



Innovation in the Preparation of School Meals



Innovation in the Preparation of School Meals recognizes schools who plan and prepare scratch recipes for school breakfast and lunch.

School Food Authorities (SFA) are eligible to apply for this Recognition Award if they participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) in the contiguous United States, Hawaii, Alaska, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, or the United States Virgin Islands.

Award Criteria

Within the past 12 months, the SFA implemented the meal service of at least three new menu items (entrées and/or sides) prepared from scratch. Using a local agricultural product* or USDA food is encouraged but not required.

**Local Agricultural Product: The definition of "local agricultural products" can depend on geographic, social, governmental, physical, or economic parameters; seasonality; and/or other factors. Local procurement options differ greatly across communities depending on district and school size; proximity to agricultural areas; growing season; and demographics. USDA expects that State agencies will have varying definitions of "local agricultural products" that align with their particular needs and goals. The intent of schools utilizing local agricultural products is to serve more locally produced foods in school cafeterias, improve student nutrition, provide nutrition education opportunities, and support local and regional farmers, ranchers, and fishers. Local agricultural products can be meats, seafood, fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, dairy foods, or legumes.*

The new menu items must have been offered as part of school breakfast or lunch meal service in at least one school.

The scratch-prepared menu items must be prepared from standardized recipes**, provide the minimum creditable amount of at least one meal component, and fit into weekly meal pattern requirements. The recipe may be from a source other than the award applicant (e.g., from the Child Nutrition Recipe Box, Chef Ann Foundation Lunch Box, Healthy School Recipes).

***A standardized recipe is a recipe that has been tried, adapted, and retried several times for use and has been found to produce the same good results and yield every time when the exact procedures are used with the same type of equipment and the same quantity of ingredients.*

If the menu items contain grains, the grains must be whole grain-rich, as defined by the Grain Requirements for School Meals and cannot be a grain-based dessert.

Scratch food production incorporates ingredients as close to their original state as possible.

The following are acceptable ingredients to include in menu items prepared from scratch for this award:

- Pre-packaged tortillas, pizza dough, rolls, buns, and breads, including proof and bake breads and sandwich bread,
- dry pasta,
- canned beans,
- fajita chicken meat, beef crumbles, unseasoned cooked meat, chicken, fish,
- individually quick frozen (IQF) fruits/vegetables,
- unseasoned canned fruits/vegetables

The following are not qualifying menu items for purposes of this award:

- Semi-homemade or speed-scratch menu items,
- condiments,
- salad dressings,
- grain-based desserts, and
- sauces

Learn more about the Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Awards at:
www.healthymealsincentives.org

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Required Documentation

Information about the school(s) used to qualify for the award including name and grade levels.

Provide a description of actions undertaken to provide the scratch-prepared menu items including:

- Outcomes including plans to repeat the three new menu items in future school meal menus.
- Optional: Indicate if local or USDA Foods are key ingredients.

Submit standardized recipes of each scratch-prepared menu item, indicating the creditable meal component(s) and the source of the recipe.

Submit school meal menu(s) identifying scratch-prepared menu items as part of a reimbursable school breakfast or lunch meal.

Provide a description of student engagement activities, marketing strategies, and their outcomes. Include school name, grade levels, and number of students.

Applicants may submit optional photographs including two or three clear, high-resolution photos of the menu items and any relevant activities with release forms providing USDA with royalty free unlimited rights to the use and printing of the photographs and parental permission forms, when applicable. A high-resolution image is one that's at least 300 DPI, or "dots per inch."

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