



CASE STUDIES

U R B A N S C H O O L
FOOD
A L L I A N C E

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ABOUT

The Urban School Food Alliance was created by school food professionals in 2012 to address the unique needs of the nation's largest school districts. The members of the Alliance strive to provide fresh, healthy and delicious meals to students, work collectively on policy, share best practices and leverage purchasing power to drive food quality up and costs down, all while incorporating sound environmental practices.

Alliance members, for the purposes of these case studies, and date of initial membership include:

New York City Department of Education

New York, 2012*

Los Angeles Unified School District

Los Angeles, 2012*

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago, 2012*

Miami-Dade County Public Schools

Miami, 2012*

Dallas Independent School District

Dallas, 2012*

Orange County Public Schools

Orlando, 2012*

Broward County Public Schools

Fort Lauderdale, 2017

School District of Philadelphia

Philadelphia, 2017

Baltimore City Public Schools

Baltimore, 2017

Boston Public Schools

Boston, 2017

**founding member district*

Collectively, Alliance member districts offer meal services to nearly **3.2 million students** daily. Annually, they serve over **567 million meals** and spend more than **\$755 million** on food and food supplies across the country. The Alliance aims to revolutionize the school food market by streamlining food procurement and maximizing the joint purchasing power of many the largest school nutrition programs in the country.



**HIGHER
QUALITY.
LOWER
COSTS.
SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES.**

Photo Credit: Baltimore City Public Schools

Over the last seven years, the Urban School Food Alliance has created transformational, systemic change in school nutrition for healthier, higher quality products at reduced costs through their efforts to build and test a model of collective food procurement, best practice sharing and policy positions.

Urban School Food Alliance member districts have focused their procurement efforts on three different strategies: developing joint procurements across districts, creating a joint standard to embed in individual district procurements and setting joint procurement commitments. Each of these three strategies offers a unique approach to work collectively across school districts, however each also serves to push manufacturers, distributors, processor, and suppliers toward the Alliance's common goal: higher quality products at lower costs, using sustainable practices.

Joint Procurement. Urban School Food Alliance member districts challenged industry to develop an innovative, affordable and environmentally friendly plate to replace the standard polystyrene tray found in school cafeterias and landfills across the country. Through joint procurement and the development of a single bid specification among all members, the Alliance was able to solicit manufacturers to bring this new product to market, while drastically lowering the cost for all school nutrition programs across the country.

Joint Standards. Working with suppliers, non-profit partners and government agencies, the Alliance created, and publicly committed to purchase, chicken raised humanely with no antibiotics ever. The development of this standard gave Alliance member districts the ability to embed specific language within their individual procurements, ensuring a high level of quality with the flexibility to procure the products best suited for their individual needs.

Joint Commitments. Alliance districts collectively set a goal to increase their local food purchase by at least five percent by the end of the 2021-2022 school year - amounting to a total of \$100 million local procurement annually. The goal aims to work with local food producers to stimulate local economies, while providing the freshest, highest-quality foods possible for the health and wellness of students.

The case studies that follow tell the story of the successes, the challenges and future opportunities available for the organization and its member districts.

CREATING AN ALLIANCE

In the summer of 2012, representatives from six of the largest school districts in the country began to discuss the idea of a partnership. These districts shared many commonalities: progressive leadership, a commitment to collaboration and incredible purchasing power. They also shared concerns that the existing school food system was not meeting their needs and a willingness to stimulate that system to obtain healthy, high-quality products for the students they serve. During the initial meeting, members discussed their common ground, potential paths for partnership and opportunities to use their collective voices to create change. “We weren’t trying to be a buying group, we were trying to be a market changer,” explains Stephen O’Brien, Director of Strategic Partnership and Policy at the New York City Department of Education, Office of School Food.

The founding members of the Alliance began to work together to change the food supply. “The Alliance offered a voice for positive change on the national level. We knew that if we could get together and agree on common products and standards, then we could get industry to listen,” recalls Julie Fletcher, of Support Services for Dallas Independent School District's Food and Child Nutrition Services.

Over the last seven years, the Urban School Food Alliance has created transformational, systemic change in school nutrition for healthier, higher quality products at reduced costs through their efforts to build and test a model of collective food procurement, best practice sharing and policy positions.



Photo Credit: Chicago Public Schools

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MULTIPLE APPROACHES, ONE VOICE

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Joint Procurement

Urban School Food Alliance member districts challenged industry to develop an innovative, affordable and environmentally friendly plate to replace the standard polystyrene tray found in school cafeterias and landfills across the country. The landmark collaboration led to the adoption of a five-compartment compostable plate in seven of the Alliance member districts. Through joint procurement and the development of a single bid specification among all members, the Alliance was able to solicit manufacturers to bring this new product to market, while drastically lowering the cost for all school nutrition programs across the country.

