for involving children in school lunch activities.

### **Noontime finds a job well done**

Those who find it hard to believe that children can take a large role in meal planning and preparation would have been persuaded by seeing the Stratham second graders take charge.

The first lunch period found them on duty in a short and efficient assembly line. Spatula in hand, Andy placed a slice of steaming pizza on each food tray; Denise scooped mixed nuts and raisins onto the tray; Neal measured out a mixed salad; and Melissa handed each child a fruit popsicle.

After lunch, the crew debated with animation who had done the toughest job.

"It was wicked hard," declared Neal. "I had to get the salad on and move the tray out, too."

Melissa tossed her blonde curls triumphantly. "Maybe my job wasn't the hardest, but I know it was the most boring."

Proud and just a little tired, they cleaned their trays and carefully returned them to the counter. A day with their friends in the kitchen had taught them the work and satisfaction involved in providing a wholesome noontime meal.

For more information, contact:  
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Stratham Memorial School  
Stratham, New Hampshire 03885  
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Concord, New Hampshire 03301  
Telephone: (603) 271-3646

*article and photos  
by Wini Scheffler*



## New Jersey Schools Make Eating Lunch Something Special



When the federal cash crunch of the eighties tightened their purse strings, many New Jersey food service managers took the initiative. Inspired by the trends, they pulled from commercial eating houses merchandising ideas which could be adapted to promote school lunch, especially among paying students.

They also took advantage of the wide range of commodities made available by USDA and, encouraged by the New Jersey Departments of Agriculture and Education, they are now increasing their use of commodities processed in their home state.

Here are just a few examples of the variety of merchandising techniques used in this Mid-Atlantic state:

### "Food is energy" campaign sells lunches in East Brunswick

A host of food specialties and games invite kids to lunch throughout the East Brunswick, New Jersey, school district. Carol Merle, food service officer for the district, is proud to point out that the number of school lunches is up 200 per day over the past year. "Kids are really picky," she says, "they know good food."

Merle attributes the popularity of the lunches to a public relations program begun 2 years ago. Through the combined efforts of food service personnel and a school district information officer, the slogan, "Food is Energy," was created.

To go with the slogan, the art

department produced a logo depicting an energy machine with various foods going in and running legs coming out. The logo is used on menus, correspondence, information pieces for parents, and aprons for cafeteria workers.

To help children make good food choices, the district has produced fliers that list the components of the lunches and suggest what foods the children should take.

"Chicken nuggets are now more popular than pizza," says Merle. Other favorites are pasta salad and spaghetti with tomato sauce. These are also popular with the food service manager, since the nuggets, pasta, and tomato sauce all come from USDA.

Among other creative foods served in East Brunswick schools are Gyros strips, Greek tacos, and frozen fruit bars.

"Got the Itch to Scratch?" This question advertises the scratch games, another part of the district's merchandising effort. To play, kids peel off the top of the small cardboard square to see whether they have a winning combination. There are a number of prizes, including a free lunch.

"We do everything to bring kids in," says Merle. Scratch and smell stickers, given out on certain days, have the aroma of the food they picture. Other enticing give-aways are Mighty Meals boxes and the large plastic cups in which chicken nuggets are served.

Meals are priced and presented to encourage kids to buy the reimbursable school lunch rather than a la carte items, for which schools do not receive reimbursement from USDA.



At Burlington High (above photo) interesting displays and fast service attract school lunch customers. When it's warm, kids can eat outside at picnic tables.

★ Winning With ★  
**SCHOOL LUNCH**

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Food and Nutrition



### Burlington High meets fast food competition

Nineteen fast food restaurants within walking distance of Burlington City High School present an everyday challenge to food service director Doris Kovach.

But it's obvious that Kovach more than meets the competition, as evidenced one day this past spring. It was sunny and seasonal, and students had been dismissed for the afternoon because of teachers' conferences. Yet, before going their way, they filled the cafeteria for a Kovach lunch.

The cafeteria has all the ingredients of a fast food franchise—only better! A sparkling blue-and-white canopy hangs over the three service bars, each of which offers different foods.

The "Devil's Den," named for the school mascot, features fast food specialties, such as the ever-favorite USDA chicken nuggets and finger fish, as well as cheese steaks, hamburgers and fries. The second bar offers the hot meal; and the third, a bag lunch and salad bar.

Eating outside is also popular with Burlington students, the food service manager says. They eat their bag lunches at picnic tables, from which they can see Kovach's competitors down the street.

An advocate of using USDA commodities whenever she can, Kovach says among her favorite items are sandwich steaks, processed in nearby Silver Spring, New Jersey.

### Special attractions draw students in Princeton

Barbara Walsh, food service manager for the Princeton Township School District, took a cue this past spring from New Jersey Foreign Language Week. She planned French, Spanish, and Italian days featuring foods from each country and menus in both English and foreign languages.

The theme was further emphasized with staff bedecked in appropriate garb. Other days afforded special treatment with foods and fashion were Halloween, Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day. For St. Patrick's Day, the costumed staff added green eye lashes with sparkles.

According to Walsh, Princeton children reflect the national trends. In the district, which has a cross section of income levels, about 65 percent of the 2,500 children eat the reimbursable lunch. Of that number, 11 percent qualify for the free and reduced-price meals.

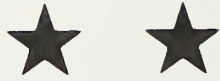
In the past few years, Walsh says she's seen meat loaf and mashed potatoes give way to pasta, cheese steaks, hamburgers, and tacos. But fish and vegetables also win acclaim, and among her high school gourmets, quiche with spinach, cheese, and ham is a favorite. Receiving high marks from all the children, she says, are cookies made with all natural ingredients, baked by the staff.

"We have good rapport with the kids," says Walsh. "If they don't like a food, we don't serve it." As an example, she tells about trying tuna salad with melted cheese, which was popular in the restaurants. It didn't go over with her customers, however, so it was dropped.

When weather permits, cook-outs are popular. "The kids really like eating outside picnic-style," says Walsh. And she really likes pleasing her customers.

