



Got Milk!
Exploring How Student Perceptions and Behaviors
Impact their Milk Selection in Schools

2016

Applied Research Division
The University of Southern Mississippi
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Institute of Child Nutrition

The University of Mississippi

The Institute of Child Nutrition was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford and is operated in collaboration with The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Institute of Child Nutrition is to improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

MISSION

The mission of the Institute of Child Nutrition is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

VISION

The vision of the Institute of Child Nutrition is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

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GOT MILK! EXPLORING HOW STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND BEHAVIORS IMPACT THEIR MILK SELECTION IN SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Substantial controversy surrounds the health effects of flavored and unflavored milk in children's diets. Few studies have been conducted to examine the preferences and perceptions of students regarding flavored and unflavored milk. The Institute of Child Nutrition, Applied Research Division (ICN, ARD) conducted a research study to identify elementary and middle school/junior high school students' perceptions of milk, their milk preferences, and their consumption of flavored and unflavored milk. School nutrition (SN) professionals' perceptions were also collected to provide an operational view of students' milk selection and consumption behaviors. The study's protocol included the development of case study instruments and researchers' training and analysis protocol that were piloted by an ICN, ARD research coordinator. Following the research design's embedded, replicable, multiple-cases, case study protocol, the communications format, focus group and observation procedures, and instruments were tested by the ICN, ARD research coordinator and revised for training researchers for case study site selection and data collection. The protocol was then revised for Phase II of the study.

A team of researchers was trained to follow the pilot protocol to collect, analyze, and report qualitative data in schools across the United States (U.S.). Six research teams were selected from a pool of applicants to attend a training session on how to conduct the case study site visits and data collection in United States Department of Agriculture regions across the country. Each team was instructed to follow the embedded, replicable, multi-case, case study protocol to select and arrange visits to four distinct elementary and middle school/junior high

schools. Researchers were trained to follow a systematic approach to conduct interviews and focus groups with SN professionals and students (elementary students in grades 3-5, and middle school/junior high school students in grades 7-8), to conduct behavioral observation procedures, and to record mealtime behaviors associated with milk selection and consumption at each site. All six research teams completed the collection of qualitative data from 24 sites across the U.S., and then attended a debriefing session with the ICN, ARD research coordinator to discuss research findings and reporting methodology. Research results indicate that although students prefer flavored milk, other factors play a key role in their consumption decisions such, as milk temperature, social dynamics, and meal times.