

Cafeteria Chronicles:

Regional School Unit #10

Regional School Unit #10 (RSU 10) in Rumford, ME, is transforming school lunch with the support of the USDA and Action for Healthy Kids' Healthy Meals Incentives (HMI) grant. RSU 10 set a goal to prepare more scratch-made meals using local ingredients. To accomplish this, the district developed and tested new recipes that incorporate culturally relevant, locally sourced ingredients, ensuring that the meals served are tasty, well-accepted by students, and meet or exceed the USDA's updated school nutrition standards. Their efforts to enhance the quality and appeal of school meals through scratch cooking recently earned them the Innovation in the Preparation of School Meals Award.

RSU 10's new, scratch-made menu items are not only innovative, but they have quickly become menu staples. The district replaced a commercial fish patty with breaded Maine fish, a product that is prepared in-house, frozen, and used for various entrees, including sandwiches and fish tacos. This move not only enhances the nutritional quality of the meals but also supports local fisheries. Another success is the introduction of Chickpea Masala, made using USDA chickpeas. This vegetarian dish is prepared in bulk and frozen, making it an easy and popular choice among vegetarians and meat eaters alike. Additionally, the Shaved Steak Sub made with local beef and served with Maine russet potato wedges has become a student favorite.

See RSU's efforts in this [video](#).

To ensure the success of these new menu items, RSU 10 has implemented a comprehensive strategy that includes sampling in cafeterias, gathering student feedback, and promoting the offerings through posters on serving lines and social media posts. This approach not only increases awareness of the new dishes but also fosters a sense of excitement and ownership among students.

Looking ahead, RSU 10 is focused on long-term sustainability and continued innovation. The district is developing a five-year plan to create menus and meal production processes that support continued improvements to their meal offerings. This plan includes setting benchmarks, providing skills development for staff, and collaborating with local growers, parents, school administrators, and various nonprofit organizations to build a robust and sustainable school meal program.

RSU 10's commitment to providing high-quality, nutritious meals is evident in their innovative approach to menu development and their dedication to engaging the entire school community in the process. By prioritizing local ingredients, student feedback, and

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scratch cooking, RSU 10 is not only feeding students but also fostering a culture of wellness that will benefit them for years to come.

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