Scratch stickers (illustrated above) are part of a merchandising campaign in East Brunswick. Kids play the scratch games to win a free lunch or another prize.

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## Attention to detail pays off at High Point Regional High

Jean MacLean, food service manager at High Point Regional High School in Sussex, is a firm believer in the importance of eye appeal.

"I like to inspire and assist the staff in preparing and presenting the food," she says. "Food must look attractive on the plate, not just be thrown there."

Her fastidious care includes polishing the apples which, among other fruits, are displayed in baskets. These baskets, together with green plants and colorful posters, make up the lunchroom decor, exemplifying MacLean's feel for detail.

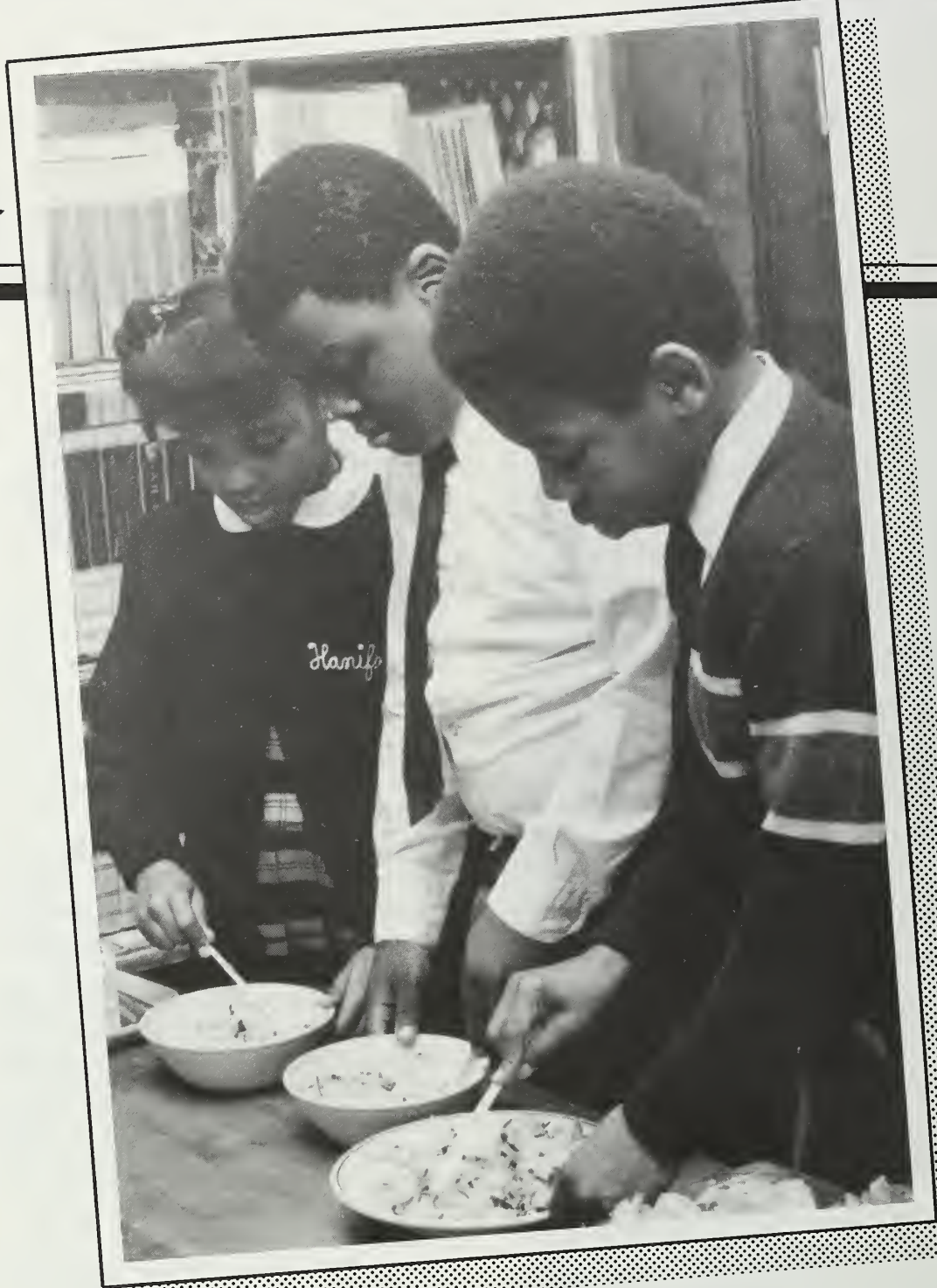
Attuned to the palate ratings her food gets, the food service manager introduced chocolate milk when the sale of white milk dropped. The result was an increase in sales of 200 cartons each day.

In addition to serving the basics, MacLean also believes in special attractions. She features a meal of the week, as well as holiday dinners. And her eating extras include games for which prizes are awarded. "A speciality for Easter was counting jelly beans in a jar," she says. For parents, she prepares a 3-month menu, with the information that the reimbursable meal is a better buy than the a la carte items.

"The cafeteria is a busy place to work," MacLean says, as she tells how 11 staffers adroitly handle five lunch periods within 2 hours. That it must also be a good place to work is evidenced by their length of service—an average of 15 years.

## Learning and lunch go together at Aunt Millie's

As you walk into Aunt Millie's Learning Center in Newark, you can smell the home cooking. On the menu are baked chicken with caramel-colored gravy, corn bread, brown rice, carrot salad dotted with raisins, cucumber salad, and milk.



This private school has 60 pupils ranging from kindergarten through the sixth grade with another 60 on the waiting list. The owner and administrator is Millicent Greenaway, who came from the West Indies in 1978.

A former elementary school teacher and science advocate, Greenaway envisioned an unusual school that would emphasize the science of eating fruits and vegetables—from the ground up.

"I learned that children in the inner city didn't like vegetables," says Greenaway, "so I decided to teach them how to grow their own, prepare them on hot plates in the classroom, and serve them properly."

Chances are, there is no other garden like this in Newark. Not only

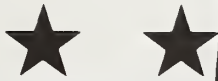
is there an unusually large variety of produce for a 27-by-18 foot plot, but there are also some very unusual items.

