

**Exploring Green/Environmental Conservation
in the School Nutrition Setting:
Results of a National Survey**



National Food Service Management Institute
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**National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi**

Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute 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 National Food Service Management Institute is to improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

MISSION

The mission of the National Food Service Management Institute is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

VISION

The vision of the National Food Service Management Institute is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

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EXPLORING GREEN/ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE SCHOOL NUTRITION SETTING: RESULTS OF A NATIONAL SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School nutrition (SN) professionals contribute to the health and well-being of students by providing them nutritious meals in a healthy school environment. School nutrition operations expend large amounts of resources (food, energy, water, metal, paper, and plastic products) to meet students' nutritional needs. School nutrition professionals take these, and many other factors, under consideration when adopting and sustaining green and environmental conservation (GEC) practices within the SN departments and for their school community. However, guidance and documentation of sustained GEC practices within the SN arena, and peer-reviewed research evaluating GEC practices in SN programs, are limited. Building on previous case study research, the National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division, conducted a two-phased study to examine common GEC practices and the attitudes and behaviors of SN directors who adopt GEC practices.

In the first phase of the study, six SN professionals involved in GEC approaches in SN programs participated in an expert panel to provide insight into GEC practices, benefits, and barriers of sustainability. In the second phase of the study, qualitative data from the expert panel was used to draft a survey. The survey was evaluated and piloted by a review panel of 19 SN professionals, and was revised according to the review panel's recommendations. The final survey was distributed to a random sample of 700 SN directors in all seven USDA regions across the country. A total of 223 surveys (31.8%) were returned.

From the surveys received, 42.9% of respondents reported that their SN department/school district is involved in GEC efforts, and 25.0% indicated that they were in the process of planning GEC initiatives. The six GEC practices that were being planned or sustained at the time of data collection were the following: recycling; energy conservation; air and water conservation; resource conservation; GEC building renovations and construction practices; and other GEC practices, such as purchasing locally grown foods and school gardening projects.

School nutrition professionals perceived “environmental conservation” as supporting and promoting the protection of the environment (3.38 ± 0.5), and believed that the sustainability of GEC practices depends upon administrative support (3.32 ± 0.6). School nutrition directors indicated that their primary roles in GEC efforts were as nutrition educator (56.0%) and role model (49.1%). The top perceived benefits of implementing and sustaining GEC practices included: providing a safe and healthier environment for students (3.17 ± 0.8), and encouraging students to adopt lifelong conservation behaviors (3.15 ± 0.7). The top perceived barriers that have prevented the implementation and sustainability of GEC practices in SN programs/schools included: the lack of equipment and/or resources to support GEC practices (2.76 ± 0.8) and costs (2.70 ± 0.9). Findings from this study will be used to develop a Web-based GEC resource for SN professionals who wish to implement or sustain GEC practices.