WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION

IN A NUTSHELL

Garden and Salad Bars in the National School Lunch Program

Background

USDA Memo SP 41-2019

"USDA encourages the use of salad bars in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) because salad bars are effective at increasing access to and consumption of a variety of fruits and vegetables, ...".

Garden and Salad Bar Basics

Implementing a garden or salad bar in the NSLP begins with communicating the plan and training staff to ensure consistency and success. School food authorities (SFA) have a variety of options when setting up the meal service line:

1. Garden bar as part of the reimbursable meal: Fruits and vegetables are available to all students selecting a reimbursable meal.
2. Salad bar as a reimbursable meal option: The salad bar is a separate line, and students only have access if they select the salad bar as their entrée. The salad bar line must meet daily and weekly meal pattern requirements for all components.
3. Garden bar with the option for salad bar entrée: Fruits and vegetables are available to all students selecting a reimbursable meal. Grain and M/MA options are offered only to students selecting the salad bar as their entrée.

It is important to place the garden bar before the point of sale (POS) to ensure all students have access to all planned components before leaving the line. If this is not feasible, or if the POS is at the beginning of the line, a trained staff member must be present at the end of the line to ensure students have selected a reimbursable meal after going through the garden bar.

Introduce students to the garden bar by clearly explaining the rules and expectations, use clear signage, then start small to allow time for adjustments. Offer produce that appeals to students and remain flexible to making changes based on participation and feedback.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) Bureau of School Nutrition (BSN) shares available Grant Opportunities for Wisconsin Child Nutrition Program operators looking to enhance their programs. Opportunities relevant to garden and salad bars include:

- The Chef Ann Foundation Salad Bars to Schools Program
- The USDA NSLP Equipment Grant

Documentation Requirements

Garden and Salad Bar Production Records

The documentation requirements for garden and salad bars are similar to the standard production record requirements. Information that must be documented on garden and salad bar records include:

- **Food item with description/preparation details** – Be as specific as possible. Indicate if the item is fresh, frozen, canned, or dried. Also specify if it is chopped, sliced, diced, whole (case count), etc.
- **Planned serving size for each item** - If the item does not fit neatly into a measuring utensil, then a Portion Size Study must be conducted.
- **Planned and/or actual quantity prepared** - In bulk units like pounds, cups, #10 cans, etc.
- **Amount leftover** - Recorded as number of servings or in bulk units.

Information that is not required but recommended to aid school nutrition professionals in preparing the garden or salad bar and ensuring students select reimbursable meals includes:

- **Serving utensil**
- **Vegetable subgroup information**
- **Portion size study results** - This information could be documented on a garden and salad bar production record or on a separate list that is accessible to all staff.

Garden and salad bar production record templates are found on the DPI Production Record webpage.

Determining Portion Sizes

Per 7 CFR 210.10(c), schools must ensure that all meal components are served in at least the minimum required portion sizes for each age/grade group to meet meal pattern requirements.

Planned portion size should be reasonable for each menu item. When determining the planned portion size, consider the amount that the average student would select. For example, 1/2 cup of baby carrots is reasonable, but it is unlikely that a student will select 1/2 cup of diced onions.

Conducting a Portion Size Study

To comply with the regulation referenced above, portion size studies should be completed in the following scenarios:

- Food items that do not fit neatly in a portion measuring utensil, to determine the number of pieces needed to credit as the desired portion size (e.g. baby carrots, bell pepper strips, broccoli florets, cantaloupe, grapes, watermelon chunks).
- Tongs are used as a serving utensil because tongs are not a measuring utensil.
- Crediting information is provided as a weight and the item is served with a utensil that measures volume (e.g. taco meat, potato products, etc.).

Portion size studies must be site specific when the food item is processed (e.g. cut, sliced, diced) in each individual kitchen.

Complete instructions and a template for conducting portion size studies can be found on the DPI Menu Planning webpage. As a reminder, this documentation must be kept on file for three years plus the current year and will be requested with meal pattern compliance documentation during an Administrative Review.

Signage

To assist students in selecting a reimbursable meal, planned serving sizes must be communicated. The Salad Bar Signage on the DPI Signage webpage can be used to fulfill this requirement and ensure students know how much to select to fulfill the 1/2 cup fruit and/or vegetable requirement under Offer versus Serve.

Benefits of Offering a Garden and Salad Bar

Garden and salad bars benefit child nutrition programs in a variety of areas including nutritional quality, meal pattern compliance, inventory management, waste-reduction, and student satisfaction.

- Increased consumption: When students have more autonomy over their meals, and the ability to choose what is on their trays, they are more likely to eat it. This naturally lends itself to decreasing food waste and improving student satisfaction.
- Increased exposure: Students can be exposed to a variety of fruits and vegetables they may not get at home. Since they can select the amount they want, they may take a small amount of a new item to try and determine if they like it.
- Vegetable subgroup compliance: Garden and salad bars are an easy way to ensure vegetable subgroup requirements are met.
- Inventory management: Garden and salad bars are great for using up leftovers or overstock. Extra produce leftover from meal prep or even the school breakfast program can easily be incorporated into the garden or salad bar.
- Promotes positive eating habits: The cafeteria is a classroom, and garden and salad bars help children learn self-regulation, portion control, and how to build a balanced plate.
- Supports Farm to School (F2S) initiatives: Garden and salad bars offer more opportunities to incorporate fresh, local and seasonal items into the NSLP. Visit the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Farm to School webpage for resources and information on getting started with F2S.