

Fruits and Vegetables



ISSUE

How have school food service directors implemented the fruit and vegetable provisions resulting from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA)?

BACKGROUND

HHFKA required the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to issue new science-based nutrition standards to improve the nutritional quality of school meals. The standards are based on the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine¹ and are aligned with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The lunch standards specify weekly and daily requirements for low/non-fat fluid milk, fruits, vegetables, meat/meat alternates, and whole grain-rich items. The standards also set specifications for calories, sodium, saturated fat, and *trans* fat. Similar requirements apply to school breakfasts.

The new regulatory provisions require schools to offer fruits and vegetables as two separate components. The provisions call for offering fruit daily at breakfast and lunch, offering vegetables daily at lunch, and meeting weekly requirements for specific vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange, beans/peas [legumes], starchy, and other). Beginning in school year 2012-2013, USDA required that school lunch offered to students include both fruit and vegetable choices (instead of a fruit or a vegetable; see Table 1); students were required to take both a fruit and a vegetable with lunch. Similarly, beginning in school year 2014-2015, schools were required to offer one cup of fruit or vegetable (instead of one-half cup) for breakfast.

To ease the burden of implementing the fruit and vegetable provisions, USDA provided additional guidance as well as flexibilities to school food authorities (SFAs) experiencing challenges in offering fruits and vegetables at school meals. USDA also has provided resources to assist schools in purchasing, handling, storing, preparing, and serving fruits and vegetables in school meals.²

1. Renamed the National Academy of Medicine effective July 1, 2015.
 2. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Tools for Schools: Offering Fruits and Vegetables, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthierschoolday/tools-schools-offering-fruits-and-vegetables>.

Table 1. Fruit and Vegetable Requirements at Lunch, Beginning in School Year 2012-2013

Food category	Grade		
	K-5	6-8	9-12
	Amount per week, in cups (minimum per day)		
Fruit	2.5 (0.5)	2.5 (0.5)	5 (1)
Vegetables, including:	3.75 (0.75)	3.75 (0.75)	5 (1)
Dark green	0.5	0.5	0.5
Red/orange	0.75	0.75	1.25
Beans, peas (legumes)	0.5	0.5	0.5
Starchy	0.5	0.5	0.5
Other	0.5	0.5	0.75
Additional vegetables to reach total	1.0	1.0	1.5

K = Kindergarten

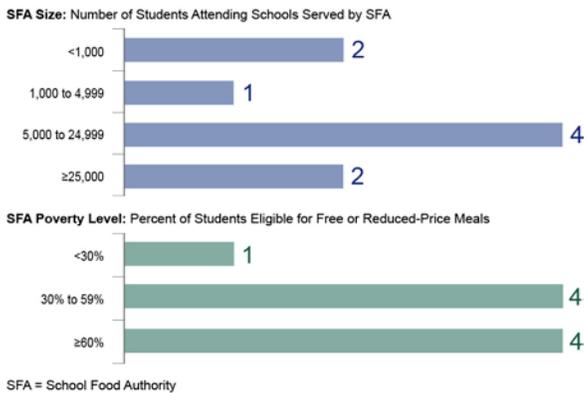
This research brief presents an overview of school food service directors' experiences in transitioning to the fruit and vegetable provisions, a summary of the strategies they have used to overcome challenges and implement the provisions in their school districts, and recommendations for technical assistance. The information comes from semi-structured discussions conducted by telephone (focus group or individual interview) with directors in April and May 2015. Although the participants are not statistically representative of all directors, the qualitative data collection technique was particularly suited to gaining an in depth understanding of how directors implemented HHFKA. See Figure 1 for a summary of the size and poverty level of the SFAs represented by these directors.³

[healthierschoolday/tools-schools-offering-fruits-and-vegetables](http://www.fns.usda.gov/healthierschoolday/tools-schools-offering-fruits-and-vegetables). USDA guidance memos addressed topics such as counting fruit in smoothies toward fruit requirements, including salad bars as part of a reimbursable meal, and using a food buying guide when purchasing vegetables.

