

Let's Do Something Positive About School Lunches

**There is a new meal choice available on the lunch line in
schools.**

We are living in extreme times. Information and knowledge are abundant, and yet health and environmental problems have reached epic proportions. Many of these problems that face our world today are having a frustrating, paralyzing affect on our young people. The majority of America's youth have grown apathetic in regard to personal and planetary health. Shockingly, a majority of the most serious health and environmental problems in America are solvable. Young people deserve to be educated about these solutions to today's problems.

Youth are the key to the future and therefore must play a major role in its creation. It has been proven generation after generation that when young people understand the depth of a situation and what they can do to help, they become enthusiastic and get involved.

Let's look at some of the facts and demonstrate how we can positively affect our health and the environment by changing our diet to include more plant foods and fewer animal products. By teaching these simple solutions to our children, we can protect them from many diseases and preserve some of their dwindling natural resources.

Americans are consuming too many foods derived from animals!

The best way to illustrate this bold statement is to demonstrate how Americans' excess consumption of animal foods (meat, poultry, dairy, etc.) is affecting personal and planetary health, and even has a lot to do with much of the world hunger and economic troubles of our times.

Animal foods contain saturated fat and cholesterol and are continually being linked to much of our nation's heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, breast, prostate and colon cancer, obesity and even some forms of ear infections and allergies. The United States has a trillion-dollar-a-year health care crisis. The U.S. Surgeon General clearly stated in 1988 that 68% of the deaths in this country result from diet-related diseases. The major contributing foods in America's diet that are contributing to these diseases are animal foods.

The excess consumption of animal foods is having a deleterious effect on our environment as well. The high-volume production of animal-based diets in America uses one-third of this country's raw natural resources and is responsible for much of the topsoil depletion, 50% of the

water pollution and is consuming 70% of our grain production. America's animal-centered diet is taking a heavy toll on our environment and natural resources.

Inevitably our food choices are even linked to world hunger problems because it takes approximately 7 to 14 pounds of grain to make 1 pound of feedlot beef, and with the coming billions more people to the planet we might all have to eat more plant foods and fewer animal products to sustain the human food supply. World hunger also has much to do with political situations. However, if America cut down on animal product consumption by just 10%, that would make enough grain available to feed tens of millions of additional people.

From an economic standpoint we could save hundreds of billions of dollars of medical costs needed to cure diseases that are caused by consuming too much animal food that layers our bodies with saturated fat and cholesterol. Also, American tax dollars, in the form of subsidies, are providing tens of billions of dollars to the animal industries that are simply over-marketing and over-producing foods of which Americans really need to eat less.

These are just a few of the startling facts clearly demonstrating that the Standard American Diet is out of balance. The more animal foods we consume, the greater the negative impact on our health and the environment. If we, as Americans, were able to change our diets accordingly, everyone would benefit.

Plant foods are truly "Heroes for Health"

People often ask, "If we cut way down on animal foods what will we eat?" Simply increase your consumption of foods from the plant kingdom.

When we eat plant foods, especially organic fruit, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, it's like eating the plant's immune system. Almost daily, we hear about additional benefits from eating plant foods. Every major health organization from the American Cancer Society to the American Heart Association is telling Americans to cut way down on animal foods and increase daily consumption of plant foods.

Plant foods should be named "Heroes for Health" for the fantastic beneficial compounds and nutrients they

contain. When we eat plant foods, it's like eating tens of thousands of microscopic superheroes that go into our bodies and fight disease and infection, and help keep us well. Here are a few examples of how plant foods help keep us healthy:

The natural fiber in plant foods cleans our digestive system, soaks up extra proteins and cholesterol and keeps our digestive system flowing smoothly. Animal foods contain no fiber. Essential fatty acids in nuts and seeds and their oils (especially pumpkin, sunflower, and flax) keep our cell walls strong and flexible. Phytochemicals protect us from cancer and many degenerative diseases. Antioxidants protect us from free radical damage caused by environmental pollutants, stress, fried foods and animal foods. All these beneficial compounds are found primarily in plant foods.

Medical research has proven that the more plant foods individuals consume, the healthier they will be and the longer they may live.

Let us offer more plant foods at school as a daily option!

The Earth Voice Food Choice Project demonstrates to students, parents, educators and food service personnel the profound benefits of producing and consuming more plant foods and eating fewer animal foods and processed "junk"

foods. The project educates students about the global connection between diet, health and the environment, while encouraging school food service to offer more low-fat, low-cholesterol, healthier daily options in the school cafeteria.

We need your help to insure success of this project.

In order to insure the success of these new meals we need parent and student support and involvement.

Parents, please encourage your children to try the new Heart-Healthy meals that are being offered.

Students, these new meals are for you and they will be offered for as long as you buy them. If you want this project to continue please participate by buying the new meals, and communicating with your school food service how the new meals taste.

For more information please contact:

Recipes to Look Forward to at School

Aztec Salad

(contributed by Jennifer Raymond) Serves 8 to 10

This salad is a true celebration of color and flavor. It may be made in advance, and keeps well for several days. If you are a cilantro lover, you may want to increase the amount.

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans
- 1/2 cup finely chopped red onion
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 red or yellow bell pepper, diced
- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 2 cups frozen corn, thawed
- 3/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro (optional)
- 2 tablespoons seasoned rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar or distilled vinegar
- 1 lime or lemon, juiced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 teaspoon coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

Drain and rinse beans and place them in a large salad bowl with onion, peppers, tomatoes, corn, and cilantro. In a small bowl combine the vinegar, lemon or lime juice, garlic, cumin, coriander, and red pepper flakes. Pour over the salad and toss gently to mix.

Nutrition information per serving: 143 calories; 7 g protein; 28 g carbohydrate; 0 g fat; 117 mg sodium; 0 mg cholesterol.

Hearty Chili Mac

(contributed by Jennifer Raymond) Serves 4 to 6

Your kids will love this easy-to-make meal.

- 8 ounces pasta spirals
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 to 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 small bell pepper, diced
- 3/4 cup textured vegetable protein
- 1 15-ounce can crushed tomatoes
- 1 15-ounce can kidney beans, including liquid
- 1 15-ounce can corn, including liquid
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon salt

Cook pasta in boiling water until tender. Drain and rinse, then set aside.

Heat 1/2 cup water in a large pot, then add chopped onion and garlic. Cook until onion is soft, about 3 minutes. Add bell pepper, textured vegetable protein, crushed tomatoes, kidney beans, corn, chili powder, cumin, salt, and 3/4 cup water. Stir to mix, then simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 20 minutes. Add cooked pasta and check seasonings. Add more chili powder if a spicier dish is desired.

Nutrition information per 1/2 cup: 109 calories; 6g protein; 20g carbohydrate; 0 g fat; 138 mg of sodium; 0 mg cholesterol.