

Chef Ann Cooper Biography

Founder and President of the Board, [Chef Ann Foundation](#); Partner, Lunch Lessons, LLC; Former Director of Nutrition Services, Boulder Valley School District

Condensed version

Chef Ann Cooper is a celebrated author, chef, educator and enduring advocate for better food for all children. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, Ann has been a chef and cook for more than 50 years, including more than 25 years supporting school food programs. She is the former director of food services for the Boulder Valley School District. Known as the Renegade Lunch Lady, Ann has been honored by The National Resources Defense Council, selected as a Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellow, and awarded an honorary doctorate from SUNY Cobleskill for her work on sustainable agriculture. In 2009, Ann founded the nonprofit [Chef Ann Foundation](#) to focus on solutions to the school food crisis. CAF's pivotal project is [The Lunch Box](#) – a web portal that provides free and accessible tools, recipes and resources to support schools transitioning to scratch-cooked meals made with whole, healthy food.

Full version

Chef Ann Cooper is a celebrated author, chef, educator, and enduring advocate for better food for all children. In a nation where children are born with shorter estimated life expectancies than their parents because of diet-related illness, for more than two decades Ann has been a relentless voice of reform by focusing on the links between school food, children's health, and the health of the planet.

A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, Ann has been a chef and cook for more than 50 years. She held positions with Holland America Cruises, Radisson Hotels, and Telluride Ski Resort before serving as executive chef at the renowned Putney Inn in Vermont. After leading a school food program at a school in New York, she saw first-hand how the quality of school food impacts the health and wellbeing of children, as well as how the school food sector influences the food system at large. She's since devoted her career to advocating for scratch-cooked,



sustainable, and equitable school food across the nation and has become known as the “Renegade Lunch Lady.”

In 2009, Ann founded the [Chef Ann Foundation](#) as a means to directly help K-12 school food professionals transition from serving students pre-packaged ultra-processed foods to serving fresher, healthier, and more appetizing scratch-made meals using sustainably sourced ingredients. Today, Ann continues to advance school food reform as the president of Chef Ann Foundation’s board of directors, a consultant, and public speaker. She envisions a time soon when being a chef working to feed children fresh, delicious, and nourishing food will no longer be considered “renegade.”

Chef Ann has been featured in a wide variety of media outlets, including The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Chicago Tribune, Newsweek, CNN, Time Magazine, and many other media outlets. She has appeared on NPR’s “Living on Earth,” ABC’s “Nightline,” PBS’ “To The Contrary,” and the CBS “Morning Show.” She’s additionally shared her knowledge and experience through speaking engagements with Smithsonian Institute, National Restaurant Association, Heifer Foundation, National Resources Defense Fund, International Association of Culinary Professionals, and at numerous conferences. She has been honored by SLOW Food USA, National Resources Defence Council, and Culinary Institute of America. She was also selected as a Kellogg Food and Society Policy Fellow, and awarded an honorary doctorate from SUNY Cobleskill for her work in sustainable agriculture.

She is past president of The American Culinary Federation of Central Vermont, and past president and board member of Women’s Chefs and Restaurateurs. She also was congressionally appointed to serve on the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Organic Standards Board,, and was an executive committee member of Chefs Collaborative.

Ann is the author of four books: **Lunch Lessons: Changing the Way We Feed Our Children** (2006); **In Mother’s Kitchen: Celebrated Women Chefs Share Beloved Family Recipes** (2005); **Bitter Harvest: A Chef’s Perspective on the Hidden Dangers in the Foods We Eat and What You Can do About It** (2000); and **A Woman’s Place is in the Kitchen: The Evolution of Women Chefs** (1998).