

NUTRITION HORIZON

USDA Proposes Updated School Lunch Guidelines

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Summary:The new proposed meal requirements will raise standards for the first time in fifteen years and will make critical changes to school meals and help improve the health and nutrition of nearly 32 million kids that participate in school meal programs every school day.

1/14/2011 --- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has published a proposed rule to update the nutrition standards for meals served through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs as part of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 13, 2010. The new proposed meal requirements will raise standards for the first time in fifteen years and will make critical changes to school meals and help improve the health and nutrition of nearly 32 million kids that participate in school meal programs every school day, an important component of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative to solve the challenge of childhood obesity within a generation.

"The United States is facing an obesity epidemic and the crisis of poor diets threatens the future of our children – and our nation," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "With many children consuming as many as half their daily calories at school, strengthening nutritional standards is an important step in the Obama administration's effort to combat childhood obesity and improve the health and wellbeing of all our kids."

The proposed changes to school meal standards, which would add more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat milk to school meals, are based on recommendations released in October 2009 by the National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) and presented in their report, *School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children*. Schools would also be required to limit the levels of saturated fat, sodium, calories, and trans fats in meals.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act gives schools and communities new tools to meet the challenge of providing more nutritious food including increasing school lunch reimbursements by 6 cents per meal, and increasing technical assistance. School meal programs are a partnership between USDA, State agencies and local schools, and USDA will work with schools and communities to help improve meals so that they are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

"Raising a healthier generation of kids will require hard work and commitment of a host of partners," said Vilsack. "We understand that these improved meal standards may present challenges for some school districts, but the new law provides important new resources, technical assistance and flexibility to help schools raise the bar for our kids."

According to government data, almost 32 percent of children 6 to 19 years of age are overweight or obese; the number of obese children in this age range has trebled in the last few

decades. These children are more likely to have risk factors associated with chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes. Updated school meal standards are a central part of the strategy developed by President Obama's Childhood Obesity Task Force to provide healthier food at schools, and in turn, work toward resolving childhood obesity.

USDA is seeking input on the proposed rule from the public through April 13, 2011.