3. This brief also includes strategies cited by directors who participated in focus group discussions and telephone interviews for research briefs in this series on other aspects of HHFKA implementation, including whole grain-rich foods, sodium, Smart Snacks, plate waste, student participation, food service revenue, and childhood obesity.



Figure 1. Characteristics of School Food Authorities (SFAs) Represented by Participating School Food Service Directors



KEY FINDINGS

Overall, school food service directors in this study agreed that they were able to implement the HHFKA fruit and vegetable provisions with relative ease. However, the directors cited four main challenges in meeting the requirements: (1) planning and serving meals to meet weekly vegetable subgroup requirements, (2) introducing students to new fruits and vegetables, (3) improving student selection and consumption of fruits and vegetables, and (4) reducing waste for fruits and vegetables.

School food service directors described successful strategies that helped them address these challenges, including:

- Network with other school food service directors and use simple tools to assess vegetables offered in all subgroups in relation to requirements.
- Expose students to new fruits and vegetables by participating in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) or through other grants, engage students in fruit and vegetable gardening activities, and engage parents.
- Improve student selection of fruits and vegetables by providing choices, serve raw as well as cooked vegetables, add vegetables in main entrées, and provide encouragement to choose fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria, and use *Smarter Lunchrooms* strategies.
- Reduce fruit and vegetable waste by practicing responsive cooking, batch cooking, and designating sharing tables.

Technical assistance in implementing the fruit and vegetable provisions should include staff training, recipes with pictures of finished products, standardized menus, information about relevant grant sources, strategies for marketing fruits and vegetables to students, and guidance on reducing fruit and vegetable waste.

“This is how it is. This is the requirement and this is what you have to do. That’s what we did and the kids adjusted.”

OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Fruits and Vegetables at Breakfast Prior to HHFKA

All school food service directors who participated in this study said that prior to HHFKA, they typically served fruit but not vegetables at breakfast. Directors also noted that they did not serve fresh fruit very often; fruit offerings were limited to apples, bananas, oranges, canned peaches (in a cup), or fruit juice. Directors said their decision to serve fruit juice at breakfast was based on children’s preference for juice, as well as the lack of storage space. A few directors said that if they had leftover fruit from lunch, they would serve it at breakfast the next day, and this typically happened once a week or so.

“At breakfast, we would offer juice every day. The fresh fruit was probably limited to maybe once a week, sometimes twice a week at our elementary levels, because we did not have kitchens at all of those facilities, so not a lot of storage space. The schools were told that if they had fruit left from lunch the previous day, that they could be served at breakfast time, as a way to use that up.”

One school food service director required her schools to serve fresh fruit, canned fruit, and fruit juice at breakfast. She added that the schools occasionally would serve roasted potatoes, but not on a weekly or monthly basis.

“We offer parfaits and we offer smoothies. So they get their veggie and their fruit. Parfaits are a way to sneak in some fruit.”

Fruits and Vegetables at Lunch Prior to HHFKA

All school food service directors in this study said they typically offered both fruits (fresh and/or canned) and one or more vegetables at lunch. One director said they offered several fruit and vegetable options, knowing that school meals may be the only source of fruits and vegetables in their students’ diets.



“We’re pretty high [in the number of children receiving] free and reduced [lunches]. So we knew that what the children eat at school was their nutrition. We knew that there was probably not a lot of variety, especially fresh fruits and vegetables consumed in the home, or available. So that was the reasoning behind that [offering a variety of fruits and vegetables at breakfast and lunch].”

None of the school food service directors offered a salad bar at the elementary school level. A few directors said this was due to resistance from elementary school principals. One director said principals in his district believed that offering salad bars lengthened the time students spent in line and shortened their time to eat lunch. Another director agreed that the time available to eat was a factor, and principals in elementary schools wanted food choices to be limited. Typical offerings included canned or frozen cooked vegetables, carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli, and iceberg lettuce salad with ranch dressing.

