

RUTGERS Bringing Food Service Professionals to the Table to Improve School Wellness

New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

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INTRODUCTION

School food service professionals partnered with Rutgers Cooperative Extension Department of Family and Community Health Sciences in *Grow Healthy: A Garden-Enhanced School Wellness Initiative*. School food service personnel participated in training workshops, classroom to cafeteria efforts, school garden projects, school wellness councils and completed a farm to school survey. *Grow Healthy* provided a vehicle for school food service professionals to meet the participation requirements of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act.

Grow Healthy is funded by a USDA Team Nutrition grant awarded to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Partners include New Jersey Farm to School Network, New Jersey-School Nutrition Association, and local elementary schools.

FOOD SERVICE TRAINING WORKSHOP TOPICS

- Dietary Guidelines for Americans: Focus on Sodium and Whole Grains
- Farm to School
- HealthierUS School Challenge
- Working with Commodity Foods
- Grow Healthy with NJ Schools
- New School Lunch Rules
- Food Safety & Produce in Schools



OBJECTIVES RELATED TO SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE

- Survey food service providers to assess knowledge, current activities, readiness for, and interest in Farm to School (FTS) initiatives
- Educate food service professionals on the nutritional benefits of USDA foods and how to use commodities to create “kid-friendly” meals
- Provide technical assistance and support for HealthierUS School Challenge applicants
- Increase the availability of fruits and vegetables through the promotion of school gardens and FTS initiatives
- Facilitate communication between parents/caregivers, school personnel and food service staff about school nutrition

ACHIEVEMENTS OF FOOD SERVICE PROFESSIONALS (FSP)

- 320 FSP were trained via regional training workshops
- 222 FSP completed the Farm to School survey
- 3 schools received HUSSC silver or bronze awards
- Assisted with over 6000 fruit and vegetable taste tests
- Supported school garden efforts
- Served on school wellness councils and contributed to school wellness assessments and policy development
- Provided healthy food for classroom celebrations and school wellness events
- Shared best practices at statewide training

[To decrease sodium content] “Using more fresh uncooked vegetables like broccoli, green beans, grape tomatoes, cucumbers instead of canned veggies with tzatziki yogurt dips instead of bottled dressings”

KEY FINDINGS

FTS Survey

- >80% of FSP are interested in or already participating in FTS
- 43% of FTS projects utilize school gardens, greenhouses or classroom gardens in food production
- 44% of responding FSP indicated after training that they would make at least one specific menu change

Student Taste Tests

- 18 school-wide taste tests were conducted using vegetables such as kale, squash, snap peas, and spinach which were later added to the cafeteria menu
- 41% of students in grades K-6 were willing to try new fruit/vegetable

Parent Input

- Parents favor healthier school meals and a la carte options and want more detailed nutrition information on menus
- Parents need healthy, affordable, easy recipes and cooking tips to use at home

BOSC PEAR CAKE USING USDA FOOD

- 2 eggs
- ¼ C. milk
- 1C. sugar
- 1 t. almond or vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt
- 1 ½ C. fine ground wheat flour
- 2 lb. firm, but not rock hard, **winter pears**
- ¼ C. frozen blueberries (dried optional)
- 2 t. butter (optional but recommended)



Recipe courtesy of Scott Engel, CEC~ Culinary Arts
Instructor, Mercer County Technical School

[In preparation for applying for the
HUSSC]
“added more cruciferous vegetables;
all milk is fat free

CONCLUSION

School food service professionals can be active and influential partners in enhancing the school wellness environment as required by the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act 2010. Collaborations on student taste-tests, garden activities, nutrition education for students and families, and school wellness council efforts have proven to be successful strategies in a school-wide wellness initiative in New Jersey.