

## USDA Foods Overview for School Administrators

### Talking Points

#### **Slide 1: Healthy Kids are Smarter Kids**

- Let's talk about how good nutrition plays an important role in creating a healthy learning environment where kids can do their best work, and discuss ways our school can improve the meals it serves.
- Healthy kids are smarter kids. There are a number of studies that highlight linkages between eating healthy foods, exercise, and performing better academically.
- For many of our students, we provide one or more meals a day. The foods we purchase and prepare greatly impacts the foods our students choose to eat.
- When we provide nutritious options for our students that are also appealing and delicious, we go beyond merely relieving hunger. We give them the opportunity to develop healthy eating habits and the basic building blocks that are key to academic success.
- We increase their ability to absorb and process information, and give them a leg up when it comes to learning.
- As our school's nutrition professional, I am keenly aware that the choices I make in my job contribute to our students' ability to learn.
- And as the administration and staff of this school, you also work hard to create a healthy learning environment for our students.

#### **Slide 2: School Wellness Goals**

- Part of a healthy learning environment is promoting student health.
- Our school plays a critical role in promoting student health, preventing childhood obesity (which now affects 1 in 3 children), and combating problems associated with poor nutrition and physical inactivity.
- We address these issues and measure our success through our local wellness policy which outlines specific goals our school must meet in areas of nutrition education, food purchasing, physical activity and other activities that promote student wellness.
- School food programs and nutrition education activities help us meet these wellness goals.

#### **Slide 3: Feeding Our Students**

- It takes a lot of resources to feed our students including food, planning, and money. But we do our best to do our job smartly, taking advantage of the many benefits available through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).
- The NSLP, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is the largest federally-funded school nutrition assistance program in the country.
- The NSLP provides lunches free or at low cost to more than 32 million students from many types of backgrounds. Our school is one of the 101,000 public and private nonprofit schools and institutions that offer the NSLP.

- All students that participate in the NSLP receive a lunch that meets strong nutrition standards and allows them to stay alert and concentrate for the rest of the school day.

#### **Slide 4: Our School Relies on USDA Foods to Support the NSLP**

- The USDA Foods program supports the NSLP by providing nutritious, safe and appealing foods that help improve our students' chances for educational achievement.
- Because the USDA Foods program continually responds to the needs and tastes of children, it offers a wide array of foods that can be prepared in many ways that kids find appealing. The foods are also affordable and healthy.
- USDA Foods make up approximately 15-20% of the school lunches we provide to our students.
- The remaining 80-85% of the food is primarily purchased using USDA reimbursement dollars and money received from students who pay either full or reduced price lunch.
- Reimbursement rates are calculated per student that participates in the NSLP and depend on whether the student pays the full price, reduced price or receives a free meal.

#### **Slide 5: USDA Foods Help Stretch Lunch Budgets**

- For each student that participates in the NSLP, we receive entitlement dollars from USDA. We use this entitlement to purchase USDA Foods.
- Compared to many foods sold commercially—such as these popular lunch items—USDA Foods offer these same foods at a discounted rate, which enables me to stretch our school lunch budget. As you can see, by ordering USDA Foods, I receive more food than if I were to purchase the same food (often of lower nutritional quality) commercially.
- In fact, USDA Foods recently surveyed school nutrition professionals and found that more than 90% of respondents agreed that the program helped them stretch their budgets by offering healthful foods at a low cost.
- As an added benefit, USDA sometimes provides bonus foods. If these are foods that we can use in our meal program, I request them at no cost to us (and they don't count against our entitlement dollars).
- We can also use our USDA Foods entitlement money to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables through the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.

#### **Slide 5: Other Benefits of USDA Foods**

- In addition to the financial benefits, there are many other reasons to use USDA Foods.
- USDA Foods support the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, adhere to high food safety standards and help our school comply with USDA's meal pattern requirements.
- USDA Foods offer more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains and more food that is lower in sugar, salt and fat than ever before.
- There are over 180 nutritious food choices available through USDA Foods—fresh, frozen, packaged, canned, dried and bulk.
- It isn't difficult to order USDA Foods. I can easily order what I need online.
- USDA also offers planning tools and menus that help me create healthier versions of kid favorites. For example, I know our kids love wraps using USDA's whole-grain tortillas.

#### **Slide 7: Investing in Our Students**

- While USDA Foods help our school in many ways, ultimately, it is about investing in our students.

- When we educate them about nutrition and help them eat healthfully, we set them up for a lifetime of healthy living.
- Studies show that when kids eat nutritious meals, their academic scores tend to be higher overall.
- By providing wholesome, nutritious meals for our students, we increase their ability to pay attention in class and concentrate on learning.

#### **Slide 8: How You Can Help**

- As the school administration and staff, we are leaders and important role models in our school community.
- You can help make nutrition a priority in creating a healthy school environment. Together we can:
  - Assess our current school lunch options and help make lunches even more nutritious.
  - Share the importance of healthy eating with parents and teachers or provide those opportunities for me to share with them—for example, back to school night, parent teacher conferences, etc.
  - Make nutrition education central to our school to promote healthy food choices. There are materials available from USDA that we can use to educate students and parents.
  - Encourage more students to participate in the National School Lunch Program to help increase the funds we have to prepare healthy meals and ensure that all kids have at least one complete meal per day.
  - Help remove the stigma that school food programs are only for low income students by increasing participation across the student body.
- Through USDA Foods and the National School Lunch Program, we can offer ALL of our students access to nutritious foods and help them learn to make eating choices that will improve their health and their capacity for academic achievement.

**\*References to studies are those cited in the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.**