There are at least 20 vegetables and fruits of the common variety, ranging from beans to strawberries. There are also peanuts, ginger, sugar cane and comfrey. "Comfrey is considered a vegetable," explains Greenaway. "It can be cooked and served with onions and butter, or the leaves can be dried and made into tea."

The garden was in full bloom at the end of June, just about a week before school closed. For a going away dinner, the children prepared their featured recipe, "Aunt Millie's Salad."

The main ingredients were lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, broc-





Working in their garden is a labor of love for these Newark children. Millicent Greenaway (below) started the garden to help children learn about food.



coli, cauliflower, and steamed eggplant. Added as flavor enhancers were slices of bell pepper, chives, parsley, and comfrey leaves. A little oil and vinegar completed the medley.

Together with chicken, rice and milk, the meal more than met USDA's school lunch requirements, and the children had the satisfaction of reaping their harvest.

During the vacation months, the garden was tended by Greenaway, her husband, and eight students who stayed in the area for the summer. Food that would perish was taken home by the gardeners. But other foods, such as turnips, were left until the fall.

The extent of Greenaway's gardening-education program can

be seen by the class papers hanging on classroom walls. There are titles, such as, "Our Family Garden," "Fun in Gardening," and "How Gardening Helps the Economy."

Greenaway also extends instruction to the children's parents. She tells them how to become involved in community garden projects and how to grow vegetables at home. "If they don't have a yard," she says, "I show them how vegetables can be grown in window boxes."

Merchandising for Greenaway means a lot more than selling kids school lunches. She's selling them—and their parents—on a whole new way of eating. And she's expanding their world in the process.

"The program is unique," says Kathy Kuser, manager of school nutrition programs for New Jersey. "And the children are totally involved."

Whether a school child in New Jersey is a chicken nugget fan, a quiche enthusiast, or has a taste for the exotic comfrey, eating in the eighties isn't just eating—it's an experience!

For more information, contact: Kathy Kuser, Coordinator School Nutrition Programs Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs New Jersey Department of Education CN 500 Trenton, New Jersey 08625

*article by Ellen Lancaster  
photos by Marian Wig*



## School Lunch Highlights From Mountain Plains

### **Brentwood, Missouri**

In Brentwood School District in St. Louis, Missouri, food service manager Donna Keyser has three schools—one junior-senior high and two elementary schools. She promotes the lunch program in a variety of ways, depending on the age and interests of her customers.

For junior high school students she has "Lucky Plate Days." Special stickers are placed at random on four or five lunch trays for each shift. The children who get the special trays get free ice cream with their lunches.

In one of the elementary schools, Keyser has a birthday party once a month for children whose birthdays fall in that month; she asks a mother to come to school that day to help serve the cake. Her other elementary school has a breakfast day once a month, with a full breakfast, including biscuits with honey butter. That school usually serves only a la carte breakfasts. For more information, contact:  
Donna Keyser  
Brentwood School District  
1775 Parkridge Ave.  
Brentwood, Missouri 63144  
Telephone: (314) 962-3837

### **Sydney, Nebraska**

June Katen, Sydney, Nebraska, food service manager, competes successfully with the fast food chains in an open-campus atmosphere by using everything she can to interest students.

She has a fast food line that offers seven or eight different sandwiches (including a baconburger). She also has a regular-meal line and a salad bar with lots of fresh fruit.

She posts signs to inform students how many calories are needed for various sports and energy-related activities. She watches any local food trends, so she can keep her program

competitive.

Out of an enrollment of 1,122 students, Katen feeds an average of 792. The program operates in the black, with no funding from the school district.

For more information, contact:  
June Katen  
Sydney Public Schools  
1128 Nineteenth Ave.  
Sydney, Nebraska 69162  
Telephone: (308) 254-2508

### **Lander, Wyoming**

Wendy Haddenham is fighting an uphill battle in Lander, Wyoming. Her high school is surrounded by five fast food operations. To compete, Haddenham uses posters to show students a comparison of "their" price and hers, "their" lunch selections and hers, to demonstrate the value of school lunch.

She also makes posters that illustrate what the kids could do with the money saved by eating lunch at school. The examples make the message clear: buy lunch at school this week and have enough for a movie date this weekend...buy lunch at school for several weeks and save for a special purchase later on.

For more information, contact:  
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Lander High School  
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Lander, Wyoming 82520  
Telephone: (307) 332-5377

### **Scottsbluff, Nebraska**

Lake Alice School, on the outskirts of Scottsbluff, Nebraska, has 100-percent participation in its school lunch program. All 81 students in kindergarten through eighth grade eat lunch at school.

Manager Bonnie Hoff puts a lot of heart in her program. The students plan the menus, and the planner is honored on the day the menu is served with window banners and a special 7:15 a.m. announcement on

the local radio station.

Hoff and her helper bake and decorate a miniature birthday cake on each child's birthday, too. The birthday child may take the cake home or share it with friends at lunchtime.

For more information, contact:  
Bonnie Hoff  
Lake Alice School  
Route 2, Box 302  
Scottsbluff, Nebraska 69361  
Telephone: (308) 632-4295

### **Minatare, Nebraska**

Thelma Gilbert, manager at rural Lake Minatare School (grades K-8) near Scottsbluff, Nebraska, sounds like a one-woman public relations firm.

The local newspaper doesn't print any school news, so she reaches the community on her own in several ways. This past school year she had a booth at the fair and a first-prize float in the Oregon Trail parade in nearby Gering, Nebraska. She saved the float and exhibit and used them again to promote National School Lunch Week, when parents and grandparents visited the school.

To encourage the children to eat lunch, Gilbert has pizza-plate "smiling face" and "frowning face" displays that she hangs up, depending on whether or not children eat all of their food. She works with some of the grades to plan special menus, and helps others with food-related projects.

Gilbert feels so strongly about the lunch program that she has written seven letters to members of Congress supporting it, and has encouraged students in upper grades to write their own letters.

