



5 A Day and School-Age Children

Salad Bars in Schools

A Food and Nutrition Service's (USDA) report found that most school-aged children did not eat the recommended number of daily servings for fruits and vegetables. Simply incorporating salad bars as part of school lunch has shown to increase fruit and vegetable consumption an average of 1.2 servings per student per day, according to research conducted by a team headed by Dr. Wendy Slusser, MD, MS at UCLA. Currently, only 21 percent of U.S. schools offer a salad bar at least once a week. Following are tips to help start a salad bar at your school.

Market

- Before it can be implemented, the salad bar must be marketed to students and staff. Outreach efforts can help ensure a successful program. Keep in mind that the target audience is students and the anticipated behavior change is increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Listen

- Ask students and staff what they want served. Conduct focus groups to learn what they will/will not eat and what would make them choose the salad bar. Organize follow-up focus groups in order to make appropriate changes.

Plan

- Set up the kitchen, order the proper equipment including child-size salad bars if needed and plan the menu. Consider the number of anticipated meals and the organization of the line.
- The key players are the cafeteria manager, food service employees, support staff and students.
- Visit a nearby salad bar if possible and review successes in other schools.
- Train and educate employees about the benefits of salad bars, how to prepare items, how to monitor and assist students choosing an appropriate school lunch meal off the salad bar.
- Enlist the help of support staff such as janitors and lunchtime monitors.
- Engage students. By increasing the students' awareness of the foods that will be served on the salad bar and generating enthusiasm for the new lunch meal, you can increase the success and acceptance of the salad bar. The following are a few examples of how this can be accomplished:
 - Nutrition education: lessons on the Food Guide Pyramid or 5 A Day, a cookbook project;
 - Classroom visitors: chefs, farmers, cooperative extension agents;
 - Field trips: farms, farmers' markets, agricultural fairs;
 - Taste tests: introduce new foods to students and measure students' food preferences;
 - Marketing: use posters and assemblies, involve students through art/music classes; and
 - Salad bar etiquette: demonstrate during an assembly before the salad bar opens.

Pretest

- It may be necessary to pretest new foods by a test kitchen. Consider preparation issues and training for cafeteria staff as well as teachers. Offer samples/taste tests to students and staff.
- Consider using the Farm to School Program. More frequent deliveries may be necessary, but items will be locally grown and fresh.

Implement

- Two to four weeks in advance set up the salad bar, prepare cafeteria staff and obtain appropriate equipment. Ideally two people are required to prepare and monitor the salad bar. Preparation is more intensive. Consider having students help prepare and monitor the salad bar; this can help mitigate some of the added initial stress the staff may feel, as well as spread the word among students as to the introduction of a new salad bar.
- Remind the teachers the day the salad bar is set to open, so they can remind their students prior to lunchtime.

Monitor

- During start-up (for about a month) the salad bar is usually very popular. Thereafter, there is a slow down to a "steady state." Maintain a close count of hot lunches and salad bar lunches sold daily, and adjust to the changing demands accordingly. Consider surveying students in order to project rates of participation.
- Keep a daily count of the number of hot lunches and salad bar lunches sold. This helps the cafeteria manager gauge the amount of food s/he needs to prepare the next day. Managers can predict the daily differences in sales depending on the food served for the hot lunch.
- Make continuous adjustments to menu items and the layout of the salad bar to increase efficiency and to build continuous support for the salad bar. Each school will have unique characteristics; therefore, continued feedback and adjustments are essential to ensure continued success of the salad bar.