

Methodological Issues In Analyzing School Menus

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FNS recently completed a nationally representative study of school nutrition programs in which menus were collected from 515 schools. The objective of the school meal analyses was to determine the **average** nutrient content of USDA meals **as offered**. Cafeteria managers supplied information (description, amounts served, recipes and labels) for one week's menus. Methodological issues resulted from two main aspects of school food service: how to develop an average nutrient content when schools had a large number of choices available at each meal, and how to determine amounts for selfserve options such as salad bars for which there are no standard servings. To compute the average nutrients **offered** each food was assigned a USDA meal component code and a code to link items served together such as salad with salad dressing. The nutrients were summed for each meal component food group. We assumed each meal offered contained the numbers and types of foods required under the USDA meal pattern, plus any non-creditable items such as dessert or condiments. All entrees offered, all bread/bread alternate, all fruits and vegetables, and all types of milk were calculated separately and an average nutrient value for meal component was obtained. The average nutrient content of each lunch was then calculated as the sum of nutrients in one entree, one bread, two fruit/vegetables, one milk and one dessert and/or condiment (if offered). Nutrient averages for salad and other food bars were calculated by assuming quantities based on USDA lunch component requirements.