Greening the School Nutrition Scene: A National Study Examining Green/Environmental Conservation Practices and Barriers in School Nutrition Programs

**PURPOSE**
The purpose of this project was to identify green/environmental conservation practices (GEC) in school nutrition (SN) settings across the United States.

**METHOD**
- Six SN professionals involved in GEC approaches in SN programs participated in an expert panel to discuss GEC practices, benefits, and barriers.
- The qualitative information from the expert panel was used to draft a survey that was reviewed and piloted by a panel of 19 SN professionals.
- Surveys were distributed to a random sample of 700 SN directors in the seven USDA regions.

**RESULTS**
- A total of 223 surveys (31.8%) were returned.
- 42.9% of respondents reported that their SN department/school district is involved in GEC efforts and 25% are in the process of planning GEC initiatives.
- SN professionals perceive “environmental conservation” as supporting and promoting the protection of the environment (3.38 ± 0.55) and sustainability of GEC practices depends upon administrative support (3.32 ± 0.58). Scale was 4 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).
- SN directors indicated their primary roles as nutrition educator (56.0%) and role model (49.1%) in GEC efforts.
- Perceived benefits of implementing and sustaining GEC practices included:
  - Implementing GEC practices in schools will encourage students to adopt lifelong conservation behaviors (3.09 ± 0.70)
  - The SN department/school district’s participation in GEC practices provides a safe and healthier environment for students (3.07 ± 0.79)
- Perceived barriers that have prevented the implementation and sustainability of GEC practices included:
  - The SN department/school district does not have the equipment and/or resources to support GEC practices (2.62 ± 0.78)
  - Implementing and sustaining GEC practices cost too much (2.56 ± 0.92)

**APPLICATION OF RESULTS**
Findings from this study will be used to develop a GEC guide for school nutrition professionals.

**TOP GEC PRACTICES**
- **RECYCLING PRACTICES**
  - Recycle paper/cardboard boxes (78.0%)
  - Place recycling bins and cans in key locations to encourage recycling practices (65.4%)
- **ENERGY CONSERVATION PRACTICES**
  - Turn off excess lights (87.0%)
  - Purchase and/or use Energy Star equipment (58.4%)
- **AIR AND WATER CONSERVATION PRACTICES**
  - Turn off water when not in use (84.6%)
  - Conduct regular maintenance of ventilation hoods (83.7%)
- **RESOURCE CONSERVATION PRACTICES**
  - Send e-mails instead of paper memos (88.4%)
  - Reuse paper (59.1%)
- **GEC BUILDING RENOVATIONS AND CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES**
  - Supports recycling practices (64.6%)
  - Install energy and water efficient equipment (42.2%)
- **OTHER GEC PRACTICES**
  - Purchase locally grown foods (not a part of Farm-to-School) (47.6%)
  - School garden projects (44.1%)