

Cafeteria Chronicles: Awardee Roundup

As we wind down the Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Recognition Award stories in the Cafeteria Chronicles, we'd like to share some of our favorite stories from awardees all around the nation. You'll read about districts that started student-raised beef programs, trained staff to make them more confident in the kitchen, experimented with fresh herbs, and baked bread from scratch as part of their efforts to provide healthy, delicious meals.

First up is the one-of-a-kind nutrition education program at **Chouteau-Mazie School District** in Chouteau, OK. Child Nutrition Director Laura Cochran found a way to blend nutrition and agricultural education into their school nutrition program. Each year, four to six students get the chance to raise beef cattle, learning about animal husbandry, responsibility, and leadership. Ultimately, the beef is processed, and the district receives beef cuts for the school's lunch menu. The district even hosts a special luncheon featuring steak from the student-raised beef to celebrate seniors before graduation. This unique nutrition education initiative earned the district the Innovation in Nutrition Education HMI Recognition Award. Meanwhile, students developed a rich sense of community, taking pride in knowing they've contributed to their school nutrition program.

Reducing sodium on your lunch menu isn't always easy. To help make the change from higher sodium premade foods to scratch-made meals, **Urbandale Community School District** in Urbandale, IA, brought in a chef consultant to conduct culinary training with the school's nutrition staff. By raising their staff's comfort level cooking with fresh produce, the district switched to all frozen or fresh vegetables, roasted with custom seasoning blends to add a boost of flavor. Recipes like roasted ranch potatoes and lemon pepper succotash have been a hit with students, as Director of Nutrition Services Jessy Sadler reports. These efforts led to the district earning the Lunch Trailblazer HMI Recognition Award.

Experimenting with fresh herbs and spices produced some delicious new recipes for **Holmen School District** in Holmen, WI. When their nutrition leaders gathered over the summer, they started experimenting in the kitchen for more nutritious recipes to serve students. The result was several new recipes, such as their "Better Together" sauce, featuring homemade Italian sausage using local pork and fresh herbs. The recipe modification resulted in a drop of over 100 milligrams of sodium, and students loved it so much, they say they prefer it over the local Italian restaurant! Other new recipes such as roasted fresh potatoes and asparagus are a testament to the district's commitment to purchasing local produce. After seeing the district's efforts posted on social media, parents are now encouraged to have their children try school lunch if they haven't before. It's no surprise this district earned the Lunch Trailblazer HMI Recognition Award.

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"When you look at our overall [participation] percentage...between 85% and 92%, depending on the month, which is really pretty incredible for a school district that our free reduced percentage is only at 26%. So, it's not like these kids have to eat with us, but they choose to eat with us."

-Michael Gasper, Director of Nutrition Services, Holmen School District

When the team at **Atchison Public Schools** in Atchison, KS, decided to cook more meals from scratch, they went *all-in*. When the district replaced their frozen processed beef with fresh beef from a local farmer, students took note and liked the change. To keep the momentum going, the district began making all their bread from scratch, which resulted in big decreases in sodium. Another way the district reduced sodium included a color-packed vegetable bar to entice students to select healthier choices at lunch. By slowly introducing these changes over time, they had time to refine recipes and establish new supplier relationships for fresh items on the menu. All of these changes resulted in the district earning the Small and/or Rural School Food Authority Lunch Trailblazer HMI Recognition Award.

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