For more information, contact:  
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Route 1  
Minatare, Nebraska 69356  
Telephone: (308) 783-1134  
*article by Joanne Widner*



## School Lunch Highlights From Western States

### Sumner, Washington

At McAlder Elementary School in Sumner, Washington, participation in the lunch program jumped 30 percent with the introduction of "Willie the Wagon," a colorful, portable, self-service food cart.

Children file along both sides of the red and white cart and assemble their own lunches from the selection of items in the wagon. They load their choices onto lunch trays which slide on rails 2 feet off the ground.

The simple, single change in the cafeteria had an immediate dramatic effect on students. They like being able to make their own decisions about what they eat.

"We're seeing many more children eating, and they're eating better," says Mimi Graves, food service manager for the Sumner district. "They're trying a greater variety of foods, and we're having less waste."

The system guarantees students get at least three of the five lunch components while leaving them the freedom to choose from among

several selections. They also get to choose any extras, like toppings.

And while the students are enjoying their new freedom to serve themselves, they're saving work for the cafeteria staff.

Graves and McAlder cafeteria manager Rita McKibben are as enthusiastic about Willie as the students. Not only did the cart increase participation dramatically, it doubled the speed of the line up to more than 13 children a minute,

and has made the lunchroom staff's jobs more rewarding. "We see the kids really enjoying coming to lunch—and that makes us feel pretty good, too."

The name "Willie the Wagon" was suggested by Sumner third grader Shane Little. The idea for the wagon came from a national conference Graves attended. She stresses that the concept is more important than the cart itself.

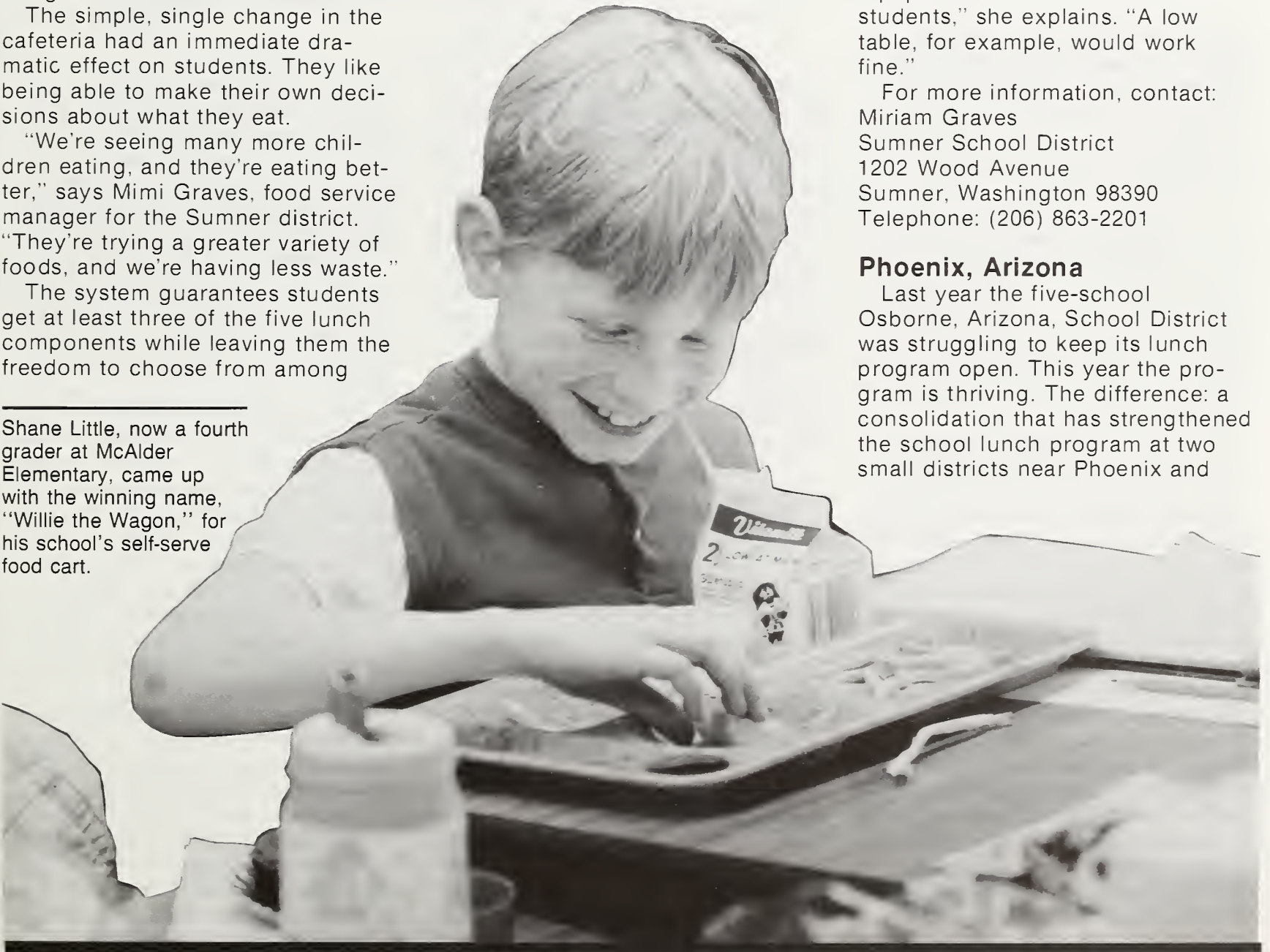
"Schools don't have to use fancy equipment to offer these choices to students," she explains. "A low table, for example, would work fine."