Joint Standard

Even before many of the nation's leading restaurants called for responsibly raised poultry on their menus, the Alliance unanimously adopted an antibiotic-free standard for companies to follow when supplying chicken products to schools. Working with suppliers, non-profit partners and government agencies, the Alliance created, and publicly committed to purchase chicken raised humanely with no antibiotics ever. The development of this standard gave Alliance member districts the ability to embed specific language within their individual procurements, ensuring a high level of quality with the flexibility to procure the products best suited for their individual needs. Alliance members are proud to have been leaders in this approach and a part of the effort to drive the market toward better options when purchasing poultry.

Joint Commitments

In the fall of 2018, Alliance districts collectively set a goal to increase their local food purchase by at least five percent by the end of the 2021-2022 school year – amounting to a total of \$100 million local procurement annually. The goal aims to work with local food producers to stimulate local economies, while providing the freshest, highest-quality foods possible for the health and wellness of students.

POWER IN PARTNERSHIP



Photo Credit: Chicago Public Schools

Urban School Food Alliance members credit the success of the organization to the support of partners such as the National Resource Defense Council, Food Corps and School Food Focus. Alexa Arnold, Deputy Director of Strategy for Food Corps remembers, “It was clear the Urban School Food Alliance had a brilliant idea and all the right people at the table to make change. Partners were able to support them with the tools they needed to form and operate the organization.” From the earliest days of the Alliance, members relied heavily on their partners for technical, nonprofit and legal expertise. Partner organizations assisted in fundraising, research and capacity building. They also facilitated opportunities for Alliance members to establish deeper relationships, identify potential collaborations and translate a broader vision into specific actions.

Alliance members describe these partnerships as “essential” and the work of partners continues today on the advisory board where they serve to offer recommendations and provide guidance for all Alliance initiatives. “This is an example of the beautiful power of collaboration,” adds Arnold. “When you truly collaborate, you can make real change on the individual and national level.”

"WHEN YOU TRULY COLLABORATE, YOU CAN MAKE REAL CHANGE ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL."

CHANGING FOOD SYSTEMS

HOW WE ARE MOVING THE NATIONAL MARKET

"WORKING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF FOOD BEING SERVED IN THEIR CITIES, BUT ALSO MOVE THE NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD MARKETPLACE"

Each day, Alliance members are proving that if districts stand up and put their weight behind healthy, high-quality products, industry will respond and their stakeholders will support them. And while the Alliance has seen success in many ways, much has also been learned from its challenges. The Alliance has worked on joint bids for cereal, breakfast and vegetarian items, and compostable utensils, which resulted in non-bids. For each of these, the challenges were an opportunity to learn more about communication with manufacturers, when to push forward and when to compromise.

In 2018, Alliance members came together on a categorical bid for cereal. This bid was not just for one product, but an entire category. This was an opportunity to communicate with industry, through a formal process, that large urban districts were interested not only in traditional cereals with brand recognition, but also nontraditional options such as organic cereals, free of unwanted ingredients proven to impact child development and health outcomes. In the end, the bid resulted in no award, however manufacturers then began to reach out to the Alliance to work together to create new products to fill the need. "Even though we weren't able to award, [the Alliance] sent a message to industry that this is something districts are looking for. This bid was about translating Alliance values into tangible products," recalls Arnold. Today, New York City students find organic, lower sugar cereal with just three or four ingredients in their bowls.

The theory of change behind the Alliance is that by bringing together the largest school districts in the country, they can shift the national marketplace for school food. Mark Izeman, Senior Attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, explains "At its core, the Urban School Food Alliance is not only working to improve the quality and sustainability of food being served in their cities, but also move the national school food marketplace to allow other districts to buy the same higher-quality food."

CREATING EQUITABLE ACCESS

HOW WE ARE IMPROVING EQUITY IN SCHOOLS

Among the nearly 3.2 million children attending Alliance school districts, more than 75 percent qualify for free or reduced school meals due to financial hardship. These children are at risk for food insecurity and rely on school meals as their most consistent source of daily nutrition. Alliance members take that responsibility seriously and recognize the opportunity they have to improve the health and educational opportunities of millions of children.

Students who live in food-insecure households have many obstacles to overcome. Food insecurity can interfere with learning, decrease the likelihood of achieving academic success and negatively impact social and emotional development. Meeting children's basic needs with access healthy, high-quality school meals is one of the first lines of defense to ensure children obtain their educational goals. Mallory Reeves, Senior Administrator of Finance and Procurement for Orange County Schools Food and Nutrition Services explains, "These are some of the only meals these children receive, we want to make them meaningful."

