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OUR CHILDREN'S LUNCH: PUTTING A SMALL MEAL IN THE BIG PICTURE OF FOOD AND PEOPLE

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A THESIS

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Our Children's Lunch

Food is essential to all human life. It provides sustenance, has significant cultural and social meaning, and is a source of livelihood for people around the world. Since the beginning of time people have expressed themselves through food. Culturally, we can distinguish someone by the smells in their kitchens. Food embodies, quite literally, all that we are and all the potential in the universe. It is this very connectedness of all living beings that makes our food and the issue of food such a grand subject. Food is not merely something we put into our bodies to sustain us, it is a social, agricultural, spiritual, intellectual, and national expression of who we are and who we are becoming. Our relationship with food is intimate and life long.

I chose this topic for personal reasons. I am the mother of two elementary school children who sometimes eat the hot lunch at school. I have eaten several times in my children's school cafeteria, and am disappointed and discouraged by the lack of nutritional food served and the hurried atmosphere of the school cafeteria. After researching our National School Lunch Program (NSLP), I have come to see how impactful, complex, and nuanced this program is and how this continues to affect our children and their future. Our NSLP is a political, social, and economic issue and it deserves our attention because of the future implications it has on our society.

Someone once said, "You are what you eat." If we are to take this literally, we must understand the implications of what we decide to put into our bodies. These implications are wide ranging for our own personal health, but also for the health and welfare of the earth.

Our family's intentional food choices

As a family, we have tried to understand the ramifications of our food choices. The consumption of meat has many consequences, and we have tried to limit our consumption as a family. We most recently decided to eat only grass fed beef which is more expensive and more difficult to purchase. We have purchased, from a local farmer, a quarter of a cow that has been exclusively grass fed. Although we haven't given up eating meat entirely, when we consume meat we consciously choose meat that has been raised in an environment that is healthy and sustainable. This is more costly and more difficult to find in the grocery stores. When we eat meat, we want the animal to have lived a pleasant, uncrowded life outdoors, on pastures, with good water and open fields.

We also try to eat locally grown produce and have joined a Community Support Agriculture (C.S.A.), where you support a local farmer and receive produce once a week throughout the harvest season. This allows us to know the farmer who is producing our food and understand the movements of the season. Last year we took a trip to the farm with our children, allowing us to truly know how and where our food was produced. We know that chemicals and pesticides are not used on the produce we are getting from a C.S.A. and that it did not travel thousands of miles to get to our table.

Our family's garden

We have also started our own garden which our kids have helped plant every year. We plant tomatoes, squash, onions, potatoes, garlic, and flowers. We do not use any chemicals or fertilizers on our garden. We compost our leftovers to use every season to enrich our garden. In making a concerted effort to live a more sustainable life, we are teaching our children the value and beauty of the nature world. Planting a garden,

composting, and eating healthy helps our children connect to the earth in ways that are personal and life giving.

Buying organic and locally produced

It is our responsibility as consumers to know what we are eating, how it was produced, and where it came from. If we don't, we run the risk of putting more toxins and carcinogens into our bodies and into our environment. Buying organic and locally grown foods also helps support small farmers who we hope are more environmentally conscious and ethically sound. We are making a political and social statement when we choose local produce or organic milk.

Researching the National School Lunch program has allowed me to see how impactful food choices are and hardened my resolve to continue to fight for a more sustainable food system, whether by my purchase in the grocery store or my vote in the polling booth. By purchasing, planting, and being mindful, our pleasure in eating can increase tenfold. A significant part of the pleasure of eating comes from the consciousness of the living world in which the food was created.

Our Family's Natural Connections

Children have lost the connection to the earth that we so readily had only twenty years ago. As a mother I can give my children opportunities and learning experiences that will grow their love of the natural world. It is important for children to learn that we are connected to the earth in a vital way, that without this connection we would perish. Food, and everything surrounding it, is crucial to our personal and public health and to our national and global security. In looking at food and our National School Lunch Program for this paper, it has become more and more obvious to me how urgent and crucial

changing our food system is to our personal and planetary well being. As you will see in this paper the issues are interconnected and a collective initiative is necessary to implement real change; fortunately, the urgency I feel as a mother has become apparent to the politicians and news media as well. We must move toward a healthier, more sustainable way of eating and the NSLP is an important place to start.

Campaign for Health

Our first lady, Michelle Obama, has launched a campaign to improve the health of all children, and there is a certain urgency needed in changing what we feed thousands of children for lunch everyday. The NSLP is finally getting the much needed attention it deserves, from our legislators, and our national media as well. There is a certain tension in this country regarding individual liberty and mandated legislation regarding public health, but our federal policy makers must take responsibility for the current state of our broken school lunch program and the toxic food environment it has created for our children.

In order to understand why we are serving such nutritionally inadequate and high caloric food to our children, we must look at the history of food. Particularly, we must examine the industrialization of the food system and why our current system of delivering and consuming food matters to our National School Lunch Program.

This paper intends to examine the relationship of our industrial food system and the school lunch program and develop ideas to enhance the educational aspects of our current program. I will explore some curriculum ideas to connect our NSLP to a variety of subjects which will allow students to learn and understand food issues and the interconnectedness of food to all things. Part I of this thesis will take a brief look at the

history of food. Part II will look at the industrialization of the food system. Part III will examine how the history and industrialization of our food system has affected the National School Lunch Program and how this is affecting the health of our nation as a whole. Part IV explores the cultural implications of how and what we eat and finally part V will generate some ideas to help incorporate food into the curriculum.

I.

A Brief History of Food in Pre-industrial Era

From the fourteenth to mid seventeenth century the development of the world food system coincided with the development of capitalism in the West. Of course the expansion of European commerce was not limited to the Mediterranean. Portugal reached India in 1498 and the Spanish, Dutch, French and English soon followed. In 1492, Columbus discovered the Western Hemisphere and some historians believe this was the beginning of the globalization of the world's food system (Harper, Le Beau 52).

When Columbus discovered the Americas, he found an indigenous population that was surviving and thriving on the land. North American Indians were foragers as well as horticulturists. They foraged for wild fruits, roots and berries. While Columbus brought many good things to the New World, he also brought European diseases such as small pox, measles, mumps, typhus and diphtheria. This was quite devastating to the Indian population which had not developed immunity to any of these diseases and their numbers rapidly declined (Harper, Le Beau 52).

The Americas had developed crops that became staples throughout the world including maize, various beans, peanuts, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, squash, pumpkin, papaya, guava, avocados, pineapple, tomatoes, chile peppers, and cocoa.

Maize and manioc (cassava) became especially vital to Africans. Potatoes, along with maize and beans, made important contributions to the European diet (Harper, Le Beau 52). By 1600 all of the important food plants of the Old World - wheat, rice, barely, oats, rye, sorghum, millet, bananas, cane sugar, coffee, and eggplant were being grown in the Americas.

Native Americans helped the colonists obtain food and taught them methods of farming. The colonists adopted their way of agriculture as well as many of their dishes. Oftentimes the colonist would take an Indian food and change it slightly to suit their European tastes.

II.

The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution began in England during the middle of the 18th century and spread over the next 150 years to many other countries including the United States. It brought on a rapid concentration of people in cities and changed the nature of the world for many. The Industrial Revolution changed the way we lived in dramatic ways; no longer was farming done by a majority of the population and people moved to the cities.

In the early half of the century almost 95 percent of the American population lived on small farms. The Industrial Revolution quickly changed that, with the second half of the nineteenth century showing a dramatic increase in industrialization, modernization, urbanization, and immigration (Harper, Le Beau 63). By 1900, only 60 percent of the people were farming.

Both producing food and eating food were becoming commodified; fewer people were producing food for their own consumption and instead they were producing food for

money. This dramatically changed the way we viewed food, the way we interacted with the natural world, and ultimately the entire global food system. Our food system has changed from knowing and buying from a local farmer to gigantic corporations owning the land and distributing the product during this time. One of major reasons for such a dramatic change was the innovations that were happening in the farm industry.

Important inventions in the agriculture sector such as the steel plow, the reaper, the binder, and the thresher, accelerated the mechanization of food production. The mechanization of farming, along with the specialization of particular crops, increased the food supply. No longer were farmers limited by human or even animal ability to harvest the crop; with machines harvesting and planting, costs dropped dramatically. This in turn enabled goods to be cheaper and more readily available for the consumer.

Food suppliers and railroads enabled farmers to bring produce to the cities where population was rising due to the influx of rural farmers and immigrants from abroad. The Homestead Act of 1862, which promised nearly free land for people willing to live on it and develop it, triggered another wave of immigrants from Europe. The first continental railroad was completed in 1869. The railroad connected farmers to markets back east, which enabled them to ship produce to be sold in the nation's larger eastern cities. Another extremely important invention was the refrigerated train car which allowed farmers to ship eggs, meat, milk, and produce to cities across the nation (Harper, Le Beau 64). Railroads also connected farmers to the west, which allowed further expansion of farming. Commercial farming spread throughout the country, as did cattle ranching.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the invention of the railroad, grain and refrigerator cars, and grain silos, along with the growth of meat packing plants

contributed to the distribution of food far beyond their point of origin. This allowed people across the country access to foods not grown in their region. It also allowed for a greater variety of food at low prices; for example middle class workers were able to afford meats, milk, leafy vegetables, and fruit. This created significant improvement in health for nearly all the classes of Americans, rural and urban, except for the urban working poor (Harper, Le Beau, 69).

With the ability to ship and sell food throughout the country, national advertising began. Food producers and store owners learned the importance of attractive advertising and packaging to increase sales. The concept of prepackaged food transformed the marketing and advertising industry. This allowed for national brand labeling, making many prepackaged foods instantly recognizable. Advertisers began demonstrating that raw goods could be turned into standardized products with national brand names (Harper, Le Beau, 70). Today we recognize most of our food products by logo and/or brand name. In fact visual recognition is almost immediate with products like Coke and Oreos.

