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New Nutrition Standards for School Meals

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In 2012, the USDA set new standards for school lunch that will result in healthier meals for kids across the nation. The new meal requirements will raise standards for the first time in more than fifteen years and improve the health and nutrition of nearly 32 million kids that participate in school meal programs every school day.

The healthier meal requirements are a key component of the *Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act*, which was championed by the First Lady as part of her *Let's Move!* campaign and signed into law by President Obama. The final standards make the same kinds of practical changes that many parents are already encouraging at home, including:

- Ensuring students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week
- Substantially increasing offerings of whole grain-rich foods
- Offering only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties
- Limiting calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size

- Increasing the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium

USDA built the new rule around recommendations from a panel of experts convened by the Institute of Medicine. The standards were also updated with key changes from the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The USDA received an unprecedented 132,000 public comments on its proposed standards and made modifications to the proposed rule where appropriate.

In addition to updated meal standards, other improvements will include:

- **The ability to take nutrition standards beyond the cafeteria** - foods and beverages sold in vending machines and other venues on school campuses will also contribute to a healthy diet
- **Increased funding** - an additional six cents a meal is the first real increase in 30 years; tied to strong performance in serving improved meals

- **Pricing standards for schools** to ensure that revenues from non-Federal sources keep pace with the Federal commitment to healthy school meals and properly align with costs
- **Training and technical assistance** to help schools achieve and monitor compliance

The final nutrition standards also provide more time for schools to implement key changes, which will be largely phased in over a three-year period, starting in 2012-2013.

To learn more about the National School Lunch Program:

United States Department of Agriculture,
Food and Nutrition Service
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/>
School Nutrition Association
<http://www.schoolnutrition.org>

