



# Keep your Eyes on the Prize

**Healthy Children**





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*We've all seen the headlines: Childhood overweight and obesity are increasing, and the status of our children's health is declining.*

Since 1946, you—school foodservice professionals across the country—and we at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have been partners in running the school meal programs for America's children. Recently, through USDA's Team Nutrition, we have combined our skills and resources to improve the nutritional quality of school meals and motivate children to choose the healthier options. Now, together, we must focus more specifically on helping our students prevent overweight and obesity and improve their health.

One excellent way to boost the nutritive value, taste, and eye appeal of school meals is to serve more fruits and vegetables in a variety of creative and appetizing ways. They can be real “show stoppers” on a salad bar or on the plate—with their dazzling array of colors, sizes, and shapes and their variety of taste sensations. Offering your students a fruit and salad bar is a great way to start. Children love to participate in selecting their meals and are more likely to try new items if they can see and choose them. Children who avoid cooked vegetables are often enthusiastic about fresh fruits and veggies.



This three-booklet Team Nutrition technical assistance tool is packed with tips to help you purchase, protect, prepare, present, and promote fruits and vegetables—and capture the interest of your students.

***Meal Appeal: Attracting Customers***, the centerpiece of the tool, includes guidance and great ideas for presenting and promoting fruits and vegetables for your special customers.

***Quality Food for Quality Meals: Buying Fruits and Vegetables*** offers technical information to help you purchase high quality fruits and vegetables, store them properly, and keep them safe and wholesome—to ensure their “star” quality for the serving line.



***Tricks of the Trade: Preparing Fruits and Vegetables*** details each aspect of operating a salad bar and making it the perfect showcase for your colorful, mouth-watering array of delicious, nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables. It also includes guidance on preparing and serving prepackaged salads as well as cooked, frozen, and canned vegetables. In addition, it provides information on food safety and kitchen and staffing requirements.



The tool offers lots of detailed information. Choose the information that is useful right now in your school and community. Some of you are just getting a fruit and vegetable effort underway; others already have sophisticated operations. Look at your current program. Take advantage of what you are already doing well, and build on your successes. Small changes can make a big difference.



### **Start with a plan.**

Once you've decided that increasing the use of fruits and vegetables in your meal program is doable and should be a priority, you'll need a plan that outlines the steps for translating your commitment into action. You can think about the steps as 5 P's: purchasing, protecting, preparing, presenting, and promoting. These steps are interrelated and all are necessary. Only high quality, wholesome fruits and vegetables prepared carefully and presented attractively will entice students to select *and* eat them.

**The three booklets in this tool cover all the steps you need to take. You can refer to them for help with both creating your plan and putting it into action.**





### **Get buy-in.**

An important component of planning is to talk to the people whose support you'll need—your district manager, your principal, and your students. Discuss the rise in childhood obesity and the decline in children's health—and the steps you're proposing to reverse the trend. Creating a focus group of students will give you not only a thumbs-up or thumbs-down on your ideas, but also as many suggestions as you can handle.

### **Take the lead.**

By taking the lead in offering more fruits and vegetables to help address a national public health problem, you can win the respect of school administrators, concerned parents, and teachers. You can also spotlight the benefits of the updated and improved school meal programs and gain community support.

We hope this tool will help in the effort to prevent overweight and obesity. **Every step we take brings us closer to the real prize—healthy children.**

## USDA's Partners in Promoting Fruits and Vegetables

Many other organizations are working with USDA and the schools to achieve these critical goals—preventing overweight and obesity and improving children's health.

- The National 5 A Day Partnership, an alliance of Federal agencies, private industry, and health organizations that have joined forces to help all Americans meet the recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Members of the partnership are the American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education, National Cancer Institute, Produce for Better Health Foundation, Produce Marketing Association, United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and the United States Department of Agriculture.

- The partnership guides the 5 A Day for Better Health Program—the Nation's largest public-private nutrition education initiative with 5 A Day

coordinators in each State and territory, and the military. Its goal is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption to 5 A Day for 75 percent of Americans by 2010. You can visit the 5 A Day Web site at **[www.5aday.gov](http://www.5aday.gov)**.

- The partnership identified the need for a publication to help schools in their effort to increase students' consumption of fruits and vegetables. USDA then developed and published this tool.

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## **Success Stories**

Thanks also to all the other schools that shared their fruit and vegetable success stories and photographs with us for this publication. We know that schools across the country have similar success stories to share. We would like to include them on our Web site.

Please send your current success stories or tell us about your new fruit and vegetable efforts, with any photographs, to **[teamnutrition@fns.usda.gov](mailto:teamnutrition@fns.usda.gov)**.

**Schools: Send us Your**



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