Advertising also introduced unknown food to a wider market and provided easier access to diverse foods in formerly isolated regions. It also began to emphasis the importance of convenience, allowing working-class and middle class women to escape the labor intensive work of food preparation (70). Consequently this gave women more freedom from domestic duties and many entered the work force.

Advertisers emphasized the up to date, state of the art sophistication of processed food. Condensed, evaporated, and concentrated foods and drinks promised more products for less money. Campbell's, for example, told consumers that one of its cans of soup could be a meal for lunch and all you had to do was heat it up (Harper, Le Beau, 71).

Convenience, ease, and affordability were continually emphasized in the marketing of these foods. This also took the "cooking" out of cooking, and most preparation became as simple as heating something up. Even the definition of cooking has evolved and some would consider heating something in a microwave as cooking today.

With more efficient farm methods and machinery, fewer farm workers were needed and mass migration to the cities took place. For the first time in American history, a majority of the American population were urban dwellers. Food processing became the norm, both in factories and in the home, so that people were no longer restricted to eating seasonal food. Citrus was available in the dead of winter in Nebraska, shipped in from Florida. The industry was soon dominated by a few giant corporations, such as Campbell's, Nabisco, and Heinz. By the 1900s industrialized food accounted for twenty percent of the entire nation's manufacturing (71).

Dramatic changes in the farm industry continued to take place with genetic engineering at the forefront of the agriculture industry. The development of disease resistant, as well as insect and virus resistant plant varieties was revolutionary to the industry. In the 1980s large scale corporations were investing huge amounts of money in hopes of mass producing such plants. The Monsanto Company, for instance, developed a soy bean with a built in immunity to a plant virus that had been fatal to soybeans in the past (Harper, Le Beau 97).

By 1999 roughly half of the U.S. soybean crop and nearly two-thirds of the corn crop came from genetically engineered seeds, decreasing the need for spraying with pesticide as well as reducing production costs for farmers. As Americans embraced this new technology, the European farmers were more cautious and skeptical. This was

mostly because the European consumers were frightened of unknown risks these new genetically engineered foods might pose. Even today the European agricultural industry rarely allows genetically engineered seeds or food into their food system. It is a highly regulated process and only few GMO (genetically modified organisms) have been introduced into the European food system. The controversial issue of genetically engineered seeds continues to be discussed and debated in America and abroad, and although there is much promise in GMOs there can be health risks as well.

Health risks and environmental impact of genetically engineered food are still being assessed and studied. The ecological impact includes loss of essential soil nutrients, which in turn could increase and perhaps accelerate our depletion of water and soil resources. New species, such as bugs that can resist the genetically modified seed's defense, could be introduced into the natural food chain with unpredictable or even catastrophic results. Much more research must be done in order to assure the safety of bioengineered foods. Critics believe we could further reduce the earth's biodiversity by killing non targeted insects or birds and that genetically engineered crops often have a productivity plateau. (Harper, Le Beau 97).

Another drawback to the genetically modified organisms is the creation of a monoculture in the plant itself. In other words, instead of several different types of soybeans, we have created only one that is immune to disease and bugs. The biodiversity that has been built into nature by evolution is what keeps natural products healthy and thriving. When a monoculture is created extinction is threatened with just one disaster or one bug that becomes immune to the "Round up Ready" seed.

Genetically engineered food has many critics yet one example of the incredible potential and good these foods can do is the perfection of "golden rice". This genetically engineered rice contains beta-carotene, which could help reduce one of the world's major nutrient deficiency diseases (Harper, Le Beau 99). This modern miracle could help millions of people stay healthy and increase life spans across the globe.

There are genetically modified foods in our school lunch program today. Many of the processed foods in the lunchroom contain soy beans or corn that are genetically modified. Some products such as apple sauce, yogurt, Teddy Grams, and Goldfish are sweetened with high fructose corn syrup which is often genetically modified.

Genetically modified foods were invented to allow farmers to spray fewer chemicals to protect their crops. This does not mean we are no longer spraying pesticides, as we continue to use chemicals on crops. How does this affect the crops or what we are ingesting into our systems?

As Rachel's Carson's ground- breaking book *The Silent Spring,* explains the indiscriminate use of pesticides can have major ramifications on the health of all living beings, as Miss Carson makes clear in this paragraph:

> Chemicals are the sinister and little-recognized partners of radiation in changing the very nature of the world- the very nature of life. Since the mid-nineteen forties, over 200 basic chemicals have been created for use in killing insects, weeds, rodents, and other organisms described in the modern vernacular as pests, and they are sold under several thousand brand names. The sprays, dusts, and aerosols are now applied almost universally to farms, gardens, forests, and homes- non-selective chemicals that have the power to kill every insect, good or bad, to still the song of birds and the leaping fish in the streams- to coat the leaves with a deadly film and to linger on in soil- through the intended target may be only a few weeds or insects. Can anyone believe it is possible to lay down such a barrage of poison on the surface of the earth without making it unfit for all life? (7)

This book had a significant impact for the chemical industry and Carson was immediately repudiated and attacked by several huge chemical businesses including Monsanto. Her book brought to the public's attention the dangerous long term effects of the wide spread use of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) and other pesticides. The controversy surrounding the book was noticed even in Washington and President Kennedy began an investigation into the effects of DDT (www.mindful.org).

Chemicals are still a large part of the industrial food system and the effects, not just on human health but on our entire eco-system, continue to be felt and studied. Human exposures to cancer producing chemicals are multiple. These chemicals can be found in the environment in many different forms including as an air pollutant, contaminated water, a pesticide residue on food, in cosmetics, in medicines, and in paints and inks (Carson, 29). Human beings have put a majority of the carcinogens into the environment and we can choose to help eliminate them. Instead of focusing primarily on a cure for cancer, perhaps we could prevent more cancers by taking a look at the environmental causes and try eliminating or reducing these causes. Carson's book is even more relevant and urgent today; if we can't see the vast and catastrophic consequences of our continued use of pesticides we are naïve or in denial.

One of the main reasons we need to produce so much corn and soybeans in America is not actually for human consumption but to feed large quantities of domesticated animals. Our consumption of meat in America is much higher than most of the world. This not only has environmental impact but impacts the quality of the meat as well.

> It was so businesslike that one watched it fascinated. It was pork-making by machinery, pork-making by applied mathematics. And yet somehow the most matter-of-fact person could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so human in their protests- and so perfectly within their rights! They had done nothing to deserve it, and it was adding insult to injury, as the thing was done here, swinging them up in this cold-blooded, impersonal way, without pretence at apology, without the homage of a tear. Now and then a visitor wept, to be sure; but this slaughtering machine ran on, visitors or no visitors. It was like some horrible crime committed in a dungeon, all unseen and unheeded, buried out of sight and of memory.
>
> (Sinclair 37)

This quote, from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle,* is describing the inhumane ways we slaughter our meat, but even before they get to the slaughterhouse, they are treated as unethically as if they are not living beings. With all the advances in agriculture, one would assume our methods of meat processing would have improved since Sinclair's time, but because the meat industry has become so huge the processing of animals has become a tragic business. Confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are a controversial way of bringing meat to the table, for a number of different reasons from ethical to environmental.

Confined animal feeding operations house large numbers of animals and dispose of animal waste into open-air fecal pits. This releases pollutants into soil, air, and water (Mirabelli, Wing 591). CAFOs are specifically designed to promote rapid growth in animals (e.g., hogs, chickens, and turkeys) in extremely crowded feed lots. They are crammed together from birth to maturity, oftentimes eating and defecating in the same space. This overcrowding is unsanitary and can lead to all kinds of diseases and the spreading of pathogens.

With hog CAFOs in particular, odor and local air pollution have an impact on those living close to the area. One study found that health and the quality of life of adults and children were affected by the quality of air. The odor that arises from livestock

emissions contain gaseous and particulate elements, including inhalable dusts, bacteria, mold, hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, methane, pharmaceutical resides, and animal dander (Reynolds, 1997). Potential health risks such as asthma, mucous membrane irritation, and other respiratory symptoms have been documented. It is important to note that the majority of the hog CAFOS in North Carolina, where this study was conducted, are located in communities of color and regions of poverty (Edwards and Ladd 2000).

Hog CAFOs are one of the greatest producers of fecal waste on the planet. North Carolina's hogs, which now outnumber people, produce more fecal waste than all the people in California, New York, and Washington combined (Harper, Le Beau 111). Many of these farms produce more fecal waste than some of America's largest cities. This causes air pollution and water contamination, and most recently air-borne viruses.

There have been several health hazards associated with these CAFOs; most recently the H1N1 virus (originally named the Swine flu) has caused problems because of the rapid transmit ion of the virus from person to person. However most producers do NOT test for swine influenza because it is not included on the list of "reportable illnesses" that when detected must be documented with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). "H1N1 is a standard flu," says Kay Johnson Smith, executive vice president with the Animal Agriculture Alliance, "and therefore, like other flus such as standard avian or equine flu, they aren't reportable as emerging diseases" (Snapp, Corbis 397). Many producers fail to report in fear of having to destroy all of their animals and consequently losing all of their income.

Another major issue of concern regarding CAFOs is fecal run off contaminating nearby water sources. Runoff from poorly managed CAFOS can carry pollutants into the

surface water and ground water. The Environmental Protection Agency has released revised rules for CAFOs to prevent such pollution and currently CAFOs will be required to obtain National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits (Rohrman 277). They will also be required to submit annual reports to the EPA.

Sierra Club leader, Ken Midkiff, who grew up raising hogs on an Illinois farm, had a pungent way of touching on the issue: "We never worried about the environment impact because there wasn't any. The problem is that nature never intended for 80,000 hogs to shit in the same place" (Harper, Le Beau 111).

