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USDA Awards Grants for New School Food Service Equipment to Help Schools Improve the Quality of Meals

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18, 2013 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will be awarding \$11 million in grants to help schools purchase needed equipment to make preparing and serving healthier meals easier and more efficient for hardworking school food service professionals.

"Schools are successfully serving healthier meals to America's students, but the right equipment and training can further their efforts to improve the health of our next generation," said Vilsack. "These grants will help schools upgrade equipment to help support nutritious meals, better ensure food safety, improve energy efficiency in the cafeteria, and expand participation in school nutrition programs."

In addition to the District of Columbia and Guam, fourteen states were selected to receive grants based on free- and reduced-price participation in the National School Lunch Program and greatest unmet need. They are Arkansas, California, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. States will competitively award the funds to school districts to purchase needed equipment, with priority given to districts serving a high percentage of low-income children.

Outdated equipment can pose a barrier to preparing healthy meals on a large scale. Today, the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project, a collaboration between The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, released a report, [Serving Healthy School Meals: U.S. Schools Need Updated Kitchen Equipment](#), which focuses on school equipment needs based on a survey of school food service personnel. The findings suggest that while most schools need additional resources to upgrade cafeteria equipment, the equipment itself is not necessarily expensive or out of reach—estimated costs for top five needed items ranged from \$32 to \$1,941. Today's grants provide additional resources for schools to purchase equipment that will make serving healthier meals easier, safer and more efficient for school food service personnel.

The school equipment grants announced today are one example of how USDA is supporting schools as they implement the new meal patterns resulting from the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kid's Act of 2010. USDA works closely with schools to address implementation challenges, and provides grants and technical assistance to overcome barriers. USDA is also currently working to permanently establish the [meat and grain flexibilities](#) that we announced last year, and extended for the current school year.

USDA is focused on improving childhood nutrition and empowering families to make healthier food choices by providing science-based information and advice, while expanding the availability of healthy food.

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America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals due to improved nutrition standards implemented as a result of the historic [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act](#).

- Last month, USDA issued an additional \$5 million through the [Farm to School](#) grant program to increase the amount of healthy, local food in schools. USDA [awarded](#) grants to 71 projects spanning 42 states and the District of Columbia.
- USDA awarded \$5.6 million in grants in FY2013 to provide training and technical assistance for child nutrition foodservice professionals and support stronger school nutrition education programs, and plans to award additional grants in FY 2014.
- USDA's MyPlate symbol and the resources at [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#) provide quick, easy reference tools for teachers, parents, healthcare professionals and communities. Schools across the country are using the MyPlate symbol to enhance their nutrition education efforts.

Collectively, these policies and actions will help combat child hunger and obesity and improve the health and nutrition of the nation's children. This is a top priority for the Obama Administration and is an important component of First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! initiative to combat the challenge of childhood obesity.

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