Food Service Updates Spring 2026

Looking Ahead w/ New Dietary Guidelines for Americans vs. USDA Guidelines

Constructing a School Meal - No easy feat

- Specific Calorie Minimums and Maximums
- Sugar and Sodium Limits- that keep getting lowered
- Vegetable sub groups- 5 different per week
- Popularity with Palates- It may be healthy but will kids eat it?
- Budget- It may be healthy but is it affordable?
- Texture & Color- Is it appealing?
- Prep- Can we do it in 1.5 hours? - Picture Thanksgiving Dinner- Can you serve 500 everyday?

Challenges are Coming

1) We are funded by the USDA and we follow their rules.
2) The USDA rules are made by lawmakers and the lawmakers of today are not the lawmakers of the past.
3) Their different ideas may cause School Food to have to change paths quickly.

USDA Guidelines– Sodium & Sugar- Goal SY 2027-2028

- Lower Sodium- USDA Goal to drop below 1080mg

  This is lower than a Heart Healthy Diet in a hospital for a cardiac patient

- Lower Sugar- USDA Goal to cap added sugar to 10% of a student's weekly calories in their school meals
- Whole Grains- maintain level of 80% of whole grains. Breakfast- 2 oz must be served-no protein required.

Jan 2026- New Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Coming to a Stalemate- What else to consider

- Rules alone are not enough to consider.
- The “how” needs to be looked at.

A) How much money will it take to change: recipes/formulations, physical lines to make the product, packaging

B) Lowering sodium usually involves adding something else- MSG, Potassium Chloride, Yeast Extract for flavor, Herbs/Spices, Magnesium Sulfates

C) Lowering sugar usually involves adding something else- sugar alcohols, artificial sweeteners, bulking agents such as corn fiber, polydextrose, glycerin

Will manufacturer’s continue to change their standards every couple of years? Will they benefit?

How Will this Impact School Food?

In order to have less processed food items and to avoid the question of whether that's doable the following must be considered:

- Equipment?
- Training?
- Labor Hours?
- Money?

*Example- This year we have served 4x the amount of breakfast meals than last year because we've offered free breakfast. However, we get complaints that the meals are not healthy and they are too processed.

How Will this Impact School Food? Cont.

We can only serve what we are able to buy from the manufacturers.

We don’t add sugar or salt to anything, we cannot meet these guidelines without the manufacturers making changes.

If the new dietary guidelines for Americans forces school programs to change their menus. We would need more funding, more staff hours, and more protein focused products made by K12 manufacturers.

The Milk Debate

- In recent years milk was made to be either 1% fat with no flavor OR fat free with flavor such as chocolate, strawberry, or vanilla. The USDA said to lower the sugar, lower the fat.
- The dietary guidelines says “Full Fat is OK”.
- Mid- year the USDA flipped and said Whole Milk is now OK.

  -Imagine what those manufacturers were thinking.

For now, we have not changed our milk stance because whole milk would tip our daily saturated fat past the point that the USDA currently allows for the day.

Wait! There is a waiver for that!

Summary

- School meal planning is challenging in normal situations.
- The contrast between the old USDA rules and the new Dietary guidelines may make planning even harder.
- Will manufacturers comply? How long will that take?
- Will school cafeterias be able to manage the changes as quickly as demands may come?
- We will do our best.