There are several ethical issues that arise with regards to CAFOs. Many consider these operations as cruel to animals. Consider this; you are raised in an atmosphere of confinement, you are overfed and over medicated, and until your death you often times stand in your own fecal matter most of your life. These animals are raised in as unnatural environment as possible. Cows naturally graze on grass over large portions of land. Chickens are naturally inclined to peck the earth for bugs, grass and grain. The animals we are ingesting are doped up on antibiotics, kept in tight (sometimes even dark) quarters along with thousands of other animals, and live their entire lives in captivity.

We are ingesting animals that are tortured to death. These are unhealthy animals that we are eating. They are imprisoned, force fed and treated as if their sole purpose in life was to become fat for the slaughter. What are we ingesting when we eat an animal from a CAFO? Are we ingesting all the negative aspects of the life of that animal? Are we eating the sorrow, the hopelessness, the despair of another living being? All of this is "hidden" from the majority of those eating the meat.

We don't really want to know where our meat is coming from as long as it is pleasing to the eye at the grocery store. We are disconnected to the suffering of our fellow creature and thus continue to perpetuate the systematic torture of these animals. We want cheap meat but the price we pay may be graver than we can imagine. We are ingesting the pain, anxiety, and despair of a fellow creature. We are also eating all the antibiotics and feed corn the animal was given throughout its short life.

As early as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, we have been exposed to the dangers of meat production. The Meatpacking industry is alive with documented cases of substandard safety conditions with unsanitary practices that lead to unsafe meat in grocery stores across the country. These substandard conditions are dangerous for workers and for consumers. CAFOs have a negative environmental impact as well as food safety impact.

The most serious health issues with meat and meat production are the presence of bacterial pathogens in meat products (Sofos 4). There are various types of known pathogenic bacteria affiliated with meat products, the most common being *Salmonella, Listeria monocytogenes*, and *Escherichia coli*. Outbreaks of *E. coli* 0157:H7 in meat have especially pushed public concerns of bacterial pathogens originating in meat to the forefront of public attention. In 2006 the United States Food Marketing Institute (FMI) indicated that the number one concern of grocery shoppers was bacterial contamination (Sofos 4). Technology improvements have been made to decrease the like hood of pathogens developing in meat processing plants, but problems with workers properly running the technology has proved to be an issue (Schlosser). Research has indicated resistance by pathogens to antibiotics and potentially to traditional food preservation

barriers (such as low pH, heat or cold temperatures) has increased over the years, which could pose a greater threat to meat consumers in the future (Sofos).

In February the Southern California meat company Westland/Hallmark recalled 43 million pounds of beef, the largest recall in history (NPR, 2008). The recall was made after the Humane Society released a secret video showing plant workers using forklifts and electric shocks to bring sick cows to slaughter. The largest recalls of beef before the February 2008 recall were due to meats potentially contaminated with *L. monocytogenes* or *E. coli* (4). One major concern regarding meat recalls has been that by the time a meat has been identified to contain a bacterial pathogen, other meat produced with the tainted batch has most likely been shipped and eaten by consumers around the nation; a faster system of communication to the public has been demanded. A large portion of the meat that was recalled, 370 million pounds, was distributed to schools for the school lunch program.

A USA today investigation found that in the past three years the government has provided the nation's schools with millions of pounds of ground beef and chicken that wouldn't meet safety standards of most fast food restaurants (USA Today, December 9, 2009). J. Glenn Morris, professor of medicine and director of Engineering Pathogens Institute at the University of Florida says, "We simply are not giving our kids in schools the same level of quality and safety as you get when you go to many fast-food restaurants." Morris, who used to run the USDA office that investigates food-borne illnesses, says the department's purchases of meat that doesn't satisfy higher-end commercial standards are especially worrisome because the meat goes to schools. It is not just because children are more vulnerable to food-borne illnesses because of their

underdeveloped immune systems; it is also because there is less assurance that school cafeterias will cook the meat well enough to kill any pathogen (USA Today December 9, 2009).

The USDA's mission statement is "We provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management." Providing the leadership has proven to be problematic not only to the small farmer but also the public at large and in particular the school lunch program.

Despite the continual rhetoric of protecting the family farm, the USDA policies and practices have truly been more beneficial to the large scale agribusinesses. The principle has continued to echo "get big or get out" mentality and the numbers support that system. For example, four companies control 69 percent of the North American seed market (Harper, Le Beau 117). ConAgra ranks third in cattle production and fifth in broiler chicken. ConAgra Poultry, Tyson Foods, Perdue, and three other companies control 60 percent of U.S. chicken production. IBP, ConAgra, and Farmland control 80 percent of U.S. beef packing and Smithfield Foods, ConAgra, and three other companies control 75 percent of U.S. pork packing (118). These companies are controlling not just the actual product but they are controlling different stages of production. For example, Cargill, a main trader of grain, now is the second largest animal feed producer and one of the largest producers of pork and beef (115).

The problems facing the U.S. agricultural system are multifaceted. It is important to look at how changes to the system could make a positive impact on our environment, our health as a nation, and our health globally. The health of our children is directly

impacted by our school lunches and this is directly linked to the USDA. Feeding our children is as important to our nation and the future of our nation as any social program we undertake.

It is a moral imperative that every human person has enough to eat. Food is a basic human right that must be protected from capitalistic practices. In the Catholic Church profiteering on food has been condemned in Catholic Social Teaching. As the *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* states, "Those whose usurious and avaricious dealings lead to the hunger and death of their brothers and sisters in the human family indirectly commit homicide, which is imputable to them." (148). If it is a moral imperative that we feed all God's children, is it as ethically important what we feed our children? Ethically we are called to feed our children healthy, nutritious food and at this time in history we are failing to live up to this call.

III.

The National School Lunch Program

When Harry Truman signed the National School Lunch Act in 1946, he probably didn't imagine American schools would one day be serving corndogs, frozen French fries and canned green beans. Truman began the national school lunch program as a response to abject poverty and malnutrition among school children. He did so after reading a study that revealed many young men had been rejected from the World War II draft due to medical conditions caused by childhood malnutrition (Harris 310).

The National School Lunch Act was created to address the needs of students who were grossly undernourished. The bill was introduced by Georgia senator Richard Russell, and his colleague Allen Ellender, of Louisiana. Both men occupied positions

on the Senate Agriculture Committee. The Southern region of the country had, as it does today, one of the highest poverty rates. Malnutrition, particularly in children, was common. Russell and Ellender also represented rural districts where farmers had suffered from chronically low prices for their goods. They were representing both groups that would benefit, malnourished children and rural farmers, and hoped to help create a federal program that would address both problems simultaneously.

Russell, in particular, made it clear from the onset that his support for a school lunch program hinged on it remaining tied to the USDA. The program, he said, came into being "in the paradoxical age when we had so much food to eat that people were starving and farmers were producing so much that they were going into bankruptcy because they could not dispose of their products" (Levine 75). This would solve two large problems in Russell's state and he did not want to see the lunch program become permanent without tying it to our national agricultural system.

Separate but equal?

Russell and Ellender wanted the National School Lunch Act to pass but this posed a problem for both men because of their open opposition to racial integration. They wanted to pass the Act in hopes of helping not only poor children, both black and white, but also poor white farmers across the region. They did not, however, want this to create a change in the integration policies throughout the South. As both House and Senate debated the creation a permanent NSLP, children's meals became a central issue regarding states' rights, federal power, and racial equality (Levine 78). Many of the southern Senators vehemently opposed federal control of the NSLP and wanted a program that would only work through state-level educational offices. State officials

would be authorized to distribute federal resources as they deemed appropriate, allowing the segregation of schools to continue, and not even guaranteeing black schools participation in the program.

New York congressman Adam Clayton Powell, along with the NAACP, planned to challenge the legislation that would send federal funds to segregated facilities. When the bill came to the floor, Powell offered an amendment that would prohibit federal funds from going to any state or school if, "it makes any discrimination because of race, creed, or national origin of children, or, between types of schools, or with respect to a State which maintains separate schools for minority and for majority children, it discriminates between such schools on this account" (Levine 83). Although Powell and the NAACP probably thought this legislation was clear and forceful, in fact, it created a loop hole for the Southern senators.

Opposing discrimination rather than segregation, Powell's amendment actually invited the support of Southern legislators. Russell and other Southerners did not want to see Congress dismantle segregation. They insisted that segregation and "separate but equal" schools in no way constituted discrimination. Russell actually agreed to a mild anti-discrimination clause in an earlier version of the bill. "The colored people are my friends," Russell insisted, "and I want to see them have the benefit of these funds. I know in the main, they need it more, perhaps, than some of the others do" (Levine 85). Russell warned that Powell's amendment, by withholding federal funds from Southern states, would actually discriminate against black children. He predicted most Southern states would not participate with the amendment in tact. Powell's amendment passed,

but the power to implement the program would be left to local officials, consequently leaving existing racial segregation intact (Levine 86).

In fact, one of the many problems with the program from the onset was the inability of many schools to participate due to lack of matching funds required from the schools. The majority of support provided to the schools participating in the program comes in the form of cash reimbursements for each meal served. The schools that needed the lunch program the most were the least likely to be able to participate because of lack of initial funds. In the South this meant a majority of all black schools were excluded from participation in the NSLP.

From the beginning of the NSLP, unions, liberals, women's organizations, and child welfare advocates all cautioned against the bill's funding formula that required states to match federal contributions to the program. This matching provision would exclude poor states and poor districts within those states, the very children needing the lunches the most (Levine 87). The matching funds requirement was preventing the neediest of children from having a school lunch.

