

Background

This report fulfills a request to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) from the Appropriations Committee Directives, Fiscal Year 2002. The following language is contained in House Report 107-116:

School Lunch Salad Bars. –The Committee is concerned about school lunch nutrition, and in particular about increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables among children. The Committee directs the Department to analyze data collected in the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study, Part II to compare the amount of fruit and vegetables available to children in schools with salad/fruit bars versus those without salad/fruit bars. The Committee requests a report on this analysis by April 1, 2002.

As requested, this report compares the availability of fruits and vegetables in schools with and without salad bars using data from the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study, Part II (SNDA-II), which were collected during the School Year (SY) 1998-99. SNDA-II data enables us to examine the choice and variety of foods offered at salad bars, but not the quantity in a typical serving or the amount consumed.

Findings

Salad bar availability varies by grade level and free and reduced price eligibility status:

- Twenty-one percent of public schools offer a salad bar at least once per week.
- Salad bars are most common in high schools and least common in elementary schools. Forty-one percent of high schools, 26 percent of middle schools, and 14 percent of elementary schools offer a salad bar at least once per week.

- On a typical school day, 20 percent of public school children have access to a salad bar, that is, they are enrolled in a school where a salad bar is served.
- Free and reduced price approved children are less likely to be enrolled in a school which offers a salad bar than paid status children because salad bars were more commonly found in the more affluent public NSLP schools.

A wide range of vegetables and fruits are available in salad bars:

- Nearly all salad bars include at least one vegetable, with the most prevalent being lettuce, tomatoes, and other raw vegetables.
- Over one-half of salad bars include at least one type of fruit, with the most prevalent types being fresh fruit and canned fruit.

Schools with salad bars offer a wider variety of vegetables and fruits than other schools:

- At all grade levels, schools with salad bars are more likely to offer green salad, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, canned fruit, and dried fruit than schools without salad bars.
- Elementary schools with salad bars are more likely to offer fruit or vegetable juice. Middle schools with salad bars are more likely to offer legumes, and high schools with salad bars are more likely to offer legumes, cooked vegetables, or french fries (either baked or fried) than schools without salad bars.

- Middle schools with salad bars are more likely to serve baked french fries and less likely to serve fried french fries than middle schools without salad bars. Baked french fries have, on average, a lower percent of calories from fat than fried french fries.

The presence of a salad bar is related to school characteristics and NSLP participation:

- Schools offering a salad bar at least once per week have a lower percentage of students who are free and reduced price approved than schools without salad bars.
- In middle schools and high schools, National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation rates for all students are higher for schools with a salad bar at least once per week than for schools without salad bars. Urban schools are less likely to have salad bars than rural or suburban schools.

- High schools with 500-999 students are more likely to have salad bars than larger or smaller schools.

Determining the quantities of fruits and vegetables served to or consumed by students would require additional data collection such as a third, expanded version of the FNS-sponsored School Nutrition Dietary Assessment series.

One overarching caveat for this report is that the differences associated with salad bars noted above have not necessarily been caused by schools adding salad bars. It is possible that schools with these pre-existing characteristics were more likely to add salad bars. For example, schools with pre-existing higher NSLP participation may have chosen to add salad bars so one cannot conclude from this report that adding salad bars caused the higher NSLP participation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), or (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.