December, 2011 Topics

Is school lunch pizza (sauce) a vegetable?

Resources added to the WNEP/FLP resource database

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By Susan Nitzke

The media has had a picnic (no pun intended) with the changes that were made by U.S. Congress when they passed a budget bill including funds for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) this coming year. In essence, the Congressional changes block some of the new requirements that USDA had planned to make school lunches healthier.

Now that Congress weakened the proposed USDA requirements, it will be acceptable for school lunch providers to make pizza with enough tomato paste (1/8 cup per slice) and continue counting each slice as a serving of vegetables. Congressional changes also responded to industry concerns by preventing the USDA from limiting servings of starchy vegetables (like potatoes) that would count toward school lunch minimums for vegetables. In addition, Congress postponed mandatory reductions in sodium and they told the USDA to develop a precise definition of the term "whole grain" before implementing new rules about whole grain foods in school meals.

The proposed new requirements for school meals that were weakened by these Congressional mandates are based on a 2009 report from the Institute of Medicine that specifies how schools should be more consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and help prevent child obesity by increasing variety in vegetables and by cutting back on salt, saturated fats and total calories.

The political and nutritional issues are summarized in a recent article in the LA Times:
http://www.latimes.com/health/la-he-school-lunch-nutrition-20111128,0,1940936.story?page=1

Implications for Extension Nutrition Educators: Media coverage of the new changes has generated confusion. On the positive side, attention to these issues brings an opportunity for Extension educators and colleagues to highlight the work of local school wellness committees and community-based coalitions. In most areas, these groups are working with schools, families and communities to make practical/affordable improvements to child nutrition such as farm-to-school projects and restrictions of “competitive foods” in vending machines, school stores, fund-raising projects, etc.
Resources added to the WNEP/FLP resource database

Soup brochure,
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=8723

Be Food Safe flipchart,
https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/tch_res2/resourceDetails.cfm?rid=8717