

# Support USDA Nutritious School Meal Standards

- DEADLINE EXTENDED -

Dear Colleague:

Please show your support for healthier school meals by signing the letter below in support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to update school meal standards and help schools serve healthier meals to our nation's children.

The national school meal standards were last updated in 1994. The USDA recently proposed much-needed updates to those standards based on consensus recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The proposed updates will ensure that school meals provide recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables and whole grains; fat-free and low-fat milk; less salt; fewer unhealthy saturated and trans fats; and moderate calories. USDA received over 130,000 comments from advocates, parents and concerned citizens in support of the rule.

Please join us in congratulating USDA Secretary Vilsack on these important efforts and urging implementation of the meal standards within the proposed timeline to ensure children have greater access to nutritious meals.

If you have any questions or would like to sign the letter, please contact Scott Groginsky in Congressman Polis' office at 5-2161 or [scott.groginsky@mail.house.gov](mailto:scott.groginsky@mail.house.gov)

Sincerely,

George Miller

Member of Congress

Jared Polis

Member of Congress

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Suite 200-A  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We strongly support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to enhance and maximize the national investment in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

School meals provide an essential safety net, helping to address both child hunger and obesity, and providing balanced meals to 31 million children each day. Since the Truman Administration, the school meal programs have been funded and operated as national programs, with USDA setting out detailed criteria for the meals to ensure that our federal dollars are well spent and the meals provide good nutrition to children. The current national investment in school lunch and breakfast is about \$12 billion a year.

However, we all know that while school meal quality has been steadily improving over the last decade, there is still much work to do. Many schools still are not serving enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and are serving too much sodium, and unhealthy saturated and trans fats. This work to improve school meals is especially urgent given the high prevalence and enormous cost of obesity - \$150 billion a year, half of which is paid through Medicaid and Medicare.

Your proposed rule to update the school meal patterns and nutrition standards is solidly grounded in science, wisely based on the consensus recommendations in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The proposed standards have been shown to be achievable by the thousand schools that are already meeting similar standards through USDA's HealthierUS Schools Challenge. However, we are anxious for such success to reach all schools. While school meal quality has been improving over the last decade, your rule will be helpful for a majority of schools that are still working to meet stronger nutritional standards.

We strongly support your efforts to provide model menus, recipes, training, and technical assistance to help schools implement the meal standards by the start of the 2012 school year and to regularly review schools to assess and support compliance with the standards.

We understand USDA is reviewing the comments submitted in response to the proposed rule and will consider options to address concerns expressed in the comments. We urge the USDA to do so without delay and implement the school meal proposed rule within the proposed time frame. Timely implementation is essential to help protect child health, support school food service staff to implement the recommended changes, and get the most out of the national investment in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Sincerely,