


USDA Announces Grants for Healthier School Meals

WASHINGTON (USDA) — [Agriculture Secretary](#) [1] Tom Vilsack Wednesday announced \$5.5 million in new grants to support schools as they continue to provide school lunches and breakfasts that give children the nutrition they need to learn and grow. Over 90 percent of schools are successfully meeting new meal nutrition standards, serving meals with more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein and low-fat dairy, and less sodium and fat. These new grants provide support to schools to help them achieve or continue to meet those standards. The grants focus on implementation of Smarter Lunchrooms strategies, a broad toolkit of easy-to-implement, evidence-based practices designed to increase consumption of healthier foods and decrease plate waste.

"Schools have worked hard to serve more fruits, vegetables, lean protein, low-fat dairy and whole grains at mealtime. Strategies like Smarter Lunchrooms give schools simple, actionable, low-cost steps that help make sure that the healthy food on kids' plates ends up in their stomachs," said Vilsack. "These grants are part of USDA's ongoing commitment to give states and schools the additional resources and flexibility they need as they help make the healthy choice, the easy choice for America's young people."

The [Smarter Lunchrooms](#) [2]  movement applies practical, research-based principles and strategies that have proven effective at creating an environment that encourages kids to make healthy choices. The movement, which was developed by Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (BEN Center) with funding from the USDA and others, uses environmental cues to increase student selection of healthy meal options and decrease plate waste. These include simple strategies such as structuring choices in the lunch line so that healthy foods are easiest for students to access, having cafeteria staff dialog with students in such a way that nudges them toward healthy items, and creatively naming foods or meals to make them more appealing to children. For example, researchers found that changing the placement of where fruit is displayed in the lunch line led to a doubling of sales. Similarly, creative naming and display of vegetables increased selection by 40 to 70 percent.

The grants are being released as part of USDA's Team Nutrition initiative, designed to support state-level child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance. The [Team Nutrition Training Grants](#) [3] for fiscal year 2014 will require state agency grantees to use the BEN Center's Self-Assessment Score Card to encourage schools in the National School Lunch Program to use Smarter Lunchrooms techniques and increase student choice of whole grains, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and legumes. These funds may be used to assist the state agency in providing training and technical assistance to school staff in creating Smarter Lunchrooms.

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For more information on the FY2014 Team Nutrition Training Grants and upcoming grant-writing webinars please visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/2014-training-grant-application> [3]. To apply for the grants please visit www.grants.gov [4].

These grants are another way USDA is combating child hunger and obesity and improving the health and nutrition of the nation's children. This is a top priority for the Obama Administration and is an important component of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative to combat childhood obesity.

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers America's nutrition assistance programs including the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Together these programs make up the federal nutrition safety net.

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Links:

[1] <https://twitter.com/USDA>

[2] <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/homepage>

[3] <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/2014-training-grant-application>

[4] <http://www.grants.gov/>