

FRESH BITES NEWSLETTER



October 2021

Falling Into a New Rhythm



We're half way through the month of October and for many of us, we're a quarter of the way through SY 2021-22. Hopefully you've gotten in the swing of things and are finding a new rhythm despite often frustrating supply chain and staffing challenges that this year has already thrown at you.

In this issue of Fresh Bites, we take a look at new USDA waivers relating to the disrupted supply chain, how to use Farm to School to help alleviate the supply chain pressures, and a look into how to cope with pandemic fatigue as foodservice professionals.

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Some relief is in sight for struggling school foodservice operators coping with a stressed supply chain due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A new [waiver](#) issued by the USDA this week prevents school meal programs from being financially penalized if supply chain shortages prevent them from meeting certain regulatory requirements for school meals.

In June, School Nutrition Association alerted USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to the challenges school nutrition programs were facing due to continued [supply chain disruptions](#) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a [nationwide survey of SNA members](#), 97% indicated supply chain as a worry going into the 2021-22 school year. Canceled orders, shortages,

product substitutions, price increases, delayed and canceled deliveries have been widely reported and shared on social media.

Responding to these concerns, the USDA is waiving requirements for States to withhold reimbursements from schools unable to meet certain meal pattern and record keeping requirements due to these supply chain disruptions. While schools, manufacturers, distributors and USDA are continuing to work together to address the disruptions in food and supplies, the waiver brings welcome relief for school nutrition programs struggling to remain compliant.

In Case You Missed It

USDA released a bulletin October 7 giving clear guidance surrounding Offer Versus Serve when it comes to adding to a meal from home.

“While OVS meal service allows students to decline some of the foods offered at lunch, USDA requires that all students must be offered a full meal that includes all five components.”

Signage encouraging students to “Pick 3” should not be used. Read more [here](#).

Upcoming Trade Shows

[Upper Lakes Food Fall Food Show](#)

November 2, 2021

9:00 am - 4:00 pm

DECC

Duluth, MN

[Wisconsin SNA Fall Conference](#)

November 2-3, 2021

Central WI Convention + Expo Center
Rothschild, WI

Celebrate Farm to School Month!

October is Farm to School Month! It's a celebration of food education, school gardens, and school meals made from healthy, local food. Farm to school foods ensure the freshest foods in school meals and help support local economies at the same time. Money spent in your community stays in your community.

Despite the continued challenges school nutrition programs are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools are finding the farm to school movement is an opportunity to help alleviate the pressure of supply chain disruptions. Schools nationwide are leaning into local sourcing and finding creative ways to incorporate into school meals. In Alabama, a local farm is ensuring fresh produce features on lunch trays when food distributors cannot. A school in Maine is ordering more fresh tomatoes to replace hard-to-come-by canned tomatoes.

"Slice them up, roast them off, we'll give them a little puree and then freeze them and that way we can use them as we would canned crushed tomatoes for tomato soups, marinara sauce, chili – anything that calls for that."

- Chef Ryan Roderick, Windham Raymond School District

In Green Bay, Wisconsin, a community wellness task force and school districts are working together to ensure local foods continue to feature on lunch trays and fill the gaps in the supply chain.

"This year we have seen unprecedented supply chain challenges. At first it was main entree items, next it was paper products, and now we are seeing challenges with produce supply. That is why working with local farms and suppliers is imperative to continue to serve students healthy, well-balanced meals... we have been able to procure fresh, local produce that students do not need utensils to eat and that is manageable for our kitchen staff to work with."

- Foodservice Director Caitlin Harrison, Pulaski Community School District



Launching a new farm to school program might seem like a crazy idea on top of an already stressful school year, but thankfully you don't have to go it alone. Check out the National Farm to School Network or search to find state or local level organizations that can help you get started. If you're already incorporating local foods in your menus, but need some ideas for how to celebrate Farm to School Month or maybe you're interested connecting the cafeteria to the classroom through food and agricultural education, we encourage you to check out these great resources!