In contrast, another school food service director said he offered a lot of choice to elementary students. He explained that the choices slowed down the line at the beginning of the school year, but children learned to make choices faster as they became familiar with the offerings.

At the secondary level (middle and high school), some school food service directors offered salads (pre-made or salad bar) every day. Most directors said they served iceberg lettuce salads (in prepared chef salads and in salad bars). Only one director served romaine lettuce at lunch.

“We wanted to offer something fresh and healthier than other options in the meal – and students recommended offering salads.”

One school food service director who served pre-made chef salad for 16 years switched to a salad bar before HHFKA to free up resources. The director also switched from serving iceberg lettuce to dark green vegetables (spinach and romaine lettuce). Another director described a reverse experience; she offered a salad bar for several years and experienced increases in food costs and plate waste. She continued offering salad but switched to pre-plated salads. The director also offered an entrée salad at the high school at least 3 days each week.

A few school food service directors offered beans at lunch. Two directors said they served pinto, baked, and refried beans regularly at lunch. They explained that students in their district ate beans at home and were familiar with dishes containing beans.

Most school food service directors said it was difficult to buy local produce. They said the biggest stumbling block in purchasing local products was that most harvesting is done in summer, when school is not in session. Only one director participated in the USDA Farm to School Program.

“Our growing season aligns well with the school year. We have an advantage over some other areas in the United States as far as being able to implement the Farm to School Program during the school year.”

A few school food service directors noted that the large geographic size of their district made it logistically difficult to go local. One director noted that although they did not participate in the Farm to School Program, their produce vendor purchases local products.

“It’s just the availability for us. Being able to get the volume that we would need for every school is difficult.”

“We’ve had the same produce company for probably the last ten years. He actually draws from local areas. So even though we are not truly a farm to school setup, we do qualify for the program. It’s [the fruits and vegetables served at school] all [from] local farmers.”

Transitioning to Post-HHFKA Requirements

School food service directors in this study agreed that they were able to implement the fruit and vegetable provisions in their district with relative ease. The biggest changes and challenges involved purchasing fruits and vegetables, and gaining student acceptance.

“As far as just the fruits and vegetables, we didn’t have a huge problem implementing those.”

All school food service directors said they changed the ordering process and started buying canned and fresh fruits and vegetables. Some directors said they set aside commodity dollars to buy fresh fruits and vegetables through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (commonly referred to as DoD Fresh). Directors also started participating in learning gardens and FFVP.



School food service directors used a variety of strategies to gain student acceptance and increase student selection and consumption of fruits and vegetables at school meals. Some directors used *Smarter Lunchrooms* strategies, such as rearranging items in the lunch line and decorating the lunch line with seasonal themes and student artwork, to make it more inviting. Two directors placed fruits and vegetable salad at the beginning and end of the line, one implemented a salad bar, and another served pre-plated entrée salads.

School food service directors also said they encouraged students to try new foods in lunch lines and in classrooms. Directors said they collaborated with teachers to educate students on the benefits of healthy eating, and emphasized the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTING FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROVISIONS

School food service directors who participated in this study cited four main challenges in achieving compliance with the fruit and vegetable provisions:

1. Planning and serving meals to meet weekly vegetable subgroup requirements,
2. Introducing students to new fruits and vegetables,
3. Improving student selection and consumption of fruits and vegetables, and
4. Reducing waste for fruits and vegetables.

Directors described successful strategies that helped them address these challenges, as summarized below.

Challenge 1: Planning and serving meals to meet weekly vegetable subgroup requirements.

