

Cafeteria Chronicles: Salad Bars

Do you know what it takes to build a successful salad bar?

Realizing their salad bar needed a makeover, the team at **Watertown Public Schools** in Watertown, CT began “Operation Salad Bar” to build interest from students. Their new salad bar includes a rainbow of colorful choices, many of which are lower in sodium than previous salad bar offerings. The district also offers a weekly “signature salad”, such as their Southwest Salad with leafy greens, salt-free Cajun chicken, black beans, corn, tomatoes, onions and tortilla chips. To engage with students, the district’s Agriculture Science Class even paid a visit to a local farm where several salad bar ingredients are sourced from. These efforts led to the district earning the Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) Innovative School Lunch Makeover Award.

See the rainbow of choices at these salad bars in this [video](#).

When the team at **Yosemite Unified School District** in Oakhurst, CA surveyed students to see which improvements they wanted at lunch, they didn’t expect to hear salad bars at the top of the list. To meet their students’ request, the district’s Food Services Manager, Dyann Eckstein began sourcing fresh fruits and vegetables like apples, grapes, oranges, seasonal berries, crisp romaine, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, shredded carrots, bell peppers and broccoli florets. Students are now drawn to the vibrant colors and fresh flavors of the new salad bar, and appreciate their voices being heard when improvements are made. In addition to offering new fresh options at the salad bar, the district also began scratch cooking meals with fresh ingredients and earned the HMI Lunch Trailblazer Award.

School gardens can help support your salad bar, as the team at **Valley City School District 2** in Valley City, ND knows well. Students in science classes grow seedlings to plant and harvest each year for the school garden. During the process, students document the growing process and learn about plant biology and nutrition, which led to the district earning the Innovation in Nutrition Education HMI Recognition Award. The school garden’s lettuce, along with the school’s own hydroponic lettuce, now supplies 100% of the lettuce needed at the salad bar in the cafeteria. To build excitement for the salad bar, the district organized taste tests of the different lettuce options grown at school and highlights the school-grown lettuce with signage at the salad bar, as well as on social media.

This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Administration. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Follow the example of these districts for success at your salad bar:

- Survey students to understand their vision
- Organize taste tests of new salad bar offerings
- Include a wide variety of colorful choices
- Grow salad bar ingredients in school gardens
- Feature a “signature” salad
- Highlight locally sourced items, if available
- Build excitement with signage and promotions on social media

Congratulations to these districts for their superb salad bars and for leading the way in school nutrition!

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