



## NEWS RELEASE

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April 2001

### **Schools Cutting Fat, Increasing Fruits and Vegetables in Meals**

School meals, which could include breakfast, lunch and snacks, are served to over 27 million children in the United States each day. These meals contribute significantly to the food eaten by children. A recent study reported by the National Institutes of Health showed that students in the United States are less likely to have a good diet than are students in other countries. U.S. students were less likely to eat fruits and vegetables each day than were students in the majority of other countries and more likely to eat potato chips and French fries.

When I talk to parents about their child's diet, I often hear complaints about the high fat, high carbohydrate food that parents perceive is being served at school. Fortunately, school meals are coming closer to hitting the mark in providing good nutrition and healthy selections. The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment II released in January, 2001 found the following positive changes in school meal programs since new national standards were instituted several years ago.

- *More schools today offer students food choices that are low in fat.* From 1992 to 1999, schools offering students lunches which followed nutrition guidelines for total fat improved from 34% to 82% in elementary schools and 71% to 91% in secondary schools.
- *There has been a decrease in total fat levels in school meals.* From 1992 to 1999, fat levels in school breakfasts were reduced from 31% to 26% (of total calories), and school lunches from 38% to 34%. The nutrition goal for school meals is no more than 30% of total meal calories from fat.
- *Schools have reduced the levels of saturated fat in meals.* From 1992 to 1999, saturated fats in school breakfasts dropped from 14% to 9.8%, and school lunches from 15% to 12%. The nutrition goal for school meals is less than 10 percent of total meal calories from saturated fat.
- *A majority of school districts have increased the number of fruit, vegetable and grain/bread choices offered.* Roughly two-thirds of all school lunch menus offered more than two fruit and vegetable choices. More than 1/4 of all menus included five or more fruit and vegetable choices.
- *National nutrition standards continue to be met for other guidelines.* Meals offered and selected exceed the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) standard for key nutrients. Breakfasts and lunches contained fewer calories than the standard. However, it should be noted that students did not always take every type of food offered to them.

Many parents ask me what they can do to encourage their school to serve "healthier" foods to their children. I suggest that you let your school know that you are pleased with the healthy changes that have been made so far, and encourage staff to continue to make additional healthy changes. At the same time, talk to your children about healthy food choices. Working together we can improve the nutritional status of your children.

Source: USDA News Release, Office of Communications, Release No. 0011.01. January 10, 2001.