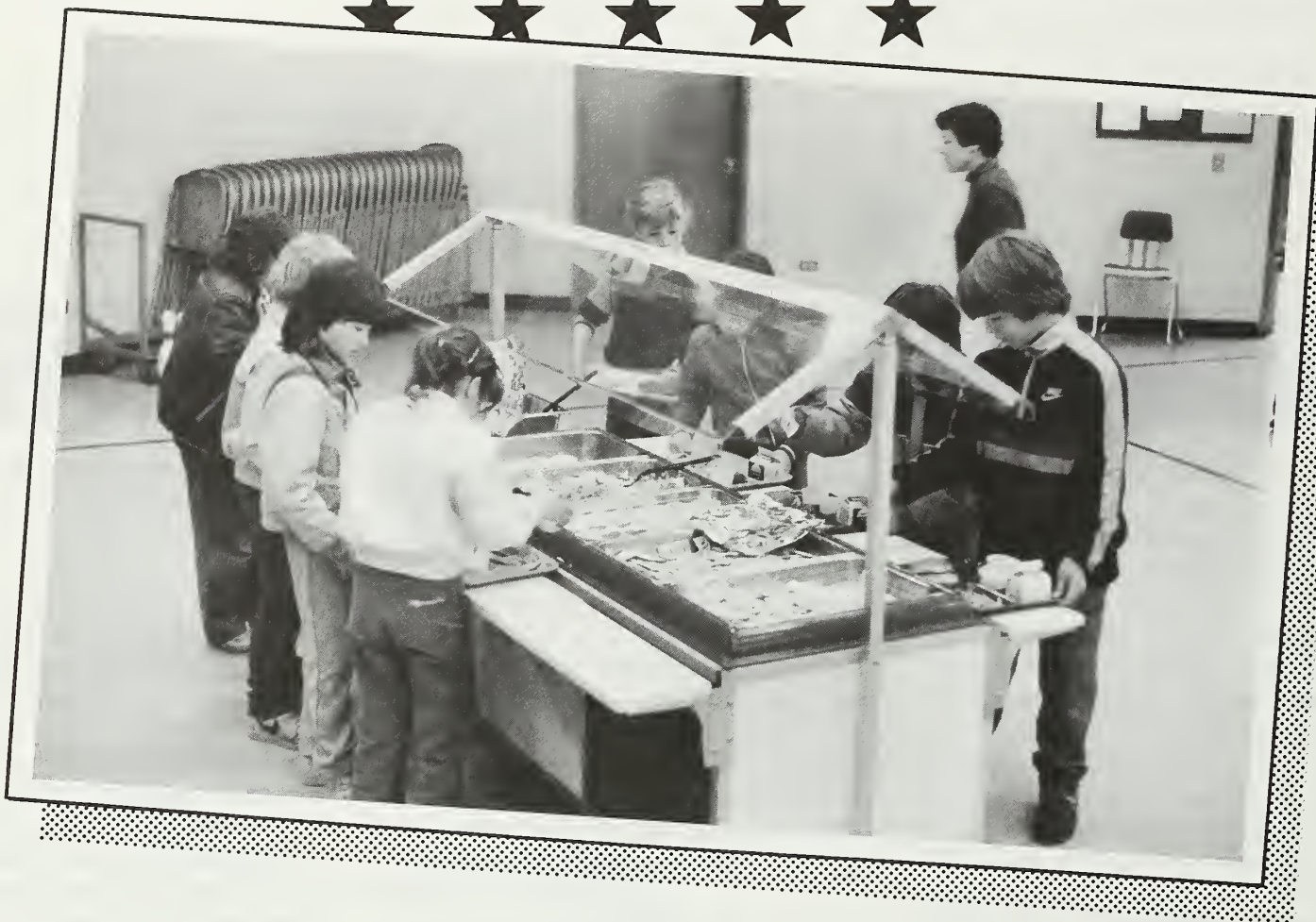
For more information, contact:  
Miriam Graves  
Sumner School District  
1202 Wood Avenue  
Sumner, Washington 98390  
Telephone: (206) 863-2201

### Phoenix, Arizona

Last year the five-school Osborne, Arizona, School District was struggling to keep its lunch program open. This year the program is thriving. The difference: a consolidation that has strengthened the school lunch program at two small districts near Phoenix and

Shane Little, now a fourth grader at McAlder Elementary, came up with the winning name, "Willie the Wagon," for his school's self-serve food cart.





McAlder's new self-service food cart has boosted lunch participation and cut down on waiting time. The children help themselves from both sides of the cart.

allowed them to expand their operations.

"Like many small school lunch programs," says Pearl Loutzenheiser, food service director of the neighboring twice-as-large Alhambra School District, "Osborne just didn't have the resources to do those extra things that would increase participation and make the program viable."

Osborne school officials, concerned about their failing lunch program, asked the Arizona school food service agency for help. The state staff recommended a merger with Loutzenheiser's district. With the support of Alhambra's superintendent and school board, the two districts worked out an intergovernmental agreement to bring the consolidation about.

It has been a year since the merger took place, and Loutzenheiser has consolidated menu planning, ordering, purchasing, and staff training. "What had been a very expensive program for one small district," she says, "has become a very economical proposition for two."

Loutzenheiser conservatively estimates that the merger has saved at

least \$16,500 for Alhambra and nearly as much for Osborne in the first year of consolidation.

As a result of the savings, she has been able to raise salaries and replace supplies and equipment that had been neglected for years due to tight budgets. She has also opened several new salad bars in area schools, which have attracted more students to the cafeterias.

The preliminary success of the Alhambra-Osborne merger has already prompted one other possible consolidation in Arizona, and Loutzenheiser hopes it will inspire others.

For more information, contact:  
 Pearl Loutzenheiser  
 Alhambra School District  
 3001 West Hazelwood  
 Phoenix, Arizona 85017  
 Telephone: (602) 246-5136

### **Mesa, Arizona**

The lunch program in the Mesa, Arizona, School District has a lot going for it. Participation in the 35 elementary schools averages 72 percent and the program is self-supporting. An interesting aspect of the program is the permanent nutrition education staff, who manage a very active nutrition education program, including a week-long visit to most schools once a year.

The nutrition staff includes two full-time and two part-time nutritionists. Mesa food services manager Barbara Savastio feels the team pays for itself because of the income from the increased lunch participation the team generates.

"The staff does more than teach nutrition," she explains. "They create a lot of interest in the lunch program and bring back ideas from the children about how to improve school lunch."

