

EXPLORING SCHOOL NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS' PREFERENCES OF USDA RECIPES FOR MEETING NEW MEAL PATTERN REQUIREMENTS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research was to explore school nutrition (SN) professionals' perceptions, preferences, and needs pertaining to USDA recipes.

METHOD

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

- The expert panel consisted of seven SN directors and two state agency representatives with experience utilizing and modifying USDA recipes.
- Discussion questions focused on:
 - the usage of USDA recipes in SN programs,
 - SN professionals' preferences for standardized recipes needed to meet new meal pattern requirements, and
 - SN professionals' needs (e.g., operational and menu planning) to increase the adoption of USDA recipes.
- Expert panel discussions were utilized to develop an online survey.
- The survey was sent to random stratified sample of 2,100 SN directors representing all USDA regions.

RESULTS

- Survey response rate was 23%.
- Fifty-two percent of respondents were from school districts with less than 2,500 students; 32% from districts with 2,500-9,999 students; and 16% from districts with 10,000 or more students.
- Respondents were from all seven USDA regions with the largest percentage from the Midwest (25%) and the smallest percentage from the Mid-Atlantic (8%).
- Most SN directors (75%) use USDA recipes in their operations. Of these directors, 64% reported that the USDA recipes are modified as necessary to meet their needs.
- SN directors used main dish recipes (46%), grains and bread recipes (32%) and vegetables (25%) one or more times per week.

APPLICATION OF RESULTS

The results of this study can be utilized by the USDA in the following ways to meet the needs of school nutrition professionals:

- Modify current USDA recipes
- Develop new USDA recipes

MEAL PATTERN COMPONENTS IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING NEW RECIPES

Beans and peas (63%)
Dark green vegetables (61%)
Red/orange vegetables (60%)
Whole grains (51%)
Meats (51%)

TOP REASONS SCHOOL NUTRITION DIRECTORS DO NOT USE USDA RECIPES

- We have other recipes we prefer. (47%)
- The USDA recipes are not current with today's trends. (40%)
- There is not enough variety in the selection of USDA recipes. (29%)
- We use mainly pre-processed and ready-made foods. (29%)
- The USDA recipes are not student friendly. (24%)
- We do not have adequate staffing to prepare USDA recipes. (22%)
- The USDA recipes require too much time to process. (21%)



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