

1300 L Street NW • Suite 910 • Washington, DC 20005
(202) 682-9456 • fax (202) 682-0333 • www.nationalpotatocouncil.org

MEDIA INQUIRIES:

Mark Szymanski
202.682.9456

mark.szymanski@nationalpotatocouncil.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Survey of School Food Service Professionals Reveals Serious Concerns Over Proposed USDA School Meal Regulations

Directors anticipate increased costs, reduced participation, and no improvements on children's health

Washington, D.C., October 5, 2011 – At a time when 90 percent of U.S. children are not eating enough vegetables, school food service directors are concerned about the unintended consequences of a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposal to limit certain popular vegetables served in schools. A new national survey shows that 72 percent of school food service directors believe USDA's proposed rules limiting total servings of starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, green peas and lima beans) to one cup per week will either cause a decrease in the quality of children's overall health (40 percent) or have no impact (32 percent).¹

Of the 245 food service directors surveyed:

- 60 percent anticipate the proposed ruling will increase their food service costs;
- 65 percent believe it will lead to decreased student participation in school lunch programs;
- 65 percent say it will result in more plate waste; and,
- Only 5 percent say the new rules will improve the quality of children's overall health.

Dayle Hayes, MD, RD, and co-author of the American Dietetic Association's position paper "Nutrition Guidance for Healthy Children Ages 2 to 11 Years,"² presented the survey results in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with a "Voices from our Nation's Cafeteria" panel of school food service professionals. Participants included food service directors from Los Angeles, Denver, the Philadelphia area, York/Kittery, Maine, and Alexandria, Va. The event's honorary co-hosts were Congressional leaders Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME), Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Sen. Mark Udall (D-CO), Rep. Collin C. Peterson (D-MN) and Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH); and the National Potato Council.

"What we're hearing from district school food service directors is that the meals they currently serve are healthy, meet students' needs, and allow schools to manage costs," said Hayes, who also created the Facebook page [School Meals That Rock](#), designed to celebrate advances in school nutrition. "This survey reveals some very real concerns about the USDA's proposed rules and expected impact on costs, waste, choice and nutrition – in particular with limiting vegetable consumption."

¹ MMS Education, Newton, PA. Survey of School Foodservice Professionals, August-September 2011. Paid for by the National Potato Council.

² Nicklas TA and Hayes D. Position of the American Dietetic Association: Nutrition Guidance for Healthy Children Ages 2 to 11 Years. *J Am Diet Assoc* 2008;108:1038-1047.

Additional survey findings include:

To “Veg” or Not to “Veg”?

- Contrary to popular perception, nine out of 10 potatoes are baked, boiled, mashed or otherwise prepared and served in schools without a fryer, and only 11 percent of schools have fryers. This means that 90 percent of so-called “French fries” on lunch menus are oven-baked and contain far less sodium, fat and calories than those served years ago.
- 96 percent of directors agree that potatoes are kids’ favorite vegetable, and 87 percent say the potato can be used to introduce kids to other types of healthy vegetables.

Confidence in Current Meal Plans

- 99 percent of school food service directors stand by their current menus and believe that their cafeterias already deliver students a variety of healthy, nutritious and appealing fruits and vegetables.

Perceptions on Proposed Plan

- 87 percent agree that limiting total lunch servings of potatoes, corn, peas and lima beans to one cup per week contradicts the USDA’s own 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), which encourages people to make “half their plate fruits and vegetables” and recommends increasing starchy vegetable consumption to five cups per week, up from three cups in the 2005 DGA.

Data for the survey, commissioned by the National Potato Council (NPC), was collected from August 30, 2001 through September 12, 2011 via an online survey. Full survey results can be found at PotatoesInSchools.com.

Taking Action

PotatoesInSchools.com helps food service professionals, parents and others voice their concerns about USDA’s proposal to limit vegetables in schools. The site allows visitors to directly contact their members of Congress, requesting them to support Sen. Collins in her efforts to protect vegetables against serving limitations.

Historical Perspective: School Meal Program

On January 13, 2011, USDA issued proposed federal regulations that would limit total servings of certain vegetables (potatoes, corn, green peas and lima beans) in the National School Lunch Program to one-half cup, up to two times per week. School districts would be prohibited from serving these vegetables altogether in the School Breakfast Program. USDA has indicated that final rules will be issued later this year.

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The National Potato Council is the advocate for the economic well-being of U.S. potato growers on federal legislative, regulatory, environmental, and trade issues. Potato growers, along with the U.S. potato industry as whole, directly benefit from involvement in the National Potato Council. NPC supports the U.S. potato industry by monitoring issues affecting the strength and viability of the potato industry, influencing regulators and legislators on issues crucial to the industry's long term success, ensuring fair market access for potatoes and potato products, and bringing the unique issues and interests of diverse growing regions in the U.S. together on a national level. The National Potato Council is a voluntary organization supported by quota assessments from state organizations, allied industry memberships and sponsorships, and directly by potato growers through membership dues.