The nutrition staff has developed a mobile nutrition education resource center, which they use to take their training program to Mesa's elementary schools. During the week they spend at the grade schools, the nutritionists give presentations geared to each grade level, ranging from puppet shows on the four food groups to sessions on the relationship between nutrition and physical fitness.

Teachers receive materials for followup activities and can sign up to use games, film strips, and other training aids made available through the resource center.

The nutrition staff also monitor students' tastes by involving them in menu planning, taste test panels, and food tasting parties that use USDA-donated commodities to show kids how to choose nutritious

snacks and make them at home.

Recommendations from students become the basis for Savastio's planning and purchasing decisions. "The students are our customers, so we'll get better participation if we pay attention to what they like."

Last year, for example, Savastio expanded the menu options by extending "offer versus serve" to the elementary schools based on recommendations the nutrition staff brought back. Participation increased 17 percent. Savastio attributes the increase in large part to that recommendation.

She feels a major key to Mesa's success in marketing the program to customers has been the extra effort the nutrition staff put in. "The students need to know that we listen to what they want, and get involved. Things are going on all the time," she says, "and the nutrition staff is a big part of it."

For more information, contact:  
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Food and Nutrition Division  
Mesa Unified School District  
143 S. Alma School Road  
Mesa, Arizona 85202  
Telephone: (602) 898-6222

### **Hood River, Oregon**

Maria Taft, food service manager for Hood River Valley High School, believes the wide variety of high quality food offered in her self-serve buffet lunch program is responsible for the 70-plus percent participation.

"When you feed 500 to 600 students in an hour," she says, "you have a lot of different appetites to deal with—and in a hurry."

Operating three very different types of food lines, each with a vast selection of items, accomplishes both. Students can move quickly through the cafeteria because they are divided among several lines. On each, they enjoy considerable choice. Many of the entree items vary from day to day, and most are prepared from scratch.

On the "main line," which offers the standard school meal, students choose from as many as nine main entrees. In addition, there's tossed salad, soup made from scratch, choice of hot vegetables and fresh fruits, and freshly baked bread and cookies. Students walk down either side of the serving counter and serve themselves.

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There's a combination salad-and-sandwich bar. Students may choose from more than 20 items to build themselves a salad, a sandwich, or both. There are fresh vegetables and fruits, cheese, several meats, peanut butter, crackers, and croutons. Wheat, white, and rye bread and rolls are on hand. Many are fresh from the oven.

The third is the "fast" line, which is laden with a selection that includes cheeseburgers, taco salad, corn dogs, stuffed potatoes and other fast-food-type items.

Together with her food service team, Taft has creatively expanded the program over the years. She's been able to do it with the same five-person cafeteria staff she's always had. "We do work hard," she says, "I've got to admit."

The smiles on the faces of students and staff alike prove that great school lunches are worth the extra effort.

For more information, contact:  
Maria Taft  
Hood River Valley High School  
1220 Indian Creek Road  
Hood River, Oregon 97031  
Telephone: (503) 386-4500

### **Woodburn, Oregon**

The lunch program in the five schools of the Woodburn School District in Woodburn, Oregon, proves that a well-run, traditional program can still pack 'em in.

Participation districtwide is close to 75 percent. The high school figure is 83 percent. The program breaks even, in spite of very low lunch prices ranging from 60 to 80 cents.

Virginia Heidi, food service manager for the district, says the program is popular simply because, "We give them food they want—and plenty of it."

Actually, Heidi and the staff in the five independent kitchens do quite a bit to make the school lunch attractive to students. They closely monitor student likes and dislikes and constantly adjust for changes. The food is good, served attractively, and the price is certainly right. They offer as much choice as possible, and there's on-going nutrition education.

The most important thing, according to Heidi, is serving what she calls "things that go"—foods kids take, and eat.

To keep abreast of student tastes, she and her staff solicit feedback in the cafeteria, listen closely to the advice of student workers in the kitchen, talk to teachers, and use annual questionnaires to formally query students about their food preferences.

Heidi keeps the cost of the meals low by operating what she calls a "no frills" program. She keeps a sharp eye on labor costs and uses as many USDA commodities as she can. All of her schools prepare food from scratch.

High school students have their choice of four lunches: a salad bar; a burger plate; a fast-food-type lunch of tacos, pizza, corn dogs, or something similar; and the more traditional school lunch, featuring entrees like meatloaf or spaghetti.

The junior high cafeteria offers the main line and salad bar 3 days a week; a weekly hot dog bar; and a once-a-week sandwich bar.

The lunch program has earned the support of the school administration—from district superintendent Don Kipp right down the line. Each school principal keeps a close watch on lunch participation and reports the figures to Kipp weekly. Kipp, the principals, teachers, and aides are regular customers in the cafeterias.

For more information contact:  
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Marion County School District 103C  
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Woodburn, Oregon 97071  
Telephone: (503) 981-9555

### **Manteca, California**

In Manteca, California, second graders recently planned a "cabbage patch lunch" for the district. They developed the menu and decorated the cafeteria, and the kitchen staff wore special cabbage patch aprons.

Mary Tolan-Davi, school food service director for Manteca Unified, says that classes plan menus for the district about twice a month, and participation goes way up on those special menu days.

"Student involvement is the key," she says. "The students need to feel part of the lunch program, and we try to make it fun. I don't know if this would work for every school district, but our elementary kids love it. You have to know your kids."

Tolan-Davi takes every opportunity to do that. Before a class plans a menu for the district, she takes the time to go into the classroom to explain what goes into the school lunch, including the nutritional standards, budgetary constraints, and preparation time.

She feels this makes students more appreciative, and helps them choose their food better. The classes receive recognition awards for their participation, and Tolan-Davi tries to take pictures for each special event.

She involves students in the lunch program through several other activities. Classes decorate the cafeteria bulletin boards each month with nutrition information. "The boards are attractive and the kids get something out of them while waiting in line for lunch." Students also participate in taste panels, which help Tolan-Davi decide which foods to order.

She also takes every opportunity to involve teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents in school food service programs, mostly through nutrition education projects. She feels their support has been extremely beneficial.