[Celebrate National Farm to School Month – Action for Healthy Kids](#)
[USDA Dig In! Lessons](#)
[Growing Minds Farm to School Resources](#)
[Edible Schoolyard Project Resource Library](#)

Farm to School Month is a perfect opportunity to teach students about where food comes from and the benefits of supporting locally grown foods. But that doesn't mean it's limited to October – farm to school is a year-round movement (and perhaps a much needed life-line if you're struggling with procuring food)!

5 WAYS SCHOOL FOODSERVICE PROFESSIONALS CAN FIGHT PANDEMIC FATIGUE

How long will we have to keep going like this? It's a question that school nutrition professionals across the country are asking. While it feels like a small step towards normalcy to have students back in person, the pandemic isn't over yet. The uncertainty, long hours, supply chain disruptions, staffing shortages and lack of control while juggling work and personal responsibilities is wearing on all of us. You might be feeling like you're starting to burn out, or you've reached a breaking point. It's especially hard when you're doing the best you can.

It's important to address potential burnout before it takes a serious toll on your mental health. How can you and your school nutrition staff fight off pandemic fatigue?

1. Celebrate victories no matter how small.

Recognize the work that you and your team accomplish by reflecting on the positives. Do this individually by writing down what you've completed each day, week, month, or year or have staff share in team meeting. Be sure to include school meal "wins" like receiving a product you weren't sure you'd get or lunch service that went especially well. If appropriate, share these small victories on social media.

2. Value and recognize the work of others.

Staff appreciation is directly tied to workplace morale and satisfaction. Taking time to recognize your team's hard work can increase involvement, boost motivation, and keep relationships strong. Recognize staff members when they've gone above and beyond what's expected of them. A simple thank you goes a long way!

3. Set clear boundaries between work and personal life.

Find work-life balance. When you're at school working, give 110% and change the world. When your workday is over, leave work concerns and worries at school. You will live to fight another day tomorrow. Remember to carve out time for yourself to relax and recuperate. Take a walk, exercise, watch a favorite show or movie, read, spend time with family.

4. Take a break.

While it's tempting to throw yourself completely into your work, remember it's OK to take a minute and give yourself a break.

5. Get creative with your resources.

If you're short-staffed or struggling to procure food and supplies, it's time to think outside the box. Engage the PTA or connect with parent or grandparent volunteers to see if they would be willing to work or help in the cafeteria.

While new USDA waivers have granted breathing room with menu compliance, think creatively how to utilize the food and ingredients you have on hand. Find inspiration from other school foodservice professionals on the [TIPS for School Meals That Rock Facebook page](#). Save time with the tools included in a subscription to NutriStudents K-12. Not yet a client? [Schedule a demo](#) now to preview these time-saving resources.

COMING UP IN NOVEMBER

Here's some upcoming celebration opportunities and ideas for you to incorporate into your menus in the month of November.

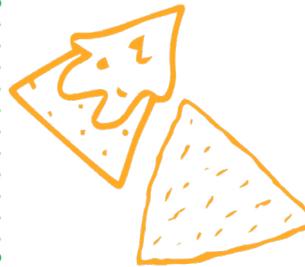
- **National Cinnamon Day (Nov. 1)** - Check out our new Beef Chili and Cinnamon Roll menu day in found in week 41. This sweet/spicy combination is a regional favorite!

- **National Sandwich Day (Nov. 3)** - Serve a favorite sandwich.

The sandwich is named after John Montagu (1718-92), the 4th Earl of Sandwich, who started a craze for eating beef between two slices of toast.

- **Diwali - The Hindu Festival of Lights (Nov. 4)** - Diwali is one of the most important holidays in India that celebrates the victory of good over evil. Join in by serving an Indian inspired menu day such as our Taj Mahal Meatballs or Creamy Chicken Sabzi.

- **National Nachos Day (Nov. 6)** - Add our Chicken Nachos, Meatball Nachos, or Chicken Enchilada Nachos to your menu line up.



What do you call a cheese that isn't yours?

NACHO cheese!

- **Thanksgiving (Nov. 25)** - Check out the holiday menu on the client portal featuring all the traditional Thanksgiving fixings - turkey and gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, candied sweet potatoes, pumpkin bread, and cranberries.



Let's stay in touch!

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