The Urban School Food Alliance is committed to supporting research-based nutrition policy and guidelines aimed at boosting student achievement and supporting healthy lifestyle choices. The Alliance is also committed to improving equity, as improving the quality of school food in its districts creates an equitable program for millions of the most underserved children in our country. "We've got to be good stewards of the public program that we are in-charge of overseeing and directing," explains Penny Parham, Administrative Director of Miami-Dade County Public School's Department of Food and Nutrition. "Our work is tied to student educational achievement, because we know that children who eat well, perform better." Adding, "This is not only the right thing to do, it is what we've always wanted to do. We strive to provide what is the best for kids and the Urban School Food Alliance is working together, having real connections and hard conversations to give our districts the tools and products we need to make it happen."

"THIS IS NOT ONLY THE RIGHT THING TO DO, IT IS WHAT WE'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO."

COMPOSTABLE PLATE



From the earliest conversations, the Urban School Food Alliance members prioritized environmentally-sound purchasing as one of the pillars of their new organization. It's no surprise then that during the very first meeting, members acknowledged their concerns around the use of polystyrene trays in school cafeterias. At the time, a polystyrene tray cost four cents and a compostable tray was closer to twelve. Even for the smallest member district in the Alliance, the switch to a compostable tray could have cost millions of dollars a year. However, the potential impact was great – all Alliance districts moving away from polystyrene could keep more than half a billion trays from the landfills each year.

Alliance members realized this effort could be the first test of their new organization. However, in a market saturated by polystyrene, creating this product was no easy task. O'Brien recalls the heavy lift, "We had to develop specifications for the bid, conduct market research on what companies had the capabilities to make compostable products and at our scale, and work with our legal departments and procurement officers to ensure this could work." Adding, "New York City volunteered to take the lead on a joint procurement. We began working with local nonprofit partners like Cafeteria Culture and the Parsons New School in New York to determine what kind of compartments, innovations and specifications." The districts didn't just want a compostable tray, they wanted a plate to serve children. Food and nutrition directors in the Alliance specified the round shape to allow students to eat their food off plates shaped like the ones they do at home, replacing the institutional rectangular lunch tray.

Members also worked in partnership with the Natural Resources Defense Council to research materials used and ensure that sound environmental practices were being followed. Together they developed a bid, it went out on the street and closed on Nov 19, 2013. "We could not have done this without the Natural Resources Defense Council," explains Parham. "They were indispensable."

Ultimately, Huhtamaki, a Finnish company with a manufacturing facility in Waterville, Maine, won the bid. This was the first opportunity to prove that school districts could work together - across state lines, procurement departments, and school boards - and achieve results. "We had driven the price down and the quality up," reports O'Brien. The new product was available for about five cents each and now a viable option for school districts.



FINDING SOLUTIONS

Excited by the fact that they could afford a product, districts began purchasing, however, there were several challenges to overcome from the get-go. First, the switch to compostable plates does incur a cost, even if reduced from the original out-of-reach price tag. Alliance food service directors had to work with their stakeholders and school boards to build support for the switch and the added cost.

One Alliance district reported that the switch to compostable plates cost \$1.1 million dollars for the district and another reported that their cost doubled. Since this was a national bid, the product price and delivery price were bid on and tabulated separately. This meant that while all districts gained the benefit of the product price being dramatically reduced, there was still a delivery markup that varied widely depending on where the delivery needed to be made in relation to the factory. Regardless, both districts have identified cost and environmental savings by using fewer paper products overall. And both are committed to moving forward, no matter the cost, because the initiative is now so important to their districts, school communities and the environment.

Staff buy-in also proved to be an ongoing hurdle for implementation. In the initial roll out, staff found the plates difficult to separate. When serving hundreds of students in minutes, even an extra second or two to separate plates can drastically slow service times and leave kids with little or no time to eat their meal. While some Alliance members made the switch all at once, others reported initially using the plates in volunteer schools or those with a passion for sustainability, to work out the kinks.

Training tools were created to introduce the plate to front line staff. Flyers, videos and talking points were widely circulated for use by members. One district enlisted parent volunteers to come in ahead of lunch and separate plates for meal service. Engaging parents not only helped to solve the immediate problem; the school meal program cultivated some new loyal customers.

Another challenge was that not all menus are created the same. Some school districts pre-plate items and some portion items at the point of service. The implementation of the five-compartment round plate eliminated the need for some additional paper items, but not all districts were able to easily transition. Alliance members identified the need for smaller plates at breakfast and potentially a different plate for pizza days.