✓ **Network with other school food service directors.** All directors said they either belonged to a food-buying co-op and thereby networked with other directors in their State, or made connections with other directors at regional and national conferences. They were able to exchange ideas about the ways in which other directors were incorporating the vegetable subgroups in their weekly menus. There was general agreement that networking with other school food service directors was also important as a way to exchange ideas on what worked and what did not.

“Obviously, we are all in the same boat, so to speak.

We try to bounce ideas off of each other. You know, I’ve tried this. ... Maybe you might try it.

Let me know how it works for you.”

✓ **Use a software tool to facilitate menu planning.** Some directors said they used a spreadsheet that served as

an audit tool and aided menu planning. One director explained that his State developed a spreadsheet that listed all vegetable subgroups and the serving sizes needed on a weekly basis. When they input their weekly menu, the output showed the gaps in meeting the fruit and vegetable subgroups. In one example, the director explained that in the early stages of implementation, they were deficient in peas and legumes. Seeing this deficiency, they added black beans and corn salad to meet the subgroup requirement.

✓ **Serve raw vegetables.** Most school food service directors said students preferred raw vegetables to cooked vegetables. One director installed a salad bar at elementary school; some directors offered tossed salads with carrots and tomatoes every day. All directors said they no longer offered iceberg lettuce and now offered romaine, spring mix, and spinach. All directors said most children enjoyed eating vegetables when served with ranch dressing.

One school food service director offered entrée salads that included breaded chicken, spicy chicken, chicken tenders, or mandarin chicken. Another director said students picked up toppings for their sandwiches at the salad bar.

“We have a variety of salads to choose from every day, as well as a side salad. The kids like when we have cheeseburgers. They like fresh lettuce, tomato, and onion to go with that, which surprises me, that so many kids eat onion and tomato.”

A few directors offered parfaits and smoothies as a way to increase fruit acceptance and consumption. One director said she was experimenting with smoothies that include vegetables, and was hoping to add that to the menu.

✓ **Add vegetables to main entrées, or flavor vegetables and serve them hot.** Some school food service directors said students were more likely to accept vegetables when combined with an entrée. All directors used USDA standardized recipes and found these helpful. One director was able to increase vegetable consumption by adding broccoli to pasta Alfredo, and another offered a Mexican rice bowl that included rice, refried beans, salsa, and greens. Another director served rice with beans, preparing the beans in a curry style with coconut milk, or with Italian seasoning. One director served soups containing vegetables every day in the winter months. Another served pumpkin casseroles—essentially a pumpkin pie without the crust, and thus resembling a soufflé—and noted that children liked the naturally sweet taste of pumpkin.

To increase palatability, directors also described ways to add flavor to hot vegetables, such as by adding dill weed to green beans, adding fresh ginger on carrots, serving collard greens with sweet and sour sauce, adding maple cinnamon



sprinkle on sweet potatoes, and serving corn with garlic and cilantro or with chili lime powder.

Challenge 2: Introducing students to new fruits and vegetables.

✓ **Secure grants focused on introducing students to a variety of produce.** Many school food service directors received FFVP grants to give students more opportunities to eat fruits and vegetables. The grants allowed directors to offer fresh fruits and vegetables twice a week, in the classroom and at times other than breakfast and lunch. Directors agreed that the FFVP was instrumental in encouraging students to try new fruits and vegetables.

“It [FFVP] really helped our food service as far as our awareness of possibilities of what we could get kids to eat now.”

“Depending on what’s in season, we’ll give them a variety of berries. They’ll do beets, kiwi, cauliflower, star fruit, raw Brussel sprouts, raw asparagus, jicama. It was something unusual but it went over very well.”

“We’ve done edamame, mangoes. It’s really an opportunity to provide them with something different, and we pair nutrition education along with those items so it can be infused in the classroom.”

One school food service director received a two-year nutrition education and obesity prevention grant from a private organization. The grant was used to procure fruits and vegetables. Teachers taught several units on the benefits of fruits and vegetables and offered taste tests.