But she points out that it is her contact with students that is crucial. "I learn a lot from them about how to make our lunch program better," she says.

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### **Jerome, Idaho**

In the past 4 years, lunch program participation in the five-school Jerome, Idaho, school district has almost doubled. Participation in the high school is 80 percent. At the elementary schools and the junior high, the figures are 95 and 99 percent.

"Nutrition education is what does it," says Barbara Draper, district food service manager. "It's letting the kids pick and choose what they want—once we've taught them something about food."

The nutrition education is concentrated and begins early. First and second graders get a 2- or 3-week orientation on basic nutrition and the school lunch program.

They learn about the four food groups, what balanced meals are, and the importance of individual nutrients. They tour the cafeteria facilities and practice making their own lunches from a salad bar.

The nutrition training continues in all the grades, becoming more sophisticated for the older students and focusing on food issues relevant to each age group. Among other things, Draper uses films, works closely with the home ec classes, and lets each class try their hand at planning and preparing meals.

The nutrition education prepares students for the wide range of choices they enjoy in the Jerome lunch program. First through third graders have a typical main line and optional salad and potato bars where they build their own lunches. The fourth through sixth graders have those options as well as a frequent choice of main entree and vegetable on the main line.

In the junior high, there's another line for hamburgers and a main line that includes a variety of choices. The high schoolers choose between the main line (with self-serve vegetables and main courses), an a la carte line, or any of three self-serve soup, potato, or salad bars.

Classes compete to see which can plan, prepare, and promote lunch with the highest attendance. All new products are first judged by students. "I tell the brokers, 'Don't show me, show the kids,' it's their decision," says Draper. All grades participate in taste testing, and menu items are added and deleted according to student acceptance.

Draper feels the time put into getting the children involved and informed is important. Participation figures show it's paying off now, and Draper feels sure it will keep paying off. "These children will benefit from this for years," she says. "They'll realize it when they have kids of their own."

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*article by Tino Serrano  
and Dee Amaden  
photos by Tino Serrano*

# **Georgia Students Help Set Standards For School Meals**

More and more schools are merchandising the school lunch program by customizing food for their students. Janie Bowles, school food service director in Rockdale County, Georgia, is doing this by developing quality standards that are based on student preferences.

### **Took part in recipe tests**

This past school year, Rockdale was invited to help USDA test quantity recipes for a reprint of the USDA recipe card file. The updated recipe card file will contain 150 newly standardized school lunch recipes to help cooks and school lunch managers plan meals and utilize USDA-donated commodities.

When USDA's Food and Nutrition Service asked states to test recipes for the reprint, Annette Bomar, administrator of Georgia's School and Community Food and Nutrition Programs, selected Rockdale as the one test site in the state. "We selected Rockdale County," she says, "because the food service program is so well organized and managed."

Besides helping USDA, Bomar and Bowles saw the test as an opportunity to use the USDA recipe card file as a basis for customizing recipes to student preferences. Rockdale food service managers were enthusiastic about working with students on the project.

### **Schools tested variety of recipes**

"Each of our schools was given USDA recipes to try along with their own recipes for the items," Bowles explains. "Between January and May of this year, we held student meetings and taste panels to evaluate the finished products and to help determine food choices for each school."

"It's hard to determine what everybody likes," she adds. "There is a

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wide range of preferences. Some of the recipes I personally thought should be changed others thought were great."

Bowles is now putting together a standard set of USDA and school recipes that individual food service managers can modify with minor changes for their particular schools.

FNS food service systems specialist John Friese is Southeast regional coordinator for USDA's recipe standardization project.

According to Friese, food quality standards are tools that can help schools offer their customers consistently good meals.

"When we talk about food quality standards," he explains, "we are talking about the taste of the food, the temperature of the food, and how it looks. Commercial food outlets have standards that are met every day of the week. Individual

schools can have their own standards, too."

Often there is a wide variety in the appearance and taste of an item due to the interpretation of a standardized recipe. Food quality standards can insure that cooks prepare food the way their customers like it.

Chili, for example, is a standard product that may vary from school to school based on student's likes and dislikes. "Some students like it very soupy, while others like to eat it with a fork," Friese says.

Friese stresses that food quality standards and choice menus should go hand in hand. While tests can show how a majority of students may like an item prepared, there will always be differences in tastes. The best way to appeal to the greatest number of customers is by giving them plenty of choices.

"With a choice menu," says Friese, "you can select foods that meet your own personal standards."

### Project results will be shared

This fall in Rockdale, students are more likely to be eating chili and other favorites prepared the way they like them, thanks to the food quality standards Bowles and her staff have developed.

Bomar is looking forward to expanding the Rockdale project to other parts of the state. She has asked Bowles to present the results of her project to a statewide meeting of food service directors in November.

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*article and photos  
by Kent Taylor*

Along with other students in Rockdale County, Georgia, these elementary school children helped test a variety of recipes for school meals. Test results will help their schools develop quality standards.





## Kids Are Helping Themselves to Healthy Lunches

State school food service directors in the Southeast identified better merchandising as a primary need 3 years ago. The first joint project to address this need was the development of the "School Recipe Portfolio" merchandising manual.

Developed by eight states in cooperation with the Southeast Regional Office of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, the manual shows how the school meal recipes should look on the serving line and gives "how to" ideas for easy and attractive garnishes.

Some Southeastern food service directors and staff are implementing another approach to merchandising attractively prepared foods: student self-service. Vivian Pilant, state food service director for South Carolina, is one of the growing number of creative school lunch merchandisers who are helping schools successfully use this approach.

"Self-service can be a good way to provide nutritionally sound meals in a cost-effective way," says Pilant. "It reduces waste and encourages children to learn about food choices."

### Training critical to system's success

Training is critical to the success of self-service. Pilant is using state-wide public television to educate teachers and students on the concepts of self-service as well as to train food service employees on merchandising tips for the serving lines.

