

School Nutrition Directors' Usage and Perceptions of USDA Recipes

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the usage of USDA recipes and investigate factors influencing their usage. The relationship between these variables and school district size (student enrollment) was also investigated.

Method

The methodology included a literature review, an expert panel, and a national survey.

- A day and a half expert panel meeting of nine school nutrition (SN) professionals convened to identify the major issues associated with the usage of USDA recipes.
- Findings from the expert panel were used to develop an online survey.
- The survey was sent to a random sample of 2,100 SN directors, representing the seven USDA regions.
- Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Chi Square and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's post hoc tests were conducted to determine the relationship between research variables.

Response Rate/Demographics

- Survey Response Rate: 23% (N=511)
- District Enrollment of Respondents:
 - <1,000 = 21%
 - 1,000 – 2,499 = 30%
 - 2,500 – 4,999 = 19%
 - 5,000 – 9,999 = 13%
 - 10,000 – 24,999 = 8%
 - ≥ 25,000 = 9%

Areas of Satisfaction with USDA Recipes

- Support participation with: National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, Summer Food Service Program
- Menu planning for meat and meat alternative items
- Compliance with specifications for food based menu planning and offer versus serve
- Other program needs: format of recipes, availability of food preparation equipment, skill level of SN staff, impact of the recipes on labor cost and ease of accessing the recipes online

Student Enrollment and Usage

- As enrollment increased, usage of USDA recipes significantly decreased ($p < .001$).
- 76% with enrollment of < 10,000 reported using USDA recipes
- 49% with enrollment of ≥ 10,000 reported using USDA recipes

Areas of USDA Recipes that Need Improvement

- Support for participation in breakfast initiatives (i.e. breakfast carts, grab n' go breakfast, breakfast in the classroom, and breakfast after first period)
- Menu planning for dark green vegetables
- Compliance with sodium regulations
- Supporting budget constraints for food cost
- Customer service issues: meeting the trends of today, cultural diversity, regional appropriateness, student friendliness, and variety

Application of Results

It is recommended that further research be conducted to identify ways of adapting the USDA recipes to better support the program needs of SN directors regardless of school district size.