“The [grant program] has been a really good program for us because everybody just gets a quick, little bite. And it’s in their classrooms and they get to talk about it. The kids aren’t afraid to try new things, based on that program.”

✓ **Engage students in fruit and vegetable gardening activities.** School food service directors discussed methods they used to engage students in opportunities to grow and harvest fruits and vegetables. One director noted

that in addition to exposing students to new fruits and vegetables, such programs provide opportunities to educate students about the different types of fruits and vegetables and their health benefits, and to show them foods in their whole, raw form.

“Hopefully [gardening opportunities] encourage students to try something new. Because we even have kids in our district that don’t know what a potato looks like, like the actual vegetable potato. They can tell you that a French fry is a potato, but they can’t tell you what the potato looks like. It’s really a great opportunity to show them some of these foods in their natural state.”

One school food service director obtained a small grant to develop a learning garden in five schools in partnership with the city, and described how community members got involved and helped to grow fruits and vegetables. The learning garden was integrated as a part of the common core curriculum, and part of the land was reserved for teachers to garden with their students.

“We will bring in displays in the district cafeterias at the elementary level where we’ll have the seeds. Then we’ll have a seedling plant, and then try to have more of a full-grown plant ... in the spring. Then in the fall we brought back the tomato plant in a pot with tomatoes growing on it. We were serving cherry tomatoes on the menu that day to try to help make that connection.”

Two school food service directors said students in some schools planted produce in their school greenhouse in limited quantities. One of the directors said she adds a label to the lunch line alerting students when the salad bar includes produce grown in the school’s greenhouse. Two directors talked about the role of farm to school programs in exposing students to new fruits and vegetables. One director described an activity in which students started with seeds and grew turnips that were incorporated in school lunch in several ways. After tasting recipes containing turnips, students voted for their favorite recipe.

“We had ‘Turning Up for Turnips Day’ for Farm to School Month in October. We had a month-long observance of giving the kids information about turnips. We had some that had been growing that



we transplanted in clear bottles so that the kids could see the turnip growing beneath the ground.

Then turnips were served on the menu that day.”

✓ **Collaborate with teachers.** Several school food service directors said they discussed the changes in fruit and vegetable offerings with teachers and requested their assistance in preparing students for the changes. One director was approached by teachers looking for additional information to share with students in preparation for the changes in the lunch line, including information about the types of fruits and vegetables available in school meals.

A few school food service directors mentioned that the health curriculum in their district included a discussion about MyPlate, and said they asked teachers to reinforce to students that half of the plate should be fruits and vegetables. One director said teachers liked the ChooseMyPlate.gov Web site because of its clear guidance and attractive layout.

Several school food service directors collaborated with teachers on the FFVP, Harvest of the Month, and other programs and grant-funded activities aimed at increasing exposure to fruits and vegetables.

“We also encourage the teachers to try it [taste test fruits and vegetables offered through FFVP] as well, to be the good role model. Hopefully encourage the students to try something new.”

✓ **Engage parents.** A few school food service directors suggested that one way to increase selection and consumption of fruit and vegetables at school was to work with parents to promote fruit and vegetable consumption at home. Directors noted that students were not accustomed to eating fruits and vegetables at home. One director said they were trying to encourage parents to try different foods and serve a variety of fruits and vegetables as part of home meals.

“One of the education components that we try to do with the menus is encourage parents to try different foods and not be serving the same vegetables or fruits [at every meal] or maybe not even preparing them with their meals at home. We’re trying to educate them along those lines.”

Several school food service directors talked with parents during open houses, parent-teacher organization meetings,

and other events about the new fruit and vegetable offerings at the school and the health benefits associated with consuming them. A few directors invited parents to eat school lunch with their children.

Challenge 3: Improving student selection and consumption of fruits and vegetables.

✓ **Offer more choices.** All school food service directors said students are more likely to select fruits and vegetables when given a choice. Some talked about offering the same products in different forms in the same menu—for example, serving both raw and steamed carrots.

