

Manager's Corner

Food Bars

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Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

VISION

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

MISSION

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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Professional Standards

MENU PLANNING – 1100

Employee will be able to effectively and efficiently plan and prepare standardized recipes, cycle menus, and meals, including the use of USDA foods, to meet all Federal school nutrition program requirements, including the proper meal components.

1110 – Nutrition Requirements

Plan menus that meet USDA nutrition requirements for reimbursable meals, including calculating meal components.

Introduction

Manager's Corner: Food Bars is designed to empower managers to use in training their staff. Each lesson is roughly 15 minutes. This lesson plan contains:

- Learning objective
- Statement explaining the importance of the topic
- List of materials
- Instructions on how to present the information
- Questions to ask staff
- An activity to strengthen or refresh the knowledge of the staff

Lesson Overview

Instructions for lesson:

- Review the lesson objective and background information.
- Review why it is important.
- Ask staff the questions.
- Facilitate the activity outlined.
- Provide time for staff to ask questions.

Objective: Determine best practices when including food bars as a meal service option for reimbursable meals.

Background information: Food bars may lower plate waste by allowing students to take only items they will eat. They are effective at increasing access to and eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, as encouraged by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Salad bars are an example of a food bar and are encouraged by USDA in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Why it is important: Schools are encouraged to use food bars and salad bars as a way to offer a wider variety of foods. Food and salad bars work well with Offer Versus Serve (OVS) because they offer a lot of variety, which may help students selecting foods they will consume. Food bars allow a variety of choices for students to select a reimbursable meal. Food bars can also help to reduce food cost and plate waste because students have the ability to choose their preferred food items.

Questions for Staff

- **What information is important for staff to know when a student selects choices from a food bar?**

Answer: Train staff on the food components/menu items provided on the food bar, the minimum serving size for each of the components, and what constitutes a reimbursable meal. It is also important for staff to implement food safety practices.

- **What are the benefits of including a food bar as a choice for a reimbursable meal?**

Answer:

- Students have a variety of choices.
- Students can select the food they enjoy.
- Students may try new items since they can select a multitude of choices.
- It may reduce food cost and plate waste.

- **What makes a food bar appealing to students?**

Answer:

- A variety of food items.
- A well-organized and clean food bar.
- Foods served at the correct temperature – Hot foods served hot, cold foods served cold.

Please note: The answers provided are only examples and are not an inclusive list of possible responses.

Activity: Food Bars

Activity materials included in this document:

No supplemental materials are included in this document.

Materials provided by the school nutrition operation:

- Index cards
- Writing utensils

Activity Instructions:

- Provide index cards and writing utensils to the staff.
- Ask the staff to identify food bar best practices.
- Allow 5-7 minutes to complete the activity.
- Discuss the responses at the end of the activity.
- Post the index cards in an attractive manner in a common location for staff to see.

Possible Answers:

- Pre-portioning food items is one way that can assist staff in quickly identifying portion sizes.
- Providing appropriate size serving utensils will assist students in taking the correct serving size.
- For self-service items, signs placed on serving line as a visual aid to help students determine the minimum portion.
- Schools also could assign student "food bar ambassadors" to assist younger students in selecting the correct portion sizes from the food bar.
- Chill foods to an internal temperature of 41 °F or below before placing on the salad bar.
- Discard food that may have been contaminated, either unintentionally or intentionally.
- Organize food items in a visually appealing way, alternating colors.

Please note: The answers provided are only examples and are not an inclusive list of possible responses.

References

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United States Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Professional standards for school nutrition professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/professional-standards>

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