Another problem from the very beginning was that although the legislation required schools to feed poor children for free, no one was charged with enforcing this policy. The program was operated differently from state to state with local officials deciding how to distribute donated commodities, and which schools participated in the program. Oftentimes school officials arbitrarily decided who would and would not receive a free school lunch. The USDA did nothing to ensure the participation of black schools in racially segregated districts, nor did it establish any policies or guidelines to enforce the School Lunch Act's mandate that poor children receive free meals (Levine

91). This lack of accountability created a school lunch program that did not reach our neediest children.

As Harry Truman stated at the signing of the School Lunch Act, "In the long view, no nation is healthier than its children or more prosperous than its farmers" (Levine 45). As we see from this statement the NSLP and United States Department of Agriculture were inextricably linked from the beginning. Although the NSLP was created to alleviate malnutrition and create an environment where learning was easy and the health of our children a priority, the farm influence may have, from the onset, undermined that goal.

USDA and NSLP linked from the start

The collaboration of the USDA and our school lunch program during the forties was based on helping both our children and our farmers. It did, at that time, meet those goals; it helped the farmer get rid of surplus food and fed some if not all undernourished children. Today, however, this partnership is under greater scrutiny. Does the USDA truly have our children's health as its biggest priority or is there a conflict in interest? Is the program a way to distribute meats, cheeses and other commodities that couldn't find a buyer on the open market, or is it a department making choices based on our children's health? Can it do both? How does the USDA determine which crops get subsidies and which commodities get shipped to schools? Not only are the commodities often unhealthy foods, they nearly always come from the wealthiest farmers. Huge agribusiness operations benefit far more than small farmers (Brownell 133).

Today, fifty years later, the largest problem facing our children is obesity. In fact, many of our children are obese and malnourished. Our NSLP and the USDA have

helped create an eating environment that is unhealthy and toxic to the future of our children and our nation. Ironically, our obesity epidemic is again a concern for national security as many of our potential army cadets are unable to serve due to weight problems. In fact, the leading medical reasons that recruits are rejected are weight problems. This is jeopardizing our ability as a nation to fill our armed forces (*Omaha World Herald*, April 21, 2010).

For many children in America the school lunch is their one main meal of the day and without it many would go hungry. Sixty percent of all school children nation wide get free school lunches everyday (Levine 3). In urban areas such as Chicago and Atlanta over 80% of the children qualify for free school lunch (3). Our school lunch programs are feeding a majority of this country's children. Ethically, we are bound as a nation to look at how we are feeding our children, what we are feeding our children, and why it impacts our future. The majority of school lunches that are served need serious reform. Reform is needed, not just in what we serve our children, but how we teach our children about food and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Shouldn't our school lunches actually teach our children about health, wellness, nutrition, science, environmental issues, and our relationship to the food we eat?

Looking Back

In order to critique today's school lunch program, we must first understand the history, politics, culture and economic factors that have influenced the program. America's school lunch program mirrors our political, social, and economic policies of yesterday and today.

Throughout the history of the NSLP, presidents have used legislation to change the program's policies and procedures. They have used the program as a symbol of prosperity, equality, and democracy. It has become one of the largest social service programs in the country and weathered many political storms. Throughout its history changes have been made to the program depending on the political climate and the needs of the times.

In the 1950s school lunches were used to feed poor children and also to teach both immigrants and middle class children the principles of science and nutrition. The hope was that in teaching children the importance of an American diet, they would bring these ideas back to their families. As social reformer Jane Addams said, "An Italian girl who has had lessons in cooking…will help her mother to connect the entire family with American food and household habits" (Levine 12). This decade also had a post- war economic boom and the majority of Americans did not think poverty was a big issue. In reality over 30 percent of Americans were living in poverty (Murray 97). Many regions and even urban areas were left out of the school lunch program because they were unable to locally fund and administer the program.

Peace initiatives and lunches

In 1954, Congress passed the landmark food policy act Public Law 480, authorizing the Department of Agriculture to buy surplus commodities from American farmers and sell them abroad (Levine 93). Eisenhower knew this would be an important initiative for the farmers and would improve our political image throughout the world. He did not focus domestically on the school lunch program; he did, however, use our nations' school lunch program to launch a peace initiative and to continue to help the

farmers sell surplus crops. In May 1959, the Eisenhower Administration brought leaders from Argentina, Canada, Australia and France together to discuss sending surplus food abroad to fight hunger. This initiative would help countries devastated by war or famine. Eisenhower passed Public Law 480, known today as Food for Peace. "School lunches for peace" partnered with the charity CARE, a humanitarian organization fighting global poverty, continued on through the Kennedy Administration (Lambers 1). This initiative emphasizes the rights of every child to healthy food. It symbolizes the importance of schools' abilities to nourish and care for the holistic health of all children, throughout the world.

Although Eisenhower changed little regarding the domestic school lunches, his Public Law 480 continues to have an impact on world food and our agricultural reach today. Originally intended to help countries in crisis, it has failed to induce economic development or any lasting benefits to countries and has, at times, been a detriment to the agricultural industry in those countries (Cochrane 15). Some argue that if you give people food, they will not want to grow their own food. In reality, large amounts of low-priced American food in developing nations make it economically impossible for small farmers to compete. The more than 10 billion that American tax payers give to farmers every year has helped destroy the livelihood of millions of Mexican farmers as cheap American corn has flooded the market pushing the poorest farmers out of business (www.nytimes.com).

Despite Eisenhower's limited impact on the school lunch program, the increases in federal expenditures for social welfare programs from 1950-1980 were extraordinary. President Kennedy, in particular, wanted the welfare system to be a social force for

progress and implemented poverty programs that were aimed at training and developing work forces (Murray 106). Kennedy believed the federal government had a responsibility to help the poor help themselves and he implemented programs that enabled people to do just that. With his untimely assassination, his successor, Lyndon Johnson continued his work and launched a "War on Poverty." It included many initiatives to provide programs for basic needs such as medical care, food, shelter, as well as education and job training (Murray 107).

War against Poverty

It wasn't until the 1960s that the NSLP was transformed into a poverty program, coinciding with the Civil Rights Movement. Lyndon B. Johnson's state of the union address on January 8, 1964 declared a "War on Poverty" and this set in motion a series of bills and acts to alleviate poverty. This declaration brought about significant changes to the federal government's role in poverty programs. Some of the important initiatives that began in Johnson's tenure were Food Stamps, the Work Study Program, Medicare, and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). All of these programs were vital in helping the poorest segment of society meet some of their basic needs such as health care and food.

Poverty and the issues of race were coming to the forefront during the sixties. Politicians like Senator Robert Kennedy and Senator Joseph Clark, heading an anti-poverty committee, toured the Mississippi Delta region and was shocked to see the extreme poverty and obvious problem of malnutrition in the region. Press coverage of their tour marked the beginning of media coverage of the issue (DeVault and Pitts 550). Largely due to the media coverage, a significant shift in the consciousness of the

American people began to take place. The perception of poverty was changing from one of blaming the poor to looking at the systemic structures that were failing the poor.

The Other America

The Other America, written by Michael Harrington in 1962 was a study of poverty in the U.S. and a catalyst for a CBS special called, "Hunger in America." The book cited examples of assistance being withheld from Southern counties to starve out unskilled black laborers. It also revealed how the Southern region was being left out of many federal programs like the NSLP and Food Stamps (DeVault and Pitts 551). As Harrington notes, "To be impoverished is to be an internal alien, to grow up in a culture that is radically different from the one that dominates the society" (Harrington 17). He talks about the rural poor that have been displaced because of the technological advances in agriculture. Most of this rural poverty was concentrated in the South with Virginia, West Virginia and South Carolina in the bottom income categories of the Department of Agriculture. One statistic Harrington cites illuminates the problems in the South, in the mid-sixties; fifty six percent of low-income farm families were deficient in one or more basic nutrients in the diet (Harrington 45). In a study of the southern Appalachians it was found that this area had higher infant mortality rates than the rest of the nation, higher rates of rejection by Selective Services, fewer doctors per thousand people, and older doctors (45). Schooling was also often inferior.

Harrington writes extensively about the discrimination of people because of their race. In the South, African Americans were often terrorized to leave their land; the use of scare tactics and financial intimidation were often employed. In one example Harrington used, a Negro who registered to vote suddenly found that he could not buy

supplies, get a doctor, or any assistance from the community (47). Harrington dares to name race as one of the most pressing issues of the day and attempts to show how deeply America has integrated racism into its structure. Blacks in the United States were concentrated in the worst, dirtiest, lowest paying jobs. Today blacks, Latinos, and other people of color continue to be systematically placed on the outskirts of society.

Harrington's *The Other America* was the catalyst for the television program that helped bring all of these issues to the forefront of the nation. America was waking up to the injustices of our food assistance programs missing whole segments of the country, and in particular, the Southern regions. With the media pressure and coverage of the issue, mainstream Americans were forced to realize the poor were no longer an anomaly but they were living among us. People were beginning to view school food through an antipoverty lens, and Johnson was implementing programs to fight it.

Breakfast Begins

Johnson continued to fight for the poor and on October 11, 1966, he signed the Child Nutrition Act. The Act established the School Breakfast Program (SBP). The SBP is a federally assisted meal program that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free breakfasts to children in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. President Johnson remarked during the signing, "Good nutrition is essential to good learning" (www.schoolnutrition.org/). Another program that emerged from the Child Nutrition Act was the Special Milk Program. This program enabled schools to provide half-day students and pre-kindergarteners free milk. The Breakfast Program currently serves more than 10 million children on a typical school day (Poppendieck 3).

Women groups survey lunches

While Johnson helped jump start many programs, several women's organizations focused national attention on the shortcomings of the National School Lunch Program. Five national Women's groups- the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the National Council of Negro Women (NCCW), Church Women United (CWU), and the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) - formed the Committee on School Lunch Participation (CSLP).They decided to conduct a nation wide survey of the national school lunch program and the results were complied in a report called *Their Daily Bread*. The conclusions showed that two out of three eligible American children did not participate in the NSLP. The heart of the problem was that no federal standards were enforced and discrimination was rampant, not just in the South, but in all regions of the country (Levine 132).