“A lot of times, when the weather is good, and the fresh fruit is good, we’ll go ahead and cut up our cantaloupe and pineapples, throw some grapes in. And they love fresh fruit. And so when it’s nicer and fresh fruit is available, we’ll do more fresh than we do the canned.”

“We found that when we put out a variety of fruits and vegetables for students to choose from, they ... took what they wanted. Our plate waste decreased when we put out the variety.”

All school food service directors agreed that it takes time for students to accept and routinely eat vegetables, and said that plate waste went down over time. One director said he offered foods at least seven times before making a decision about its acceptability and popularity.

“We knew that [plate waste] was going to happen, because this was not a way of eating that these students were accustomed to. They weren’t eating this way at home, so it was going to be difficult for them to accept some of the foods in the beginning.”

✓ **Encourage students to choose fruits and vegetables in the cafeteria.** Several school food service directors emphasized the role of verbal encouragement from line staff in promoting fruit and vegetable consumption. One director said she featured “a vegetable of the week” that school nutrition staff encouraged students to try.



“If kids would come through and we’ve got something new, they’d turn up their nose. We would suggest to them, like, ‘try it.’ And most of the time, after they have tried it, they said, ‘OK, I’ll have some.’”

One school food service director said cashiers promoted fruits and vegetables to students as they paid for their meals.

“We would have lots of kids who will get to the cashier and not have that [fruit and vegetable] on their tray. So we encouraged them to select something to make their reimbursable meal. I think it is just a part of a habit that has to be formed, a change in habits. ‘Are you sure you don’t want to have a fruit or vegetable?’ And they would take it. We do have fruits at the register so they don’t have to go back all the way to the line, especially if it is at the beginning of the line.”

Another school food service director said she placed plastic spoons in the lunch line so students could sample items before taking them. She said this encouraged students to try new items and make a decision when selecting from several options.

“When you see a sixth grader say, ‘sure, I’ll try coconut curry chick peas,’ and then smile and say, ‘I’ll have some more’ – that’s the best that I can ever hope for.”

✓ **Use *Smarter Lunchrooms* strategies.** These strategies make the cafeteria more inviting and promote healthy food choices. School food service directors used *Smarter Lunchrooms* strategies to display fruits and vegetables in lunch lines. One director conducted in-service training with school nutrition staff to demonstrate how to apply *Smarter Lunchrooms* strategies. Another director worked with their State agency to obtain assistance from regional coaches and consultants.

One school food service director said they implemented *Smarter Lunchrooms* to improve their standing in the HealthierUS School Challenge. Another director said he invited experts to review the kitchen and lunchroom space and provide guidance on product placement, use of post-

ers, creative naming of fruits and vegetables, and use of labels to display the new names of fruit and vegetable dishes in the lunch line.

“Just last week, we had Smarter Lunchrooms people come through our kitchens to take a look at what else we could be doing for presentation’s sake and just making everything look nice.”

“They brought some ideas like rotating posters, changing the names of our fruits and vegetables to something kind of snappy. ... Cowboy beans is much better than barbecue beans.”

Some school food service directors said they changed the placement of fruits and vegetables in the lunch line. Directors said they increased selection and consumption of fruits at lunch by placing fruits at the front of the line. One director said he purchased smaller restaurant pans to serve fruits and alternated the fruits in the lunch line, thereby making the fruits and vegetables look more appealing.

“Before, the fresh fruit was put, more or less, in one of the pans, stainless steel pans. And I got some baskets, and we tried to arrange them and make it a nice presentation. ... Instead of using institutionalized-looking equipment, we changed to stainless steel-looking equipment with black pans to make the color of fruits and vegetables pop up.”

A few school food service directors placed fruits and vegetables in two different locations in the lunch lines. One director placed fruits by the water cooler and near the hot foods, and another placed fruit at the front of the lunch line near the cashier.