Now nearing the next round of bids for the compostable plate, Alliance members have worked with the manufacturing company to improve the ability to separate the plates and change the way the plates stack, greatly reducing the time required to separate the plates. Easy to separate plates was not a part of the specifications in the bid but will be in the future bids. Additionally, after seeing the demand, paper companies are now offering additional designs at reasonable price points that are allowing more school districts to make the switch. Making the change proved that a targeted procurement could be done among members and the plate garnered national attention since it was now available helped develop policies, such as polystyrene bans in several cities.

IMPROVING COMMUNITIES



**360 MILLION
FEWER
POLYSTYRENE
TRAYS USED
EACH YEAR**

As Alliance members move forward in their sustainability journey, they are determined to push their communities towards healthier more environmentally friendly practices as well. Institutional composting is still not commonplace in all Alliance member communities. Half of New York City's schools are receiving institutional organic waste picks up from the department of sanitation, as part of a citywide zero waste plan, while other districts are limited by the capacity of their locality. "When we first started looking at the [compostable] tray, we met with the city to discuss composting. The composter that they use was unable to handle the volume of one of our schools, and we have more than 200," remarked one district. But that isn't stopping the Alliance. Members are interested in driving the industry and proving there is a need and market for institutional composting. Many districts are working together with their cities to see this idea come to fruition.

The compostable plate is an example of the Alliance's work toward positive change on the national level. The plate has a sturdier and smarter design made from recycled paper, reduces the carbon footprint of each school and is supporting the trend nationwide toward zero waste. This shift among Alliance districts alone has resulted in 360 million fewer polystyrene trays each year going into landfills, however the impact reaches significantly farther. The work of the Alliance has made compostable plates and other compostable trays, bowls and meal service wares a reality for countless school districts across the country.

Alliance members are putting sustainability ahead of bottom line and because of this work together, they are making it possible for school districts everywhere to do the same. Parham remarks, "It was an experiment to try to buy through a different process and it paid off. The bottom line is we were able to lower the cost of that pulp fiber tray through our work together. The Urban School Food Alliance was able to make that happen."

SUPPORT FROM STUDENTS

In some of the Alliance districts student groups led the charge to build buy-in on compostable plates. In Baltimore, Beyond Plastic, a youth-led organization comprising of Baltimore high school students, researched existing initiatives and advocated at a public board meeting to transition from polystyrene to sustainable products in Baltimore cafeterias. In Philadelphia, students at Central High School, a school with a strong environmental science program, also advocated for the change. These students led each of their districts toward lasting change through policy.

In Baltimore, the school board approved a sustainability plan including the use of compostable products and in the School District of Philadelphia, the board approved the Green Futures plan. Both plans solidified the commitment of these districts to invest in sustainable products and practices. Now, the Alliance and its member districts regularly receive inquiries from interested students, educators, parents and administrators interested in making similar changes in their own communities.



NEXT STEPS

Determined to stay ahead of the curve in school nutrition, the Urban School Food Alliance worked together to challenge industry to procure affordable environmentally-friendly compostable utensils to replace plastic sporks (spoon shaped eating utensils with short tines at the tips). Eliminating an institutional utensil and replacing it with forks, knives and spoons, again as students eat at home while being compostable was the next logical step. The Alliance worked with the Natural Resources Defense Council to support research and develop a specification for compostable utensils that consist of environmentally friendly products made from FDA-approved, food grade materials that are BPA- and Phthalate-free. The Alliance conducted a bid and four member districts are participating. These certified compostable utensils break down in less than 180 days to become soil, helping grow more resources. Among the Alliance's early adopter districts alone, more than 300 million compostable tableware pieces will replace the use of plastic sporks each year.

CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has begun meeting with stakeholders throughout the supply chain from the district paper supply company, LAUSD's Office of Environmental Health and Safety, Food Services, and to LA County's Republic Services, the district's trash hauler, to identify strategies to decrease their environmental impact. These types of collaborations are what make Alliance members leaders in the field.



LOCAL FOODS



Through the years working together, member districts of the Urban School Food Alliance have seen the effects of local procurement in helping the agricultural community realize the importance of intentional partners. They have also recognized the benefits of increasing student knowledge about where their food is grown or sourced, and improving student behaviors and attitudes towards fruits and vegetables. Alliance members understood that as they were working toward food standards and quality food procurements, they needed to simultaneously emphasize their commitment to their own local food supply. Arnold explains, “All of the Alliance districts value local procurement and while exploring what could be procured nationally, they made the commitment to increase local food and farm to school activities.” She adds, “This shared commitment is a bold stake in the ground to push each district to do more.”

In fall of 2018, Alliance districts collectively set a goal to increase their local food purchase by at least five percent by the end of the 2021-2022 school year – amounting to a total of \$100 million local procurement annually. The goal aims to work with local food producers to stimulate local economies, while providing the freshest, highest quality foods possible for the health and wellness of students. “We have such an incredible purchasing power,” says Reeves. “If we can put that back into our states, that is our intent.”

