

Notice to Stakeholders: USDA Sets the Record Straight on Proposed School Meals Flexibilities

Today, USDA announced a proposed rule aimed at [increasing flexibilities for school nutrition professionals](#) based on the feedback received directly and consistently from those who operate the program on-the-ground day in and day out. After more than 2 years of listening to its stakeholders, proactively seeking input through roundtable events and dozens of visits to schools across the country, the proposed rule offers reforms to reduce administrative burden and food waste, and empower schools to serve meals children are eager to eat.

USDA's School Nutrition and Meal Cost Study found that children are throwing 25 percent of nutrients straight into the trash can. This is not serving children well. The changes in this proposal would increase flexibility and decrease administrative burden for local districts, while continuing to ensure that children receive wholesome, nourishing meals they want to eat.

You may have heard: *The rule proposes to lower the amount of fruit required in breakfast outside of the cafeteria.*

In reality: The rule would align the minimum requirements of what children are served *outside* the cafeteria with what must be taken *inside* the cafeteria. Schools are empowered and encouraged to serve larger quantities both inside and outside the cafeteria if that best meets the needs of their students. It defies common sense to allow schools to serve elementary children one banana in the cafeteria, but force them to serve two in the classroom even when they know one goes in the trash.

You may have heard: *The rule allows schools to replace fruit at breakfast with potatoes.*

In reality: The rule proposes no changes on this issue. Under explicit direction from Congress since the law was enacted in February 2019, USDA has allowed schools to substitute vegetables, including potatoes, for fruit in meeting school breakfast requirements. This continues to be the current law. The proposed rule requests comment on this and other flexibilities *not* in the proposal.

You may have heard: *Under the proposal, pizza, burgers, and fries could be served to students every day.*

In reality: This mischaracterizes the proposal, which makes only limited changes to existing requirements. The current standards allow burgers, pizza, and other entrees to be available a la carte on the day of reimbursement and the day after. The proposal released makes only a small change in that it adds an additional day's

flexibility for schools that wish to serve lunch entrees as a la carte foods in an effort to reduce food waste. This proposal would therefore allow service of an entrée item the day it was served, the day after, and only 1 additional day, not for all 5 days in the school week. Further, the rule makes no changes to side dishes sold a la carte (such as French fries), but requests comment on such flexibilities.

You may have heard: *The proposal changes “vegetable subgroup” requirements so that schools will no longer have to serve greens and will instead always serve potatoes to meet these requirements.*

In reality: This is incorrect. The proposal would continue to require *every* vegetable subgroup to be served and the amount of dark green vegetables that must be served each week did not change. It would, however, change the serving sizes for some subgroups to make them consistent, provide more flexibility to operators, and reduce waste. Operators would then be required to provide additional vegetables, from any of the subgroups, to meet overall vegetable requirements, but they would still have to ensure that every subgroup is served each week, ensuring children receive and consume nutrients available from all vegetable subgroups.

USDA looks forward to continuing to work with school nutrition professionals to serve America’s children well. These proposed changes respond directly to the needs of nutrition professionals who look these children in the eye every day.