State budgets stressed

The report recommended that the price and funding for school lunches be revised. It also insisted that the federal government issue guidelines and standards for free lunches (Levine 136). Without adding any federal funding to adhere to these problems, the government mandated the states to abide by this free lunch program, again stressing state budgets. This had significant consequences for school lunches, raising the fee for a lunch for paying students. Consequently, many paying students stopped eating the school lunch and subsidies were not enough for most schools. By the early 1970s, many schools looked to privatization as the only way to keep the program going.

While the government was mandating free school lunches, the way our nation as a whole was conducting our agricultural sector was changing dramatically. In fact, our entire agricultural system was evolving and this change is continuing to have ramifications on our health as a nation today. As early as the 1920s there were people concerned about our changing agricultural system.

Demise of the small farmer

One of the most vocal critics of federal agricultural policies was Henry C. Wallace, the Secretary of Agriculture from 1921 to 1924. In *Our Debt and Duty to the Farmer*, published after his death in 1924, Wallace lambasts the government policies that sought "to convince the farmer that it was his duty to grow the largest amount…possible," and then, under the guise of "reducing the cost of living," set about "to break prices" for agricultural products (Griesen and Hersey 289). He complained "such legislation as has been enacted presumably in aid of agriculture has been to increase production instead of to insure a fair reward for the farmer's labor or a fair return on his capital" (289). This new system changed farming in a way that continues to this day. Wallace foresaw the injustice of this system, which was a slow and methodical demise of the small farmer.

The USDA, in the early 1970s, created a system that was vastly different from our earlier ancestors. Traditionally the family farm was a diversified operation, with a combination of several kinds of crops. It also raised livestock for dairy production as well as meat. Under the new system, the USDA expected farmers to maximize the output of their crops. In most cases, this created monocultures of corn, soybeans, and

wheat produced in large qualities. Biodiversity became a thing of the past and small farms were forced to respond (Griesen and Hersey 290).

The personal, social, and economic consequences of the new system meant a loss of many individual family farms, a change in agricultural values, and the concentration of land ownership in fewer and fewer hands. This caused domination of agriculture by giant corporations. Nixon's Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz in his infamous quote, "get bigger, get better, or get out" (Giesen and Hersey 293) failed to see the fiscal drawbacks to planting such quantities. Within a few years of frenetic production rate, the market was glutted and the price of a bushel of corn or wheat dropped below what it cost to produce (Roberts, 121). This cheap grain has changed the kind of food we make. High fructose corn syrup is in most of our processed food today and the long term implications of this are still being assessed. Some studies have show that humans have a more difficult time processing HFCS and this can lead to a plethora of health issues.

By 1980, the United States was generating forty percent of the world's corn and all of this was happening with fewer and fewer farms (Roberts, 23).We had sacrificed the quality of food for mass quantities. Our society applauded this shift as James Bostic, Jr., Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development said, "But just stop for a minute and think about what it means to live in a land where 95 percent of the people can be freed from the drudgery of preparing their own food " (Berry 97). This freedom from "drudgery" has left us disconnected to the land in which we live and from the food that sustains us.

Finally, FDA guidelines

With the federal government mandating schools to serve free lunches, the Secretary of Agriculture finally released a clear set of guidelines in 1971. The department issued minimum income standards for free lunch eligibility and uniform reimbursement rates for federally subsidized meals. The initial income requirements for free meals were set at 100 percent of the federal poverty line (Levine 147). The NSLP was transformed from an agricultural subsidy program to a poverty program.

The mandate, again with no federal funding to go along with it, caused many administrators to invite food service corporations and fast food franchises into their lunch rooms. There was an exodus of paying students and this in turn created a huge shortfall in lunchroom budgets. State and local communities were unwilling to pick up the budgetary slack (Levine 162). In 1969 then Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman announced a new set of regulations that would allow school districts to contract with private companies to run, operate, and manage school lunch rooms. Three years later Congress opened the door to soft drink vending machines in schools (Levine 161).

Protest from school administrators, parents, and nutritionists were too late. As Jack Anderson, columnist for the New York Times, warned, “candy bars, potato chips, and soda pop” would be allowed to compete directly with nutritious meals (Levine 162). Nutritionists feared junk food would be competing for more healthy food options, which of course was a well-founded fear that has come to fruition.

Soda and snacks in schools

Food industry representatives defended the sale of snacks and made their case even more compelling by pouring money into schools' athletic equipment, educational materials, and other resources. Within a few years, 98 percent of senior high schools had contracts with vending machine companies and soft-drink distributors. While many of the vending machines were closed during lunch hours, according to one report, one in five high school students could access snack food at any time during the day (Levine 163). Why do we allow fast food franchises in our high schools? Are we compromising the health of our children for the money it generates? Schools receive only $2.14 for each free meal they serve as part of the NSLP; this can often make it difficult to break even. In contrast, the profit margin on a la carte foods and items sold in vending machines can be 50 percent to 100 percent (Brownell, 146). That profit benefits many programs in the schools and many of schools have come to rely upon that income for athletics, music, drama, or art.

Incidentally, the nutrition guidelines the USDA had were loosened allowing the sale of food of minimum nutritional value to be "counted" in the lunchroom. The rules stipulated that if the food supplied more than 5 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance of just one basic nutrient in a 100 calorie serving, the item could be served for lunch. The new rules put no restrictions on the amount of salt, sugar, or fat products could contain. As Carol Tucker Forman, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Consumer Affairs, admitted, "any manufacturer of candy bars, snack foods, cakes or soft drinks could simply fortify his product with the required 5 percent of any one of the eight nutrients and so have the product declared minimally nutritious" (Levine 164).

The Reagan Years 1981-1989

As most lunch rooms privatized to make ends meet and keep cafeterias afloat, Reagan came into office. His election started an assault on domestic spending. Three months after his inauguration the Reagan administration sought to cut "fat" from the nation's social welfare programs without ripping the "social safety net" (Murray 100). In fact, immediately after assuming office, Reagan proposed an 11.5% cut in funding for the U.S. Department of Education and the next three years he proposed cuts of 18.6%, 29%, and 12.6% (Jennings 565). He succeeded in a 35% cutback in federal support for the school lunch program in 1981 (Jennings 566).

Reagan was convinced that many people in the welfare system did not actually need federal assistance. Immediately there was tightening of eligibility requirements in most welfare programs including the NSLP. Instead of the simple self-declaration of income eligibility that had been part of the program since its inception, the application process became more structured and detailed information was required. The Reagan administration was concerned with fraud and abuse in the public assistance program (Pierre, Puma 43). Congress accepted the administration's proposal to restrict food stamp eligibility to those below 130 percent of the poverty line. A similar approach was taken toward the school lunch programs, with subsidies reduced for those over 130 percent of the poverty level (Sullivan 139). These legislative changes reduced participation by about 10 percent and cost by about 20 percent (Giertz, Sullivan 141).

The Reagan administration wanted to eliminate all subsidies for families over 185 percent of the poverty line and reduce food stamp benefits for those receiving school lunch subsidies, but Congress rejected this proposal (Giertz, Sullivan 140). Reagan's

"trickle-down" economics had a negative effect on the poor but it was not devastating to the social welfare programs in the long view. It did, however, disproportionately affect families headed by women with children. Blacks also suffered disproportionately because a higher percentage of blacks were poor.

During his first four years in office, Reagan submitted legislative proposals that would repeal 90 educational programs outright or through consolidation in a block grant. The block grant mechanism was used to provide states with more autonomy in exchange for less federal assistance. For example, the single education blocks grants for elementary and secondary schools repealed and consolidated 43 programs into one authorization and reduced the funding by close to 40% (Verstegen 357).

He also spoke out in favor of abolishing the Department of Education and in favor of tuition tax credits and tuition vouchers that would encourage greater use of private schools (Jennings 565). Congressman Carol Perkins, who had been Chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor from 1960-1980, used his influence and knowledge to fight to keep federal aid to education in tact. He did everything in his power to blunt the effects of Reagan's proposals. Despite his efforts, some three million fewer children were now included in the school lunch program (Jennings 566). During this period, Congress did authorize a substantial cut in the Section 4 subsidies, reducing the amount per meal by more than one-third, and it eliminated participation of most private schools, lowered subsidies and sharply raised allowable prices for reduced price meals, lowered the eligibility ceilings for reduced price meals, and increased accountability and verification requirements for families (Poppendieck 73). According

to one estimate, the Reagan cuts doubled the cost of breakfast and lunch for four million black children in families earning between $13,000 and $19,000 a year (Levine 175).

Reagan continues to deny the poor

Reagan, much like Hoover, continued to deny the tremendous needs of the poor. He denied that people were starving in the midst of excess. In fact, presidential adviser Ed Meese told the press that people were eating at soup kitchens because it was easier than preparing a meal at home, and that the reports of hunger were "all anecdotal stuff". When a *New Republic* reporter mentioned long soup lines as evidence, Meese responded, "people go to soup kitchens because it is free, and that's easier than paying for it" (Harper 211). A presidential task force charged with investigating allegations of widespread hunger after the administrations cuts in major programs such as food stamps and AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) found no reliable quantitative data no national hunger count (Harper 212).

Reagan's stance took a sharp turn after his first four years in office; some believe it was due to change in public perception but a hands-off federal education policy was still advocated. In 1983 the Administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a report claiming that the U.S. had committed, "an act of unthinkable, unilateral educational disarmament." The report continued, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (Jennings 566). Reagan did much to dismantle programs implemented specifically for the poor; in fact more than half the budget cuts implemented directly targeted the poor or children. Programs such as food stamps, school lunches, legal services, Basic Education Opportunity Grants, and

CETA were all greatly reduced during the Reagan administration. In the long run, the most profound impact of these changes may have been to change the image of the school lunch program from a middle class educational program to a welfare-oriented program for poor children. In the short term, fewer school lunches were sold, smaller reimbursements for each meal were given, commodity entitlements were reduced, and new accounting requirements were introduced (Poppendieck 73).