FINDING SOLUTIONS

All the Alliance member districts put value on the power of local procurement to support and lift their communities with more dollars in the local economy, job creation and commitment to sustainable business practices. However, local purchasing sometimes requires creative thinking to overcome challenges along the way. One concern is availability of items popular in school meal programs. Short growing seasons in some parts of the country or lack of availability in a region are regular concerns when buying locally. For example, Chicago Public Schools serves one million pounds of local apples each school year, however apples won't grow locally in South Florida. And, while oranges are readily available in Florida, "Maryland does not have the climate to produce oranges that are popular with the students," laments Elizabeth Marchetta, Executive Director of Nutrition Services for Baltimore City Public Schools.

Another challenge is finding manufacturers, farms or groups of farms that can produce the volume necessary for even one meal in a large school district and at the correct size to meet U.S. Department of Agriculture serving size regulations. Those local apples in Chicago are sourced from up to eight different farms to provide the volume necessary.

On the other hand, sometimes local purchasing allows school districts to use the school meal patterns to their advantage. Florence Simpson, Regional Manager for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Food Services describes a win-win situation with a local grower of oranges not well suited for the traditional market. "He has orange groves, but they are older orange trees that now grow smaller oranges," she says. "Our produce company connected us with him. We found the oranges were the perfect size for school meals and they were actually sweeter than a regular orange which was a big win with the kids!"

Every farm and manufacturer is different, and they each require different techniques and approaches. "All of our farmers want to do business, but we have volume and meeting that demand can be difficult," explains Reeves. Growers need to be certified and farms evaluated to ensure food safety standards are adhered to. However, while the additional oversight might be a challenge for smaller operations, institutional contracts bring stability and a committed buyer. "We begin our planning process a year ahead, so we can very specifically tell that farmer, we will need corn at this time and then they can plant accordingly," explains Reeves. Los Angeles uses a similar approach, "We are planning for crops four months out. If we can guarantee a farmer a market, we can guarantee supply and at a lower cost, especially compared to buying month to month." Simpson adds.

POLICIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Alliance districts are finding great support from their districts and states as well. New York has made a state-wide commitment to support local purchasing because they know that when schools use food products from local sources, they support local farmers and economies and provide healthy choices for children. School food authorities that spend at least 30 percent of lunch food costs on New York State food products are eligible for up to 25 cents additional reimbursement for any school lunch.

In Los Angeles, local policy is fueling local procurement. The LAUSD School Board was the original adopter of the Good Food Purchasing Program in 2012. Their ongoing commitment to the policy works to align its food procurement policies with its mission to educate students and create healthy environments where students can succeed. As a result, now over 80 percent of wheat products purchased come from the state of California and more than 50 percent of produce served in LAUSD is sourced from within 200 miles of the district.

Baltimore City Schools District Wellness Policy and Nutrition Standards commit to promoting local purchasing as well. The regulations require the school nutrition program to prioritize the purchase of regionally sourced products and to implement Farm to Schools strategies that increase student awareness of the link between food, farming and nutrition. Baltimore City Schools is now working to increase the quantity and variety of local produce and products by five to 10 percent each year.

The Dallas Independent School District adopted a Minority/Women Business Enterprise (M/WBE) Program to ensure that its contracting opportunities reflect the growing diversity of the district's business community. Julie Fletcher, Director of Support Services for Dallas Independent School District's Food and Child Nutrition Services describes, "Our district goal is for 30 percent of vendors to be M/WBE. This helps local business to participate. Once a vendor qualifies, we can consider that as we award our bids, and this gives us some additional flexibility to purchase and utilize local minority- and women-owned businesses."

Partners, such as Farm Logix, LLC and nonprofit foundations are also stepping up to the plate to help Chicago Public Schools and Boston Public Schools build capacity, monitor and increase their access to local foods. School Boards, State Agencies and State Legislatures are all moving to support more local purchasing, because they now know what Urban School Food Alliance districts have always known, local purchasing strengthens the link between the school district and the community, increases student knowledge and access to healthy foods, and supports local economies, job creation and the environment.

LOCAL FLAVORS

Another trend for the members of the Urban School Food Alliance is the implementation of complete menus using local produce and products. New York City has NY Thursdays where they feature beef burgers using all New York raised beef. Maryland Homegrown School Lunch Week allows students in Baltimore County Public Schools to dine on local melons, green peppers, collard greens, peaches, white corn and cherry heirloom tomatoes from five area farms. Boston Public Schools Local Day features a local, New England-sourced lunch of quesadillas, homemade salsa, roasted squash and apples. Pennsylvania Preferred day in Philadelphia Public Schools offers students roasted chicken, locally grown potatoes, Bibb lettuce salad, apples and an apple pretzel - all from Pennsylvania. Additionally, though Pennsylvania Preferred Day originated in Philadelphia Public Schools, more than 20 neighboring schools have joined in to serve Pennsylvania food for Pennsylvania students.

