

**USDA Launches $100 Million Healthy School Meals Initiative, Announces Grant Program for Rural Schools**

**Washington, D.C., Sept. 23, 2022**– Today, USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service launched the first phase of its $100 million Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative aimed at improving the nutritional quality of school meals by opening a request for applications for an organization to manage grants to small and/or rural school meal programs, establish an awards program to recognize school districts that are excelling in their meal quality, and support schools in bringing best practices into their lunchrooms.

“One of the most important things we can do to protect the future of our nation’s children is to make sure they have enough nutritious food to eat,” said Food and Nutrition Service Administrator Cindy Long. “Local schools are experts in crafting meals that are both healthy and appetizing to children. This new initiative will provide more resources to them to achieve that goal and celebrate those who are raising the bar.”

The grants will aid small and rural school districts in meeting or exceeding school nutrition standards by providing up to $150,000 each to help them overcome various challenges, including the rising cost of food, staffing shortages, lack of space, and outdated kitchen equipment.

Meanwhile, the awards program will recognize schools that have made significant improvements to the nutritional quality of their meals, such as:

* Exceeding nutrition requirements for sodium and whole grains;
* Reducing added sugars in school breakfasts;
* Implementing innovative practices in scratch cooking and nutrition education; and/or
* Providing meals that reflect the cultures of their students.

In total, the nonprofit organization selected to manage the initiative will receive approximately $47 million to execute these efforts in support of nutritious school meals.

To further the impact of these efforts, FNS will host two Healthy Meals Summits to recognize award recipients. During the summits, attendees will share best practices and strategies for sustaining their achievements that can be leveraged by other schools across the country.

Earlier this year, FNS issued temporary school nutrition standards to serve as a bridge between the flexible options needed during the first two years of COVID-19 and stronger, long-term standards that are aggressive and achievable. This progress toward even more nutritious school meals is both important and timely, as diet-related diseases are on the rise and [recent estimates](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDAsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5uZWptLm9yZy9kb2kvZnVsbC8xMC4xMDU2L05FSk1vYTE3MDM4NjAjdD1hcnRpY2xlIn0.VpEINFG5U3vu0w7MagEQiDmd3Dl9gD-mnEbxdT_YVxc/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l) project that most children in America today will have obesity by the time they are 35 years old. The Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative will help school meal programs meet the transitional standards and put schools on a path toward long-term success.

“Schools meals are vital to the health and well-being of our nation’s children, providing critical nutrition to tens of millions of children every school day,” said Administrator Long. “The Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative is part of USDA’s deep commitment to ensuring schools have all the support and tools they need to continue to rise to that task.”

The request for applications is open to all nongovernmental organizations through Nov. 28, 2022. For more information about the Healthy Meals Incentives Initiative, please explore these resources:

* [Request for applications](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDEsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3YvZ3JhbnQvaG1pLXJlY29nbml0aW9uLWF3YXJkcy1zZmFzLWNvb3BlcmF0aXZlLWFncmVlbWVudCJ9.Jb6YSnfxO62Lfawei0JtL6QuEwrQA7x95DioqOPghag/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)
* [Healthy Meals Incentives webpage](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDIsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3YvY25wL2hlYWx0aHktbWVhbHMtaW5jZW50aXZlcyJ9.Crg7j30sca7A3bNpB_wzYc_1X-CLTryL8GX-poU4Gw8/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)

Later this year, FNS will announce the second and final phase of the initiative that will expand nutritious food options for school meals through financial investment and collaboration with food industry partners. All of the Healthy Meals Incentive Initiative efforts will also support American agricultural producers by strengthening small and rural school districts’ access to nutritious commodities such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables as well as local and cultural foods.

School meals are a cornerstone of the federal efforts to end hunger, increase healthy eating, and curb diet-related disease. The Biden Administration is bringing together key stakeholders to supercharge progress on these goals at next week’s White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. More information on this historic conference is available on [health.gov](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDMsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL2hlYWx0aC5nb3Yvb3VyLXdvcmsvbnV0cml0aW9uLXBoeXNpY2FsLWFjdGl2aXR5L3doaXRlLWhvdXNlLWNvbmZlcmVuY2UtaHVuZ2VyLW51dHJpdGlvbi1hbmQtaGVhbHRoIn0.oYshcUYLvrxret4VZX6cNIUAfCdAkLiYzoXkD7uvBmI/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l).

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service leverages its 15 nutrition assistance programs to ensure that children, low-income individuals, and families have opportunities for a better future through equitable access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food, while building a more resilient food system. Under the leadership of Secretary Tom Vilsack, FNS is fighting to end food and nutrition insecurity for all through programs such as SNAP, school meals, and WIC. FNS also provides science-based nutrition recommendations through the co-development of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. To learn more, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDQsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3YvIn0.JawReBJvwxjEDHvseXlTCbnLj46cbIUKiKHZYZt73CE/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l) and follow [@USDANutrition](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDUsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3R3aXR0ZXIuY29tL1VTREFOdXRyaXRpb24ifQ.LBLw-b7d39Pe6fIr--u4DfU2BtV0xUiz4GEzdIgeRRY/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l).

Related Resources:

* Webpage: [Building Back Better with School Meals](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDYsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3YvYnVpbGRpbmctYmFjay1iZXR0ZXItc2Nob29sLW1lYWxzIn0.s34yd4w1nbqSxmp-4ObT_ksBwOTLQDMbjg4J_VmJ1rQ/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)
* Fact Sheet: [Child Nutrition Programs: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDcsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3Yvc2l0ZXMvZGVmYXVsdC9maWxlcy9yZXNvdXJjZS1maWxlcy9iYmJzbS1mYWN0LXNoZWV0LnBkZiJ9.npMliDbSzlvBdy1ZqEH8kzXS1ZYGcV6qjigpLwWl7pk/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)
* Infographic: [The Road Ahead: Building Back Better with School Meals](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDgsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3Yvc2l0ZXMvZGVmYXVsdC9maWxlcy9yZXNvdXJjZS1maWxlcy9iYmJzbS1yb2FkLWFoZWFkLnBkZiJ9.rmTTVa6ILPdNrLSC6HHJRgYm33ltpfhSkzREYDUMovI/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)
* Infographic: [Ten Reasons to Build Back Even Better with School Meals!](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDksInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMjA5MjMuNjQxMzQ5OTEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5mbnMudXNkYS5nb3Yvc2l0ZXMvZGVmYXVsdC9maWxlcy9yZXNvdXJjZS1maWxlcy9iYmJzbS10ZW4tcmVhc29ucy5wZGYifQ.mDxdtkOz4Du2UIsic70bbDl33DeozqHvR_6eBf2_aNE/s/2162093189/br/144598775867-l)

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