



Source: Chef Ann Foundation

January 30, 2023 13:00 ET

Chef Ann Foundation Launches First-Ever Federally Registered Fellowship Program to Cultivate New Generation of School Food Leaders

Boulder, CO, Jan. 30, 2023 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Chef Ann Foundation](#) (CAF) today announced it has chosen 24 fellows from across the country to participate in its inaugural year-long [Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship \(HSFP\) program](#). Over the next year, the program will develop the next generation of diverse leaders in scratch-cooked school food operations that can support future sustainable programs and drive school food reform. As the first-ever federally registered fellowship program for mid- to upper-level school food professionals, participants will focus on workforce development and upskilling the profession to grow scratch-cooked school food leadership across the country.

For many kids in our country the lunch they are served in school has the ability to be the most nutritious meal of their day. Yet today, millions of students throughout the nation will be served a lunch that is highly processed, heat-and-serve food, often laden with preservatives, which does very little to nourish or energize the students for the rest of their day. Despite the great need to improve nutrition across the country, skilled labor is one of the top challenges to implementing a scratch-cook school food program. According to a 2019 SNA survey, 54% of responding districts reported 'finding the next generation of School Nutrition Directors' was somewhat of a challenge or a significant challenge. The HSFP Fellowship will empower participants to operate successful self-run, scratch-cook meal programs, advocate for serving fresh and healthy meals to students, and help retain the talent and capacity to serve healthy, scratch-cooked food.

"Today more than ever, we see the impact of labor shortages resulting in less access to nutritious meal options for our kids," said Chef Ann Cooper, Founder and President of the Chef Ann Foundation. "With this fellowship, we aim to create a lasting solution to this important problem, with hopes to one day better the lives of every single student in the United States. "

To be invited into Chef Ann Foundation's competitive Inaugural cohort, Fellows demonstrated their passion for scratch cooking and school food reform through a multi-step process including an application, video and resume submission, and interviews with content leads. This dedication resulted in a cohort of 24 fellows from across the country that are committed to furthering their role in leadership and ready to accomplish real systems change.

Fellows will participate in weekly live learning sessions across 12 key content areas, gain hands-on experience in exemplary school districts and through the Culinary Institute for Child Nutrition, earn credits towards a certificate in food systems and food justice from UCLA Extension's Food Studies program, and build their network of scratch cooked school food peers. Their experience will culminate in an implementation-based capstone project demonstrating the application of their learning to benefit their home school district and ultimately cultivate transformative change within the school food system.

"I'm proud of our partnership with the Chef Ann Foundation and their extraordinary work to pave the way for more of our country's schools to serve fresh, nourishing food," said California First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom. "Through California's Farm to School program we've seen the wonderful impact access to nutritious scratch cooked school meals can have on children's overall well-being. That's why I am so excited for this new class of Healthy School Food Pathway fellows and the rewarding careers they've embarked on- as well as the vital role they will play in helping us bring more delicious, nutritious and locally-sourced meals to students."

[Meet the Fellows](#)

The 2023 cohort includes representation from Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Texas, Virginia and the Northern Mariana Islands. Fellows will bring their experiences working in school districts ranging in size from one school building up to 86 schools, nearly 64,000 students, and from 9% free & reduced meal eligibility up to nearly 100%.

One of the most unique parts about this Fellowship cohort is the broad range of roles they currently hold in their districts: five area supervisors, two assistant directors, three chefs, two culinary managers, three food service directors, two kitchen leads, two program specialists, and five nutritionists.

“One of the biggest issues facing school foods today is labor. We’re seeing anywhere from 10-40% vacancies in school food programs,” said Mara Fleishman, CEO of Chef Ann Foundation. “The Chef Ann Foundation created this program as a long-term solution to address both building labor capacity and skills in school foods. Our hand-selected Fellows are people who truly approach their jobs differently. Each of our Fellows is passionate about creating lasting impact on kids and want to help mold their eating habits for lifetime.”

With the HSFP Fellowship, Fellows will learn about a systems approach to change to help a district build and sustain a healthy, scratch-cooking focused program. Over the next 12 months, CAF aims to provide the Fellows a better understanding of how school food fits into the greater food system, driving Fellows motivation from not only childhood nutrition and culinary perspectives, but also considering systemic issues in food access equity, environmental sustainability, fiscal impacts, and more.

Kicking off the Fellowship

Fellows began their learning journey with a program welcome from the Renegade Lunch Lady herself, Chef Ann Cooper, Founder and President of the Chef Ann Foundation; Mara Fleishman, Chief Executive Officer of the Chef Ann Foundation; and Kim Herrington, Senior Programs Director for the Whole Kids Foundation. Fellows didn't waste a minute; excited to ask Ann questions about how she was able to build such significant scratch-cook programs at Berkeley Unified School District (CA) and Boulder Valley School District (CO).

During the second week of their program, Fellows sat down with Administrator Cindy Long, from the USDA Food & Nutrition Service and the Director of Sweetwater Unified High School District Food Services program, Eric Span, and the Superintendent of Sweetwater Unified High School, Dr. Moises G. Aguirre.

“School food professionals provide our kids with one of the most fundamental and meaningful forms of care – nourishment.” said Cindy Long, Administrator of the Food and Nutrition service at the USDA. “During the pandemic, it was the school food professionals who showed up as heroes, delivering nutritious food to students each day, despite many challenges. With The Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship, this tireless work is being lifted up, empowering the next generation of heroes in school food, and ensuring school meals continue on a positive trajectory of nourishing all students .”

Looking Ahead

Fellows will engage in learning across 11 core content areas: Leadership Development; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; Human Resources; Nutrition; Procurement; Finances; Facilities; Policy & Compliance; Sustainability; Marketing; Grant Writing & Fundraising.

As individuals complete the Fellowship, CAF will stay engaged with alumni and draw on their expertise to support other districts and leverage the collective voice to advocate for healthy school meals, efficient scratch cooking operations, climate positive food system solutions, and an equity-driven, valued workforce.

The Fellowship is part of the HSFP program, work-based learning, registered apprenticeship that aims to increase capacity and prepare individuals for job opportunities in healthy, scratch-cook school food programs. Thanks to CAF's founding program partners, Whole Kids Foundation and the state of CA, the Fellowship is open to school food professionals across the country.

About the Chef Ann Foundation

The Chef Ann Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to ensure that school food professionals have the resources, funding and support they need to provide fresh, healthy, delicious, scratch cooked meals that support the health of children and our planet. To date, the organization has reached more than 14,000 schools and 3.4 million kids with healthy school programming. Learn more at chefannfoundation.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Attachments

- [Chef Ann Foundation's Healthy School Food Pathway Inaugural Fellowship](#)
- [Chef Ann Foundation's Healthy School Food Pathway Inaugural Fellowship](#)