New guidelines

In September 1980, under pressure from Congress, the USDA issued a new set of nutritional guidelines for the NSLP. Schools were now required to lower the fat and salt content of children's lunches. The reluctance to issue new guidelines stemmed from the fact that seventeen percent of schools lunches were still surplus commodities the USDA donated. These items were not always within such guidelines and often exceeded the fat or salt content recommended. The fat content of mozzarella cheese used in school pizza was cut in half but still stood at 10 percent (Levine 176). The most infamous nutritional faux pas occurred during the Reagan administration when ketchup was classified as a vegetable requirement. Large public outcry caused the Secretary of Agriculture, John R. Brock, to recant such a claim.

Ketchup counts?

Ketchup was not the only suspicious item "counted" toward nutritional requirements. Juice in jam could be counted as a fruit serving, eggs in cakes could be credited toward an allotment of meat or meat substitute, and pickle relish could be counted as a vegetable serving. (Levine 177). All of these items were declared

nutritionally sound in order to save money for a program torn between offering free meals to poor children and making nutritious lunches available to all students.

At the end of the twentieth century the NSLP ranked as the nation's second largest domestic food program after Food Stamps. While participation declined considerably in the Reagan era cuts, millions of children continued to eat subsidized school meals. According to a 1980 report, 5.9 million households receive food stamps, half of all black households used the National School Lunch Program and 43 percent of Hispanic households participated. (Levine 182). Twenty years later the demographics had not changed substantially. Two thirds of school lunch participants were from female-headed households, and one-half of the households lived below the poverty level (Levine 180).

By 1990 the NSLP was the largest federal child nutrition program and the largest source of federal funding for elementary and secondary schools. In fact much of the federal funding provided to schools was based on the number of children in the school district who qualified for free or reduced price school lunch. Free lunch was used to allocate federal and state benefits to schools (Levine 180). Oftentimes states used school lunch eligibility to diversify districts. They were measuring diversity by the economic status of students.

Privatization continues

Despite the need for and importance of the school lunch, privatization continued to be the wave of the future. Few states were willing or able to fund school meals and turned to private companies to service their schools. Lunches have become big business; by 1990 Marriot Corporation managed lunch programs in over 350 school

districts. (Levine 181). Many foods sold in schools are sold a la carte; these items are often not regulated for nutritional content. These competitive food items pose many problems, the largest being the diet related health risks. The high in fat, high in sodium, and low nutritional content foods are often the very items students want to eat more of instead of what is nutritious on the menu. The high fat snacks and calorie dense drinks are replacing or displacing fruits, vegetables and proteins in middle school and high schoolers diets.

The obesity crisis is one factor affecting our children who eat our National School Lunch every day. What is the caloric intake in a typical meal? The USDA and schools across the country are making a concerted effort to address the high fat, highly processed content of many of the meals. Lunches cannot have more than 30 percent of calories from fat and less than one-third of these calories from saturated fat. They must also contain at least one-third of the Recommended Daily Allowances for protein, vitamins A and C, iron, calcium, and calories (Brownell, 133). This is a challenge when the main dish that is often prepared comes in bulk, is often fried, and has too many calories. A typical week at an elementary school may have sausage pizza on Monday, Macho Nachos on Tuesday, and Chicken Nuggets on Wednesday. All of these main dishes have kid appeal but are processed, high fat foods. They do meet the necessary needs for protein in their diets, but if highly processed food is all these children are getting this could lead to health problems such as elevated blood pressure, dyslipidermia, a disorder of lipoprotein metabolism, including lipoprotein overproduction or deficiency, type 2 diabetes, and long term physical health issues such as heart problems (Winterfield 34).

Local Schools

The Omaha Public school district is the largest district in the state of Nebraska. This district serves a diverse community of more than 46,000 students at over 80 elementary and secondary schools. These schools serve the Omaha community and over 60% of the students that attend OPS are eating subsidized lunches (www.ops.org). This is a vital meal for those students and needs to be a healthy and nutritionally balanced. Oftentimes, however, the meals are high in fat and calories.

The Omaha Public Schools entrees are often breaded, which tends to add more ingredients and oftentimes more fat to the entrée. For example, a chicken patty is breaded with enriched bleached wheat flour (enriched with niacin, ferrous sulfate, thiamine mononitrate, riboflavin, folic acid), water, modified corn starch, salt, spices, dextrose, dried garlic paprika and annatto, soybean oil, extractives of paprika, xanthan gum, natural flavor (http://www.ops.org/).The more ingredients added to a food the less natural (or whole) it becomes. OPS adds breading to appeal to children because the more lunches they sell, the more money they receive from the government. I interviewed Tammy Yarrow, the OPS nutrition director and Tracy Wassabaum, the Westside nutrition specialist in order to see how our local schools are complying and changing with the national school lunch guidelines.

All the elementary schools in Westside District 66 have kitchens and this enables them to make some things from scratch. For example they may just heat and serve chicken nuggets but some products are a combination of frozen and fresh. As Tracy Wassabaum, nutrition specialist with Westside 66 Schools explains,

> We serve homemade calzones where our pizza dough is frozen product. We have sometimes if we have the raw ground beef we ground that at our high school,

> which is our largest kitchen and then we send that out frozen, cooked ground beef frozen to the elementary. If that is not available sometimes we get that- then we purchase beef crumbles, but then we have the sauce and the meat and the cheese and we build those calzones in the kitchen. We do spaghetti with meat sauce. We do lasagna. We do chicken enchilada casseroles. We do enchiladas; we do turkey over gravy, open-faced turkey sandwiches. Just this year we've done from raw; chicken drum, little legs, not wing drums but a smaller chicken leg. In a couple of weeks we're doing from raw pork roast, we're going to do barbecue pulled pork (Appendix notation here).

Tammy Yarrow, the OPS Nutrition Services Director, cited many examples of changes in the menu over the last ten years. "When I started in 2000, that's when we really made the push towards nutrition education but since 2000 we've gone to 1% and skim milk. We've added high fiber breads, whole wheat, and whole grains. Our pastas are whole grain, more fruits and vegetables."

Fresh fruits and veggies

Fresh fruits and vegetables are served everyday but the choices in Omaha Public Schools are more limited than District 66. As Tracy Wassabaum explains, "There's a salad bar everyday. There's two hot entrées, two hot vegetables, including 2-3 cold vegetables and then a wide variety of fresh fruits and canned fruits, yogurts and cheese sticks and uncrustable sandwiches which are peanut butter and jelly packaged sandwiches that have cut the crust off." These options are open to all students whether their meal is subsidized or not. Omaha Public Schools also have a choice of fresh vegetable bar, which consists of different types of vegetables but does not always include salad.

Yarrow believes continued changes might be forthcoming, "I think that whole grains are going to be an emphasis. I think lower sodium. I think more fresh fruits in the morning for breakfast, less juice. I think the calorie count, you know the number of

calories required, might drop a little. Those are just some of the things I think might happen. I think they're going to mandate 1% or skim milk. Anything over 1% I don't think they're going to allow." Wassabaum echoes much of what Yarrow sees as changes that are being implemented; "The trend now is whole grain. A lot of local manufacturers such as Rotella are coming out with new products that are the whole grain, not necessarily 100% whole wheat, but whole grain." She continued, "Trans fats have been almost eliminated from all products. It is just amazing. We are Trans fat free. So, but first it was a little bit of a challenge but as the year went by, it was just amazing how easily these companies were able to remove trans fat from their products."

Farm to School Program

Another push throughout the country is to serve locally grown foods in our school cafeterias. The National Farm to School Network is a nonprofit group aiding the effort to get farms and schools connected. Today, approximately 400 school districts in 22 states nationwide have FTS projects underway (Allen, Guthman 405). Locally grown produce is seen as more nutritious because it gets from field to plate faster, with less time to lose nutrients. This program also enables school children to get to know local farmers and to understand what a seasonal fruits or vegetables is. Omaha Westside school district has recently served fresh tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, watermelon, and cantaloupe, all locally grown in O'Neill, Nebraska (*Omaha World Herald*, Monday, September 27, 2010). The Omaha Public Schools are planning to serve Jisa's Farmstead Cheese made in Brainard, Nebraska in December as part of a year long educational focus on dairy products. The Council Bluffs Community School district

recently served its elementary schools apples grown at Ditmars Orchard in Council Bluffs.

Nationally, more than 10,000 schools now participate in the farm-to-school program, said Debra Eschmeyer, communication director for the National Farm to School Network, a nonprofit group working to help connect schools with local farmers (*Omaha World Herald*, September 27, 2010). Eschmeyer said data collected indicate that farm-to-school programs increase fruit and vegetable consumption by one serving a day. The Douglas County Health Department will use some of the $5.7 million grant it received to initiate farm-to-school programs and area school gardens (*Omaha World Herald* September 27, 2010). All of these initiatives are intended to make it easier for schools to buy locally, not only produce but bread and cereal as well.

Farm to school is not without critics. One of the biggest is Kate Adamick, who served as the first director of New York City's School Plus collaboration. Adamick states, "Far too many schools are saying, 'We've fixed the school lunch program, we've got farm to school,' and when you dig deeper, you find they have started getting their apples locally. You have to fix the center of the plate, she continues, "If you have just replaced a side with a local side, it's nice, but it doesn't solve the problem" (Poppendieck 243). Farm to school programs are more likely to be undertaken by affluent communities or schools receiving grants from private foundations. With only about 15% of schools participating at all in the Farm to School Program, access is still limited and less likely implemented in lower income regions.

