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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

Tuesday, September 5, 1944

QUESTION BOX:

How start lunch program?
How prevent discrimination?
Pay for lunch with produce?

ANSWERS FROM:

Food Distribution officials
of the U.S. Department of
Agriculture.

Schools are clean; dresses are starched; hair is cut; and teachers are ready for a new school year. When the first day finally arrives many of the teachers and pupils are finding a pleasant surprise waiting for them. One of the services that many schools are offering for the first time this year is a nutritious lunch. Last year, with the financial assistance provided by the Federal appropriation for school lunches, 30,000 schools found it possible to serve lunches to their pupils at the noon hour.

Many more schools are considering ways and means to provide lunches. Letters are coming into the War Food Administration daily asking how to share in the fifty million dollars that Congress appropriated for school lunches this coming winter. It is neither too late to inquire nor too late to start a school lunch program in your community school if you and other citizens are interested.

This letter from a Home Economics teacher in a small school in New York State is typical of the enthusiasm expressed in many inquiries. Here is part of her letter: "In previous years the children have had milk and sandwiches served to them, occasionally soup, sometimes fruit. Many of them bring their lunches. I know it's possible to pack a lunch that is satisfactory. But most pupils or their mothers don't pack that kind. Many children bring two jelly sandwiches--and nothing more--day after day. Sometimes they eat a bite or two and throw the balance in the waste basket. The children who have a nickel to spend for milk often get candy instead. So you can see why my experience with home packed lunches was so distressing.

I want to do all I can to introduce a lunch program into our school this year. Will you please tell me how to go about it?" That teacher will receive a brief publication called "Lunch at School" which explains clearly the financial arrangements, the types of lunches and other information she needs. Anyone who wants to know more about it can write to the War Food Administration, Washington, D. C.

City schools, rural schools, big and little, public or private schools of high school level or under are eligible to draw on this federal fund, providing the schools are not run for profit. Certain stipulations are set up. For instance one of the most important requirements is that every child will receive the same lunch whether he can pay for it or not. Perhaps you would like to hear part of the letter from a mother whose youngsters go to a city school: "Our elementary school is attended by children from will-to-do homes and children from very poor homes. We haven't had a lunch program because the children are near enough to their homes so that the teachers expect them to go home for lunch. But the situation is different now during the war. Forty percent of the mothers of children in that school are working at war jobs. That means a packed lunch for the children or a sandwich in the corner drug store. Neither one is satisfactory. The children don't get enough to eat--either in quantity or quality. But the teachers object to a lunch room because it would increase that distinction between the two groups of children--those who could pay for their lunches and those who cannot. How does the Federal plan provide for that problem?"

One of the most far-reaching stipulations in this lunch program is that which says "each child may have a lunch, regardless of his ability to pay; and that there is no discrimination between paying and non-paying children". If you are wondering how the grocery bills can be paid under this plan let's take an example like this. Imagine a school with 100 pupils. They will be served a Type-A lunch which is a complete lunch that will provide one-third to one-half of a child's nutritive needs for a day. There are other types of lunches for which schools can get compensation, but we won't go into that now. Let's say that 90 pupils can afford to pay 10 cents each for their lunches. That amounts to \$9. And the other 10 pupils can't pay anything. From the Federal Fund that school can be reimbursed a maximum of 9 cents for each plate it serves, providing the school spent an equal amount for food. At 9 cents a plate for 100 pupils the school collects from the Federal Fund

\$9. That sum plus the \$9 which the children paid would come close to paying for most of the food for all the children. Food costs differ so widely from one place to another that it is difficult to be specific.

Another question along the same line is frequently raised. A farmer's wife asked this one: "Can I pay for my children's lunches at school with potatoes and eggs?" The answer is "Yes", if you can arrange with the lunch room manager to buy them at market prices." One Home Economics teacher who was managing a lunch room for the first time, wrote in to us about being swamped with requests to buy eggs. The school was a poultry section. She couldn't possibly use all the eggs they wanted her to buy. What should she do? In that particular case they finally worked out a market held in town on certain Saturdays. It was in charge of the Parent-Teachers Association. In that way the women found a market for their produce and had the cash to pay for the children's lunches.

But in many cases the school buys directly from the farmers, paying the local market price. Reimbursement from the Federal fund depends first on the need for financial assistance. Second on the type of lunch served. In the third place the rate of reimbursement will never exceed the cost of the food purchased and used. In the fourth place reimbursement covers only food, not equipment or help to do the work.

Every school works out its own plans for buying, preparing, and serving. In one town the entire community pooled their extra pans and dishes and silverware until the school had more than enough to serve lunches. In another school one of the teachers and the senior boys built the steam tables and cupboards. The girls painted tables and chairs. Frequently an organization such as the Rotary or the Business and Professional Women take a lunch room on as their annual project. They work in collaboration with the school board or trustee and arrange to see it through financially.

One of the best investments a community can make is to see that its children are well fed. With a complete, nutritious lunch children are more likely to get their daily food requirements for growth and good health.

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