Local partnerships are also creating new products, new markets and bold flavors in many of the USFA member districts. Local foods include breads like multigrain focaccia and Pão de Queijo, a popular South American breakfast bread, all baked right in Miami, Florida. Rebel Crumbles, apple-filled, whole grain-rich breakfast bars created by students, are offered in school breakfast and stores throughout Philadelphia and surrounding areas. Dallas is serving up local empanadas and tamales; Boston, New-England caught fish; and a partnership between the district and local produce processor in Los Angeles is creating three new varieties of cucumber salad with jalapeno, Asian, and lemon-Tajin dressings.



Photo Credit: School District of Philadelphia

BY THE NUMBERS

- **Produce companies in Baltimore, Dallas, Boston and Orange County are providing velocity reports to help districts make more strategic decisions when selecting local items.**
- **Orange County has refocused its milk and juice bid to a local preference and doubled local procurement. Today, 15 percent of its annual food budget is spent in the state of Florida.**
- **Boston Public Schools increased local purchases from 5,000 pounds to more than 60,000 pounds each month through targeted work to institutionalize new local procurement capacity, new marketing of New England-sourced ingredients and regular staff culinary training on local food prep.**

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



In complement to local procurement, all Alliance districts are adding farm to school educational opportunities for students, local promotions and unique local products to their menus. Thousands of students, teachers, and members of the broader community visit Great Kids Farm to learn about the importance of healthy foods and the environment. The 33-acre farm is operated by the Baltimore City Schools. Elementary and middle school students participate in hands-on learning activities, meet animals, taste produce and work together to strengthen their understanding of nutrition, agriculture and natural resources. High school students who work at the farm can earn credits in their Career and Technology pathways, preparing them for jobs in agriculture, hospitality, business and construction.

At Ocoee High School, in Orange County Public Schools in Florida, students are creating the ultimate local partnership with school nutrition. AgriScience students partner with Food and Nutrition services to sell the hydroponic cucumbers, tomatoes and Bibb lettuce they grow and harvest from their greenhouse. Students handle the entire process, from learning how to plant seeds, maintaining nutrient and soil conditions, monitoring growth and harvesting. Following the harvest, produce is purchased by Food and Nutrition Services and included in school meals and vegetable tastings. Reeves excitedly describes the successful partnership,

“Our students learn how to sell their products, how to bid, and how to become a vendor. We work with the students throughout the whole process which has never been done before in OPCS. We are so excited to have a real sustainable partnership where we can purchase fresh local produce grown for students by students and they receive funding to maintain the program.”

In Boston Public Schools, educational opportunities extend to professional development for food and nutrition services employees as well. The district and University of Massachusetts have created web-based live culinary trainings to help staff prepare exciting new recipes with local ingredients such as cinnamon-spiced rolled oats, roasted squash and zesty tomato salsa. These monthly chef-led trainings are not only helping familiarize staff with new preparation methods, they are ensuring students the opportunity to enjoy more freshly prepared, local foods.