Twenty minutes tops

One of the policies that will not likely change anytime soon, is the time allotted for lunch during the school day. Elementary schools in most school districts typically give twenty minutes for lunch. As Wassabaum from Westside District 66 said, "In the elementary level it is very scheduled. I believe the schedules are made by the principals. I believe they have 20 minutes to eat and 20 minutes recess on average, but that includes going through the line." She continues, "We have worked with principals over the years because it takes too long to get through the line. We have what is the word, standards that are set and I believe it's a 10 seconds to go through the line which doesn't seem like a lot but when you have 60 kids lined up to go through the line...so we've worked with principals to stagger their classes so they're not all coming down." (at the same time).

Recess before lunch?

In most cases, the faster the children eat their lunch, the quicker they are dismissed for recess time. For some students, the slower eaters, the allotted time is not enough for them to finish their meal. Studies have shown that when recess is placed before lunch there is a 30 percent reduction in food waste (www.centerforecoliteracy). This is one simple way to cut down on food waste as well as make meal time less hurried and more communal.

A typical lunch time experience at an elementary school is chaotic, rushed, and unpleasant. The hot lunch students have less time to eat than those that bring lunch from home because they must wait in line. In many cases the children don't eat much because they care more about getting outside to play than eating. One of the cultural implications of this atmosphere is the inability to taste, converse, and enjoy the lunch

time experience. We are not culturally "taught" that mealtime is to be savored and enjoyed. Our fast food mentality is detrimental to our relationship to food. How can we emphasis the importance of eating healthy when our relationship with food is one of hurried convenience? We have lost the connection to how food gets to our table and we have lost connection with the taste, smell, and enjoyment of eating.

Twenty minutes for all

Whether in elementary school or high school the allotted time for lunch is not enough; in most cases, it is a maximum of twenty minutes. Eating should be communal, pleasant and important. Eating should be an experience not a chore. If we continue to feed into the fast food mentality, food becomes something we consume on the run or something to get "done" before having fun. It is detrimental to our children to continue to hurry them in and out of the cafeteria. The healthier, slower eaters are unable to finish their meals, and the faster eaters are praised and encouraged. How do we advocate for an extended lunch hour for children? Do we ask for a longer school day? Can we ask for at least 30 minutes for lunch and 30 minutes for recess?

For many main meal of the day

For many low income students lunch is their main meal; instead of rushing them through it, why not teach them the importance of community, table manners, conversation, and nutrition? Indeed, the cafeteria itself can be a detriment to healthy eating. With long lines, cramped quarters, and lots of noise, cafeterias tend to diminish the mealtime experience. At my children's school administrators and teachers are often part of the problem, often hurrying children to rush thru their meal and quiet down in order to "get outside." If we don't cultivate understanding of how vital food is to our

physical, social, and emotional well being, we risk teaching our children that food is an ends to a means, as opposed to food being a relational, life giving, integral part of our everyday lives.

Teach your children well

The lunch room is a great place to start teaching our children that food is as important to all of us as the air we breathe and if we choose to treat our meal time as grab and go, we feed into the corporate, consumer mentality our society cultivates. Instead we should be teaching a counter cultural way of being, or as a new food movement emerges, the "Slow Food" way of being. In other words, we should cultivate a community building, local production, and leisurely way of eating.

Siesta time

Europeans tend to be healthier eaters, perhaps because many of these countries eat their biggest meal of the day at lunch time and for two hours all the commerce is closed to enjoy the pleasure of a lengthy, conversational meal. This focus on community or neighborliness can really start to instill in students life lessons of mutual respect, listening skills, and care of others. If we change the cafeteria to make meals more like gathering around the table, we cultivate communication skills, polite behavior, taking turns in conversations, and civil discourse.

When the majority of Americans think of school meals fresh fruits and vegetables do not automatically spring to mind. In fact most of us think of unappetizing menus with plenty of fried food and sodium but less readily available fresh fruits and vegetables. We, as a nation, could make our school lunches a national priority by provide enough funding for healthy, wholesome, appetizing meals.

Free for All?

In Janet Poppendieck's new book, *Free For All*, she makes the case for free lunches for all children, changing the entire way we look at school lunches. She claims this universal approach stresses community, equality, and hospitality. It shifts the paradigm to a more inclusive, less stigmatized lunch room. If everyone receives a free lunch, there is no shame or embarrassment involved for any student. As one student saw it, "You keep it to yourself if you get it for free. So many people are embarrassed to tell others that they get their lunch free" (Poppendieck 192). If there is a universal approach a sense of community is formed in the lunchroom. A shared meal creates solidarity with each other.

Pie in the sky?

How could we feasibly support a free lunch for all children? This is not a new idea, in fact Representative George Miller introduced legislation for universal free meals in 1992 (Poppendieck 288). The Congressional Budget Committee estimated, at the time, the cost would be a 100 percent increase in the current budget. Today we spend $11 billion on lunch and breakfast combined; if the same ratio applied, funding a national universal program would cost an additional $13.2 billion annually (Poppendieck 289).

Pop payment

Poppendieck proposes several different ways to pay for universal coverage, one being taxing soft drinks. With the power of the soft drink industry it would be extremely difficult to get legislation passed. But it is worth considering how much our obesity crisis stems from the soda pop industry. She also proposes changing the capital

gains tax to redistribute funds to lunches. If we can creatively imagine a free lunch possible for all children, we can make this a reality. If the parents of all children decided this was an important right for all, and used their political and social voices to implement change, lunches for all children would change for the better. When all parents care about what is served in the lunchroom their collective voice becomes much more powerful.

What about taste?

Conducting a lunch survey for the fourth grade class at Gunn elementary in Council Bluffs, Iowa, I was not surprised at the many complaints regarding the taste of the lunch offerings. With over half the class of twenty three eating the school lunches everyday and the remainder eating, once, twice or three times a week, taste is as essential to the students as the price and quality is to the parents. A reoccurring concern was the meat items on the menu with several students echoing Paytn Beinherd's sentiments, "The meat tastes like rubber." Or as Ethan Snead complained, "The meat tastes fake, they need to warm stuff up better, and the raviolis are slimy and gross."

Surprise students sentiments

What was surprising was the many students that wanted healthier food. As Jessee Decker said, "Make it healthier and let some students choose their favorite lunches that they would have at home." Some expressed the desire for more choices and fresher ingredients. Many also commented on the preparation of the food, that either it was burned, or overcooked. At Gunn the kitchen is minimal with not many options for the cooks. They are really only able to reheat or heat frozen entrees.

IV.

Food and Culture

As we see the movement toward the commodification, commercialization, and mass production of most food items, we see the change in not just what Americans are eating, but in their cultural, social, and psychological views of food. This change has many ramifications today and our National School Lunch Program is a perfect example of how the industrialization of our food system has had a negative effect on our collective health and relationship with food, not just in America but globally as well.

Gathering around the Table

In addition to the significance of the food itself is the environment in which people gather to consume that food. How we break bread together says as much about us culturally as the food we are consuming. Cultures differ in how they experience the phenomenon of sharing a meal.

The meal is universal, existing in every society, culture and social class, but its symbolic meaning and significance differ from group to group. The significance can vary dramatically from meal to meal as well and even within the same country. In contrast to our ancestral environment, our contemporary society has an abundance of food that is easily accessible which has caused overeating and obesity in American society. This has ramifications for how we perceive the meaning of mealtime.

French and American differences

In one study, Paul Rozin compares the French cultural attitude toward food with the American attitude toward food. There were several major differences in attitudes toward food and eating. Overall he found that the French experience less stress and more

pleasure in relation to eating. The French focus more on the experience of eating and the Americans focus more on the consequences of eating. The French seem to consider eating a more important part of life and they incorporate exercise into their daily routines. For example they walk or ride bikes to work and the grocery store. Snacking is rare in France and food is not offered much between meals. The study also showed how the French savor their communal time at the table. In fact, the French eat more slowly even at McDonalds according to Rozin's data. According to his measures, the mean eating time is 22.3 minutes in France versus 13.2 minutes in the United States (Rozin, December 2005). The French tend to eat more slowly because their meals are social, communal, conversational events. Americans tend to worry about food rather than enjoy food. It is culturally acceptable to eat and run in American society, this is encouraged especially in our business sector in hopes that less time spent eating means more time on task.

The cultural structure of meal time is also a factor in our association with food and dinner time. The family meal is becoming less common in the United States and the way in which children are socialized can be detrimental in our relationship with food. In Shohet's study comparing U.S. and Italian meal time socialization, the U.S. parents urged their children to eat, emphasizing nutrition as part of a social contract, with the reward of dessert being the goal (Ochs, Shohet 38). Italian parents, on the other hand, emphasized food as pleasure and oftentimes did not include dessert or use sweets to convince their children to eat the meal. They also did not expect children to eat everything on their plate and assumed they would develop preferences for certain foods just like adults (Ochs, Shohet 40). In addition, Italian families often linked their own positive childhood

memories of a particular dish on the dinner table to help link family members across generations, even bringing back memories of members no longer alive. Food operates as a symbol of care in all social groups and at the same time it can be used as a weapon or threat (Ochs, Shohet 41).

Talking together at mealtime

Communication at mealtime is also an important socialization factor in all cultures, often linked to historically rooted ideologies and practices. Norms of communication can range from complete silence, to shared conversation, to only adults speaking. As Shohet and Ochs cite in their article, mealtimes are dominated by talk oriented toward reinforcing what is right and wrong both within the family unit as well as outside within a larger context. "Morality is socialized through grammatical markings of deference and authority, directives, assessments, justifications, excuses, apologies, prayers, storytelling, and other forms of communicative exchange in which children participate" (43). For many social groups, family mealtimes are cultural sites for recounting stories that may convey a moral message. As Shohet emphasizes, "Meals are cultural sites where members of different generations and genders learn, reinforce, undermine, or transform each other's ways of acting, thinking, and feeling in the world, sometimes through cajoling, begging, probing, praising, bargaining, directing, ignoring, or otherwise interacting with one another in the course of nourishing one's body" (47).