Earlier this year, South Carolina sponsored the "Southeastern

Seminar on Innovative Serving Systems" that drew state and local school food service personnel from throughout the Southeast region. At this conference in Georgetown County, federal, state, and local staff exchanged knowledge and shared experiences on self-service programs.

"I realized that there were a lot of good things going on out there that we were not yet doing in South Carolina," says Pilant, "and I also saw that we were doing some things that other states were interested in hearing about."

As part of this meeting, participants observed the successful self-serve operation at Andrews Primary School in Andrews, South Carolina. Georgetown County food service director Susan Williams, who supervised the process of setting up self-service at Andrews, says at first she was skeptical, but is now sold on the new system.

### Works even for youngest students

"When we were planning new schools several years ago, we called in food service systems specialists John Friese, of the Food and Nutrition Service, and Bobbie Berry Rudisill, of the state department of education, to plan the operation for Andrews Primary," Williams explains.

"Andrews serves 4-year-olds through fourth graders, and when John first approached us about having self-serve for all students, I thought he was kidding. We didn't know if 4- and 5-year olds could really serve themselves.

"Even after we decided to go to self-service, I had some second thoughts when a parent told me there would be spaghetti on the ceiling if kindergarten children served themselves," she laughs.

Fortunately, that did not happen when Andrews converted to self-service during the 1984-1985 school year. Instead of more waste, there was less, and there were more

children participating in the lunch program.

According to Williams, there are a number of technical obstacles to overcome in converting to self-serve. First, the proper height serving counter must be used to accommodate kindergarten students.

The correct placement of the "sneeze guards"—to insure sanitation of foods on the serving line—is also an important consideration. Williams suggests working closely with health departments and equipment specialists early to prevent problems later on.

Williams also explains that it is important to educate students, teachers, and parents on self-serve concepts and procedures. "The teachers have been very helpful in guiding the students, and we have received the backing of the principal and parents. We try to get the students and parents involved—helping us plan menus, for example."

### Self-service line is carefully designed

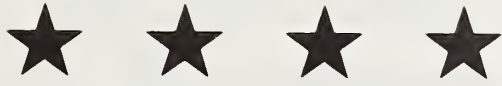
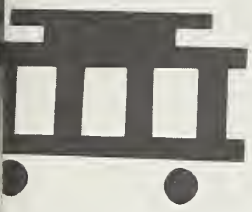
Merchandising and nutrition education work together in the Andrews cafeteria. The self-serve line, with dual-sided serving counters, has been designed to resemble a train, complete with a smoke-stack, wheels, and caboose. Trays are stacked in front to look like a cowcatcher.

The brightly colored lunch area carries out the railroad theme with train cars painted on the walls showing the different food groups. Food service workers are outfitted as engineers.

Throughout the cafeteria, food groups are color-coded on attractive menu boards and signs—meats are red, vegetables are green—to help students classify food as they are selecting items. Students have a choice of at least two and sometimes three entrees and several fruits and vegetables.

"The kids love it," says Williams,





In Andrews, South Carolina, children move quickly through the self-service lunch line.

and the best part is they're eating the food, and they like lunch."

They're also more adventure-some, which is something Pilant sees often with self-service. "Students are more likely to try foods they select themselves—foods that would go uneaten if served to them," she says.

FNS regional reviewers visited Andrews last year to see how self-serve was working. According to Charles Kirby, director of special nutrition programs for FNS' Southeast region, they found that the system was working with few exceptions and that most of the children were taking enough food to meet the meal requirements.

"Self-service takes a good bit of monitoring," says Kirby. "The food needs to be served in such a way so that if the child picks up an item it will satisfy a meal component requirement."

Presentation is important, too. Says FNS' John Friese, "Since children are more likely to choose items that look attractive, it's important to pay attention to merchandising the food." In Friese's experience, self-serve makes it easy for children to find foods they like within the choices they have.

### **Schools see less waste**

Although there may be expenses involved in purchasing or modifying equipment for self-service, there are usually savings derived in reduced labor hours. At Andrews, for example, fewer labor hours are now required due to the change in the work of the cafeteria staff.

Another change is that small batches of food are cooked throughout the lunch periods, which provides all students with freshly cooked food and cuts down on waste.

A number of schools in other states, especially in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee, have implemented self-serve systems. Connie Beaudoin, food service director in October 1985

Leon County, Florida, offers a choice of two meals, a hot plate meal, and self-serve bars serving Mexican food, potatoes with a variety of toppings, and soup and salad.

Although most of the foods on the self-service bars are not preportioned, Beaudoin says certain high-cost meat items are either served to the students or portioned in individual containers. In addition, some hot foods such as toppings for potatoes and meat sauce for tacos are served to younger students for safety reasons.

Beaudoin has not seen any labor savings by going to self-service but does find food costs have lowered. She attributes this primarily to the extensive use of commodities on the self-serve lines.

### **Idea is catching on in many areas**

No Alabama school had tried a self-service system for elementary school students until state child nutrition consultants Anne Freeman and Janice Wood convinced the Montgomery County food service supervisor to test self-serve at Dannelly Elementary in Montgomery.

Since it was a pilot program, existing equipment was used to save money. Folding tables that were 26 inches high provided a low serving line for the younger students.

It is not uncommon to increase school lunch participation as a result of converting to a self-serve operation. Participation at Dannelly increased substantially, and now 95 percent of the students eat school lunch.

Because of the success at Dannelly, all of the Montgomery County schools are changing to the self-service concept. In Nashville, Tennessee, more than 125 schools plan to implement self-service by the end of next year.

School food service is changing to keep up with students' needs. With innovations like self-service and choice menus for all students, school lunch programs are becoming more modern and efficient operations for future generations of children.

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*articles and photos by Kent Taylor*

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Alexandria, Virginia 22302

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Published four times a year by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250

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The Secretary of Agriculture has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of this Department. The use of funds for printing this publication was approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget June 22, 1984.

Prints of photos may be obtained from Photo Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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# Food & Nutrition

*Food and Nutrition* is a magazine of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In it you'll find articles on the family food assistance and child nutrition programs administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service in cooperation with state governments and local agencies.

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