“Even alternating our fruits – apple, banana, apple, just for color and presentation – has made a difference.”

A few school food service directors said they changed the bowls used to serve fruits and fruit salads. One director started using flatter, ribbed clear containers for salad cups instead of opaque, squat cups. Another director used black decorative square containers for fruits and vegetables in



elementary schools. Another director found that serving fruits like apples and oranges pre-cut made it easier for younger children.

“I’ll just say apples, for instance. They were just set up in a crate and the kids could take them or not. We found that the little ones really were having trouble eating a full apple or just dealing with the apple in general. So we actually went to a packaging company there. So now they have apple slices that are cored and ready to go and look real nice.”

Challenge 4: Reducing waste for fruits and vegetables.

✓ **Practice responsive cooking.** A few school food service directors said school nutrition managers in each school constantly monitored student selections and plate waste. The managers shared their observations with the director, and kitchen staff could adjust the number of portions offered for each fruit and vegetable item, as well as other items on the menu.

“Initially increasing variety ... there was more plate waste and increase in cost, of course. [By observing student uptake and plate waste] our managers in attendance were able to adjust their production and decrease the site waste.”

One school food service director said being responsive also involved developing a menu with vegetables that fit with other menu items and adjusting the portions of the vegetables offered based on the alternatives that were offered.

“Once you determine how the students are going to take it, today I had tater tots, beets, and roasted butternut squash. Obviously they’re going to be taking the potatoes, and the beets are the least favorite, but in the beginning you don’t necessarily know that. Once you have an established quantity that’s going on, then your costs really don’t come into play at that point.”

✓ **Batch cook vegetables.** School food service directors said they had to increase the amount of vegetables

they cooked, in order to ensure that there were enough portions for the children. Some vegetables were not taken in the anticipated amounts, so kitchen staff began preparing vegetables in batches, thereby reducing waste.

“In the beginning it was a little difficult, because I didn’t know quantities for cooking. Of course, if you institute batch cooking, it does back off your waste a little bit, as long as you’re prepared up ahead so that if you have to rush to get something cooked off, you’re OK.”

School food service directors trained their staff to recreate standardized recipes, do batch cooking, and maintain correct cooking and holding temperatures for vegetables. One director said the appearance of the final product is important when training staff, so they know what the finished product should look like.

✓ **Designate sharing tables.** A few school food service directors implemented sharing tables in schools that allowed students to share whole fruits. One director said students were not allowed to drop packed fruits at sharing tables, due to health safety concerns.

“They’ve implemented at the elementary schools and even some middle schools what they call a sharing table or a giving table. If a student has to take a certain component to make their reimbursable, and they really don’t want that item and it’s something that’s packaged that they’re not going to open, then they can put it on the table. And another child that maybe wants an extra serving, or a child who maybe even brought their lunch from home and they don’t have a lot of food to put in their lunch box, can go to that table and get some items from there.”

One school food service director said all students in the cafeteria, including those who brought their food from home, were allowed to visit the sharing table and take items placed there by other students.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

School food service directors in this study have used a variety of strategies to achieve success in implementing USDA’s fruit and vegetable provisions in school meals. Their experiences and approaches provide relevant in-



sights that can be applied in developing training and technical assistance materials. Such materials should focus on the following areas:

1. **Providing staff training and support:** Provide step-by-step recipes with pictures of finished products so kitchen staff can visualize what they are preparing, as well as standardized menus that include vegetable subgroup offerings.
2. **Providing a list of grants available:** Provide information about sources of grants to educate and expose students to new fruits and vegetables during the school day.

3. **Marketing to students:** Offer strategies for encouraging students to select more fruits and vegetables.
4. **Reducing waste:** Provide guidance on ways to adjust the amount of fruits and vegetables served on a given day, use batch cooking techniques, and implement sharing tables to reduce waste.

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