ANTIBIOTIC-FREE CHICKEN

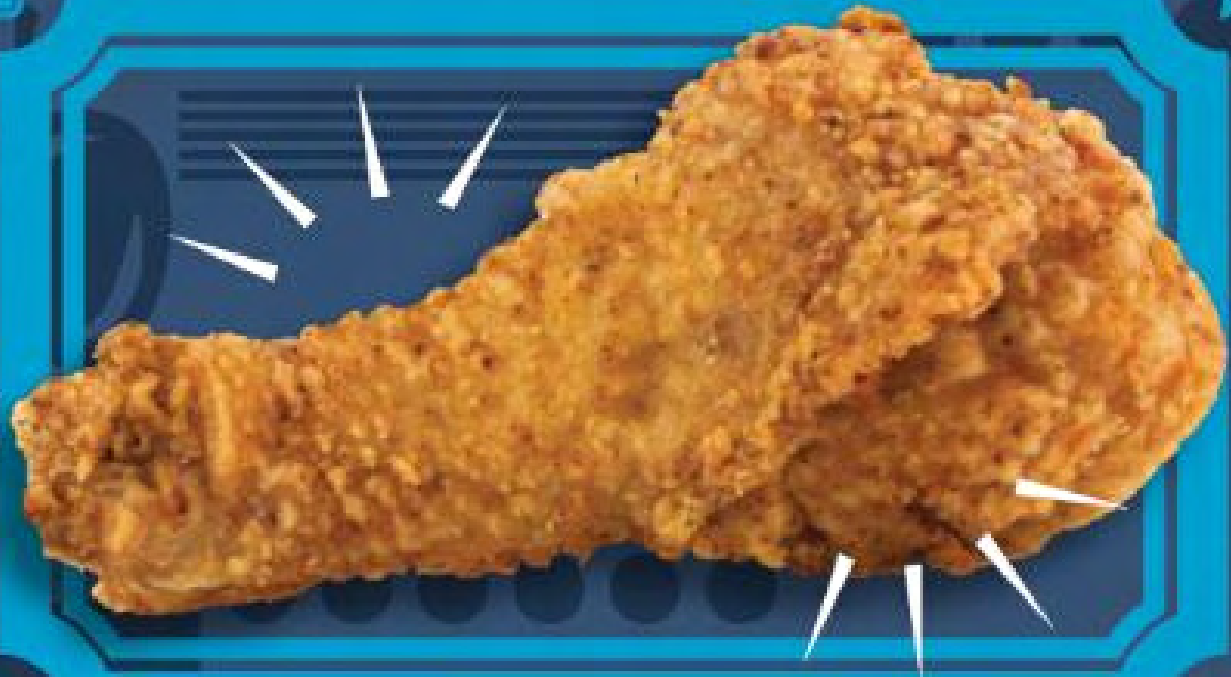


Photo Credit: Orange County Public Schools

Chicago Public Schools, one of the Alliance's founding members, was an early pioneer for the use of the antibiotic-free chicken in schools. In the 2012-2013 school year, the district purchased half a million pounds of Indiana-raised, Amish antibiotic-free chicken from Miller Poultry, with the support of School Food Focus, Pew Charitable Trusts, Healthy Schools Campaign and Whole Foods Market. Several of the Alliance districts and some members of School Food Focus also began voicing concerns about antibiotic use in meat served in their school meal programs and were looking to follow their lead.

Stephen O'Brien describes the thought process, "We talked about purchasing meat raised without antibiotic use as a target and realized we had the opportunity to push for a systems-wide change." For this initiative, the Alliance decided not to pursue a joint procurement approach, but instead develop an agreed upon standard. This way, depending on the individual procurement cycles, Alliance districts, and others, could embed the antibiotic-free standard into their bids. "The Urban School Food Alliance published the No Antibiotic Ever (NAE) standard. Then, when procurement comes up for renewal, we all agreed to adopt that standard and we did it. It is one thing to say and another to do, but we did it!" Penny Parham recalls enthusiastically.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Implementation of the standard presented a new set of challenges as well. Initially, districts found it difficult to find products at a competitive price. They also struggled with continuing to use their USDA Foods dollars in a market that did not have antibiotic-free chicken available. Alliance districts found strategies to meet this commitment and took a phased-in approach. Orange County School District added the antibiotic-free food specification to their USDA food bid, helping to spark conversation between the district, manufacturers and processors about its commitment to healthier poultry products.

Los Angeles Unified School District and the New York City Department of Education made public commitments, such as board approval of the Good Food Procurement standards in Los Angeles and changes to purchasing practices to ensure they remain in compliance. New York City shifted its USDA Foods dollars to products other than chicken allowing the district to buy antibiotic-free chicken on the open market, but still take advantage of USDA Foods dollars on other food products such as fruits and vegetables.

Some districts have looked at ways to incorporate popular, yet less expensive cuts of chicken such as drumsticks in place of breasts or decided to offer chicken less frequently to address cost and availability concerns. Still others, including Orange County and Miami-Dade are making shifts to invest more in better quality meats. “The health of our children means more to us than saving \$1 to \$2 on a case,” says Mallory Reeves. Penny Parham agrees, “Chicken remains our most popular item, any slight increase in price has been off-set by increased participation. On some items you take a loss, because they drive sales. If you spend a few more pennies, you know you will save it one another side of your operation. Our supporters and funders want to back those changes.” Reeves adds, “We want to be able to stand behind the products. It’s about more than revenue.”

Today, antibiotic-free chicken is in the mainstream. It is widely available to the public in restaurant chains and supermarkets and increasingly to schools through school food manufacturers. “When six of the largest districts said we really want antibiotic-free chicken, the industry listened,” explains Julie Fletcher, “Now, some large manufacturers only sell antibiotic-free chicken across their product lines. Look at the influence this large group of districts has had. When you get that type of coalition going, we are working to improve the market for everyone. We have shown that school nutrition operators can be the positive voice for change.”

