

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

USDA COMMITMENT TO SCHOOL MEALS
May 1, 2017

By the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States of America

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS schools across the Nation are committed to serving healthy and appealing school meals, giving millions of children the opportunity to enjoy foods that contribute to a nutritious diet; and

WHEREAS schools have worked diligently to overcome operational challenges in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs created by meeting sodium, whole grain-rich, and milk requirements; and

WHEREAS schools need flexibility in menu planning so they can serve nutritious and appealing meals and encourage student participation in the meal programs;

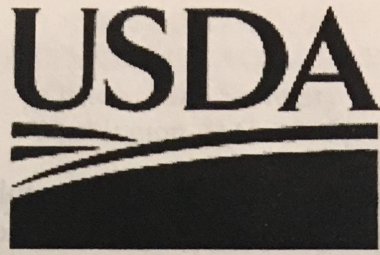
NOW, THEREFORE, because States need continued flexibility in serving whole grain-rich foods in school meals, I, Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Agriculture, direct the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to begin the regulatory process to provide schools with additional options in regard to the serving of whole grains. While the process is underway, I will continue to provide States the authority to grant exemptions to schools experiencing hardship in obtaining whole grain-rich products acceptable to students, for any type of grains on the menu for school year 2017–2018.

Additionally, schools that meet sodium Target I for school years 2017–2020 will be considered compliant with USDA sodium requirements. The Department will take all necessary regulatory actions to implement this change. I am also dedicating USDA resources to provide significant technical assistance to schools as they continue to develop menus that are healthy and appealing to students.

Because milk is a critical component of school meals, and providing schools with the discretion to serve flavored, 1 percent fat milk provides more options for students selecting milk as part of their lunch or breakfast, I am directing USDA to begin the regulatory process to provide that discretion to schools. In addition, I am committed to providing USDA resources for technical assistance during implementation of the new regulations to ensure that schools may use this option effectively.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 1st day of May 2017, the two-hundred forty-first year of the Independence of the United States of America.

SONNY PERDUE
Secretary



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Ag Secretary Perdue Moves to Make School Meals Great Again *Local Control of Whole Grains, Sodium, Milk to Make Meals Healthful, Appealing*

LEESBURG, VA, May 1, 2017 - U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide greater flexibility in nutrition requirements for school meal programs in order to make food choices both healthful and appealing to students. Perdue made the announcement during a visit to Catoctin Elementary School in Leesburg, Virginia to mark School Nutrition Employee Week. Perdue signed a proclamation which begins the process of restoring local control of guidelines on whole grains, sodium, and milk. Perdue was joined in the announcement by Sen. Pat Roberts (KS), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and Dr. Becky Domokos-Bays, school nutrition supervisor for Loudoun County (VA) Public Schools and the president of the national School Nutrition Association.

“This announcement is the result of years of feedback from students, schools, and food service experts about the challenges they are facing in meeting the final regulations for school meals,” Perdue said. “If kids aren’t eating the food, and it’s ending up in the trash, they aren’t getting any nutrition – thus undermining the intent of the program.”

Schools have been facing increasing fiscal burdens as they attempt to adhere to existing, stringent nutrition requirements. According to USDA figures, school food requirements cost school districts and states an additional \$1.22 billion in Fiscal Year 2015. At the same time costs are going up, most states are reporting that they’ve seen a decrease in student participation in school lunches, as nation-wide about one million students choose not to have a school lunch each day. This impacts schools in two ways: The decline in school lunch participation means reduced revenue to schools while they simultaneously are encountering increased costs.

“I was talking to some folks in Washington about this, and they said that the current program is working. ‘How do you know?’ I asked. They said it’s because 99 percent of schools are at least partially compliant. Well, only in Washington can that be considered proof that the system is working as it was intended,” Perdue said. “A perfect example is in the south, where the schools want to serve grits. But the whole grain variety has little black flakes in it, and the kids won’t eat it. The school is complaint with the whole grain requirements, but no one is eating the grits. That doesn’t make any sense.”

The specific flexibilities are:

- **Whole grains:**

- Schools are experiencing challenges in finding the full range of products they need and that their students enjoy in whole grain-rich form. They need continued flexibility in meeting the whole grain requirements for school meals.
- USDA will allow states to grant exemptions to schools experiencing hardship in serving 100 percent of grain products as whole-grain rich for School Year 2017-2018. USDA will take all necessary regulatory actions to implement a long-term solution.

- **Sodium:**

- For School Years 2017-2018 through 2020, schools will not be required to meet Sodium Target 2. Instead, schools that meet Sodium Target 1 will be considered compliant.
- The time frame will provide schools and the school nutrition industry with the certainty and predictability they need to make appropriate plans for creating foods with the appropriate amount of sodium. During this period, USDA will take all necessary regulatory actions to implement a long-term solution.
- USDA will dedicate significant resources to providing technical assistance to schools as they continue to develop menus that are low in sodium and appealing to students.

- **Milk:**

- Milk is a key component of school meals, meaning schools must have more options for students who select milk as part of their lunch or breakfast.
- Perdue will direct USDA to begin the regulatory process for schools to serve 1 percent flavored milk through the school meals programs. USDA will seek to publish an interim rule as soon as possible to effect the change in milk policy.

“I’ve got 14 grandchildren, and there is no way that I would propose something if I didn’t think it was good, healthful, and the right thing to do,” Perdue said. “And here’s the thing about local control: it means that this new flexibility will give schools and states the *option* of doing what we’re laying out here today. These are not mandates on schools.”

Perdue lauded the efforts of the nation’s food service staff in serving healthful, appealing meals and underscored USDA’s commitment to help them overcome any remaining challenges they face in meeting the nutrition standards.

“The hard work and dedication of the people who prepare nutritious meals for our children should serve as an example to all, and we will continue to support them,” Perdue said. “We also have a responsibility

to our shareholders and our customers – the American taxpayers – to provide our school children with healthful and nutritious meals in the most efficient and cost effective way possible.”

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers 15 nutrition assistance programs that include the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the Summer Food Service Program. Together, these programs comprise America's nutrition safety net. For more information, visit www.fns.usda.gov.

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