



## Exploring School Nutrition Professionals' Preferences of USDA Recipes for Meeting USDA Meal Pattern Requirements

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The specific objectives of the project were to:

- Assess the usage of USDA recipes in school nutrition (SN) programs;
- Identify SN professionals' preferences for standardized recipes needed to meet new meal pattern requirements; and
- Determine SN professionals' needs (e.g., operational and menu planning) to increase the adoption of USDA recipes.

### **METHOD**

#### **Phase I**

- A day and a half expert panel meeting of eight SN professionals convened to identify the major issues associated with the usage of USDA recipes.

#### **Phase II**

- 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%

### **STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND USAGE**

- 76% with enrollment of < 10,000 reported using USDA recipes
- 49% with enrollment of ≥ 10,000 reported using USDA recipes

## AREAS OF SATISFACTION WITH USDA RECIPES

- Support participation with: National School Lunch Program, Child and Adult Care Food 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

## 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

## CONCLUSIONS

- There is a strong need for USDA recipes;
- School district size has a significant effect on the usage of USDA recipes;
- The current USDA recipe file has several perceived strengths; and
- There are several potential opportunities for improving the USDA recipes.

## ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDED

- Evaluate stakeholder (student, parent, teacher, SN director, SN staff, and school administration) acceptability of the USDA recipes;
- Identify ways of adapting the USDA Recipes to better meet the “trends of today;” and
- Identify ways of adapting the USDA Recipes to better meet the cultural and regional preferences of stakeholders in a variety of settings (metropolitan and rural areas; districts with small, moderate, and large enrollments).

For more information,  
you can download the full technical report at  
<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20151207094024.pdf>

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