And the Alliance isn’t stopping with chicken. They are already at work on antibiotic-free turkey procurement standards and exploring strategies to increase access to organic vegetables. “If you can take things to another level, you can push forward to improve the entire food system, that is what we did with NAE chicken,” says Parham. “This is public health.”

“THIS IS PUBLIC HEALTH.”

ANTIBIOTIC-FREE CHICKEN STANDARD

Working with suppliers, non-profit partners, and government agencies, the Alliance committed to the following standard:

The Alliance will require that all chicken products must be produced under a USDA Process Verified Program that include compliance with the following:

- Humanely raised as outlined in the National Chicken Council Animal Welfare Guidelines
- No antibiotics ever

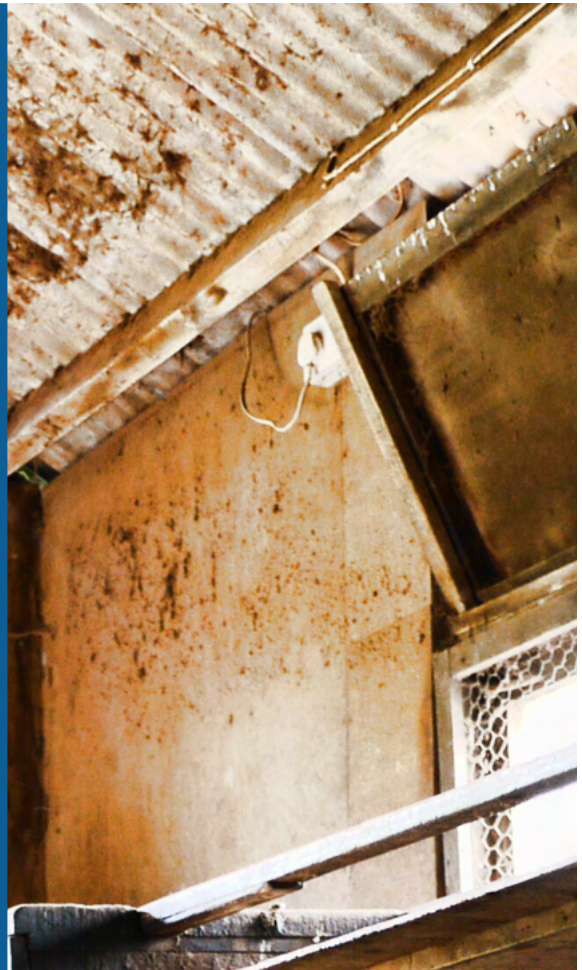
Proof of process verification must be supplied during the pre-award vendor qualification process. The use of vegetarian feed is preferred but not required and vendors able to comply should provide proof during the qualification process.

If a food company cannot supply the full volume of “No Antibiotics Ever” chicken during procurement, a written plan as to when the supplier will meet the above standard will be required. In the meantime, the supplier must have the capacity for USDA Process Verified (third party) for Therapeutic Use Only chicken as defined in the Natural Resources Defense Council's "Support For Antibiotic Stewardship in Poultry Production" dated December 2013; Or School Food Focus “Certified Responsible Use Standard” dated September 29, 2016.



WHY CHICKEN?

The Alliance's landmark action focused on chicken because it is one of the most popular items served in school cafeterias across the country. In 2014, six districts agreed to adopt the standard: New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Miami-Dade County and Orange County. Today, Philadelphia has also joined in. "Purchasing meat and poultry raised without the unnecessary use of antibiotics is critical to ensuring the safety of our children," said Mark Izeman with the Natural Resources Defense Council, one of the nation's leading environmental and public health organizations and a non-profit partner of the Alliance that helped develop the antibiotic-free standard. "This transformational move had a dramatic impact on the quality of school meals and also helped push the entire food industry to move away from animals raised with improper antibiotic use."



WHY LIMIT ANTIBIOTIC USE?

Most antibiotics sold in the United States are given to livestock, not humans and often not used to treat sick animals but to speed growth and help their livestock survive crowded and unsanitary conditions. When producers use antibiotics again and again, some bacteria become resistant, multiply and spread. This misuse in meat and poultry production contributes to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The widespread overuse and misuse of antibiotics in food animals contributes to the dangerous rise of antibiotic resistance in humans. Limiting the use of antibiotics in poultry and other meats could slow the development of drug-resistant bacteria and protect both human and animal health over time.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In seven short years, the Urban School Food Alliance has shown that collaboration and innovation can drive the school food market. They are committed to identifying ideas, new opportunities for partnership and new strategies to leverage their purchasing power. Each step forward drives transformative change in school cafeterias across the country and the Alliance will continue to lead that progress to ensure all students in the United States have access to healthy, high-quality school meals.

