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Chef Ann Foundation Response to USDA Proposed Rules

[USDA Proposed Rules: Simplifying Meal Service and Monitoring Requirements in the NSLP and SBP](#)

Current Articles

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The Chef Ann Foundation believes we need to be serving more fresh fruits and vegetables, combined with whole grains (as intact as possible) and the least processed, cleanest possible proteins in school meals.

When it comes to regulations, we believe that the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) was monumental in providing the strongest nutrition-supported guidelines in the history of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

We believe that, like education requirements, there needs to be nutrition requirements based on known health and nutrition research. **We are tired of school lunch not being considered a key element to a student's potential to thrive and succeed.**

The term “flexibility” used with the current administration's rollback of the HHFKA regulation adherence is the most concerning piece to us. We do not provide kids with the “flexibility” to bypass algebra or skip learning about grammar or biology if they like other subjects or topics more. We understand that there is a foundational learning curriculum that students need to thrive and be successful. We ask that the same theory be applied equally across the school day. We know which foods are healthier, even if kids prefer food that is not. We should not be providing the “flexibility” to serve kids what they prefer if we know it's less healthy for them.

These rollbacks are intrinsically tied to the fact that the NSLP relies on average daily participation (ADP) to stay financially solvent. We know that many food service directors struggle to keep their programs fiscally sound, and most district administrations look to the food service program to pay for itself, rather than relying on financial contributions from the general fund.

So instead of talking about exchanging potatoes for red peppers or letting schools opt out of 51% whole grains, **we need to elevate this conversation to a true solution: Universal Free Meals.** A bill sponsored by Congresswoman Ilhan Omar (D-MN, 5th District) and Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) to establish a [Universal School Meals Program](#), making school meals free for all children, was introduced to Congress in 2019. This is the next step in the evolution of the NSLP.

The time has come. We all know that kids need to learn math, language, and science. We also know that kids need healthy food. We should not be allowing schools to “opt-out” of either of them. By moving to a universal free school meals program, we remove the need for school food teams to hit a prescribed ADP because of budgetary constraints—allowing districts to make the best possible decisions for **children's health** and not the fiscal health of their program.

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The Chef Ann Foundation