In immigrant families mealtimes were often sites of confrontation for the children. Children often thought of parental food habits as obvious indicators of social inferiority in the eyes of their peers. They longed to assimilate to the American way of life rather than embrace the past. However, more frequently it was a place of negotiating conflicts

and an important way of continuing to cultivate some sense of ethnic identity. As the Italian American scholar Richard Gambino describes his growing up in Brooklyn, "The major meal of the week was the one at which time and circumstances permitted the most leisurely and largest gathering of *la famiglia.* It was the Sunday *pranzo*, which began in midafternoon…and lasted until early evening. It is a relaxed social gathering of the clan, featuring intimate conversations as much as well-prepared courses" (Cinotto 26).

The Communal Meal

The mealtime with traditional dishes often triggered stories and remembrances of past generations and long ago histories. Gambino continues, "In a very poignant way, meals were a 'communion' of the family and food was 'sacred' because it was the tangible medium of that communion" (Cinotto 26).

The Jewish practice of centering the weekly observation of Shabbat and one of the most central of Jewish holidays, Passover, in a shared meal at home speaks to the importance of gathering around the table. Through lighting of candles, saying prayers, and eating special foods parents teach their children that life is lived in the mystery of interdependence with God (Parks 133). The ancient wisdom of the Jewish and Christian people reveal the importance of the ritual of the family meal. The breaking of bread, the passing of wine, the sharing of stories nourishes not just our physical bodies but our spiritual and emotional being as well. As writer and priest Daniel Berrigan wrote in *Love, Love at the End*,

> When I hear bread breaking, it seems almost as though God never meant us to do anything else. It is so beautiful a sound. The crust breaks up like manna and falls all over everything and then we eat; bread gets inside the humans. It turns into what experts call "the formal glory of God." Sometime in your life, hope that you might see one starved woman and the look on her face when the bread finally arrives. Hope that you might have baked it or bought it- or even kneaded that

> bread yourself. For that look on her face, for your hands meeting hers across a piece of bread, you might be willing to lose a lot, or suffer a lot- or even die a little (41).

The gathering at the table within the family is immensely important for all cultural tradition, as it teaches much about our relationship with food. Unfortunately as a society we have not encouraged this way of gathering in our school systems, in fact, we have created an environment of eating that is in direct opposition of the family meal.

Hurry up and eat

Our school lunches are hurried and chaotic. Gathering in a school lunch room consists of eating as quickly as possible, being quiet (if you are in an elementary setting) and trying to be dismissed as soon as possible, in order to get outside to play. There is no cultivation of gratitude for the meal or the community. The fact that for some of these students this is the most significant meal of their day should encourage our school systems to take a look at what we are teaching during this time. Are we teaching and cultivating a relationship with our food and our table companions? If we make the school lunch a communal, nutritional meal time instead of a fast food event, we will encourage a more relational way of being with our food and those with whom we gather. It is imperative that our children learn to cultivate a positive, thankful attitude toward food and the act of eating. For some students, the only place this will be possible is within the schools.

Approaches to the Obesity Epidemic

Wendell Berry observed in his 1977 book *The Unsettling of America:*

> It is clear to anyone who looks carefully at any crowd that we are wasting our bodies exactly as we are wasting our land. Our bodies are fat, weak, joyless, sickly, ugly, the virtual prey of the manufactures of medicine and cosmetics. Our bodies have become marginal; they are growing useless like our 'marginal land'

> because we have less and less use for them. After the games and idle flourishes of modern youth, we use them only as shipping cartons to transport our brains and our few employable muscles back and forth to work.

Although this may seem an extremely critical assessment of the current state of our national fitness level, it is a fairly accurate statement. As we look at our current obesity rate and even reality television with shows like the "Biggest Loser", we see a society that is eating more, exercising less, and unable to decipher what are healthy and unhealthy practices. Our children are most vulnerable when it comes to health, as they do not have the means to care for themselves without an adult, and if adults are not modeling healthy behaviors our children suffer the consequences.

Many single parents cannot afford to feed their children the healthiest options like fruit and vegetables because of the added expense. They are living on a low income and oftentimes have to choose processed food in order to be able to afford to feed their family. This is a poverty of choice: they are unable to choose the best option for their children. Their income and/or location makes it more difficult to get fresh produce or organic food. They may live in a neighborhood that only has convenient stores and are limited by lack of transportation. Convenience stores do not typically carry much produce and organic foods. Oftentimes there may be a fast food restaurant in the neighborhood but no grocery store. In some case, lack of education inhibits parents in their choices. They may not have the time or knowledge to cook nutritional meals.

The Bronx

In the U.S. food insecurity affects 22 percent of Native Americans, Hispanics, and African Americans and 8 percent of White Americans (www.breadfortheworld.org). A person is food insecure when they are unable to access an appropriate and adequately

healthy food supply to maintain a productive life. Nearly 1 in 3 children in Head Start programs is obese, and almost half are overweight or obese (Matt, Ellis 1). Weight gain occurs when more calories are consumed than are used during activity. Eating sensible portions of nutritious food and exercising regularly are important components for a healthy lifestyle. In the South Bronx, one of the most food insecure places in the nation, more than 4 in 10 (43%) public high school students say they do not exercise at least 20 minutes per day, and nearly 6 in 10 (59%) watch TV at least 3 hours a day (Matt, Ellis 4).

Fat and Hungry

The hungriest people in America today may not be sickly skinny, but excessively fat. People are food insecure if they lack money to buy food at any given time. This is often the case in the Bronx, and oftentimes children in this type of household are malnourished. For example, in the movie *Precious*, the main character is morbidly obese but lacks basic nutrition in her diet; consequently she is simultaneously obese and malnourished. In one scene she eats an entire bucket of fried chicken and proceeds to throw it up. She may be getting plenty of calories from eating a fast food meal but her intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is minimal. Her body may not show it but she is literally starving for nutrients.

In *Super Size Me*, another film that raises the issue of obesity in America, we see how fast food has largely impacted the obesity crisis. “72% of the people that eat McDonalds are ‘heavy users’ meaning they eat there at least once a week,” according to Morgan Spurlock the film maker. We spend more than half our food dollar on food

consumed away from home. We spend more money on fast food than on movies, magazines, newspapers, videos, and music combined (Freeman 2222).

Middle-class households most often have two parents working full time. Oftentimes children of these households are overscheduled; attending soccer, drama classes, gymnastics, music or an array of other activities may lead to fast food, microwavable dinners, snack packs or other quick, processed food being eaten on the run several times a week. Although the harm caused by over consuming fast food cuts across race and class lines, the obesity crisis is currently effecting low income people of color at a dramatic rate.

Poverty Matters

Income is a major factor in children's nutrition and the most serious dietary issue effecting today's American children is obesity. Lack of access to healthy foods is one of the major contributing factors. As May Rockeymoore, from the National Urban League said, "In some neighborhoods, it's easier to get an artery-clogging piece of fried chicken than it is to get a fresh apple. Many urban community dwellers would love to have better eating habits, but if there's no grocery store nearby, you're talking about getting on public transportation with a grocery cart" (Brownell 40). There is a large imbalance of cost in healthy and unhealthy foods. Convenience stores charge twice as much as grocery stores for the same items.

As Brownell points out in his book, there is a grave injustice in what is available to the inner city dweller. He sites the report the Center for Food and Justice at Occidental College on food conditions in inner city Los Angeles. Among the key findings from the report were: the average supermarket in L.A. County serves 18,649

people, while the number is 27,986 in low-income areas; the higher concentration of poverty in a given area, the less likely there will be supermarkets, and there are more supermarkets in white than in African American and Latino communities (Brownell 209). West Oakland, California, a neighborhood of 30,000 people, the majority of whom are African Americans or Latinos, has one supermarket and thirty-six liquor and convenience stores (Freeman 2221). This is a form of food oppression.

Many health problems

Pediatricians are now reporting children with high levels of serum cholesterol, high blood pressure, and adult onset diabetes at earlier and earlier ages. All of these are due to caloric intake (Nestle 175). Being overweight can impair school performance. Asthma, joint problems, depression, anxiety, and sleep apnea are other medical conditions that have been linked to obesity (Story, Kaphingst, French 110). The social implications of being overweight are many; the bullying behaviors from other students, and the low self-esteem or loneliness this may cause may also be a factor in absenteeism.

There are several different factors working with regards to our obesity crisis but the two main factors are overeating and under exercising. We are a nation that no longer engages in daily exercise. We no longer walk or ride our bikes to school. We don't even have physical education everyday in our schools. As of 2000, Illinois was the only state to require daily physical education in all schools. Even more shocking was the fact that only 12 percent of states require elementary schools to give students regularly scheduled recesses (Story, Nanney, Schwartz 86). One study found that

children spend only twelve to thirteen minutes daily engaged in vigorous physical activity, compared to ten hours of sedentary activities (Brownell 78).

Social and cultural paradigm shift

This is a product of our cultural and social priorities and the shift to sedentary lifestyles has happened gradually but has great implications for our future and the future of our children.

Children who are not encouraged to exercise often times do not. Our forms of entertainment have drastically changed in the computer age. We entertain ourselves with video games, television, and the internet which keeps us sedentary while barraging us with advertisements for products (including fast food). The more time children spend in front of a screen, the less time they spend outdoors or exercising. We have created a generation that has learned to communicate on line; personal interactions with people, nature, and our community are less frequent and this comes as a detriment to the child both physically and socially.

Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act

Given that one in five children are obese or overweight, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, it is not surprising that our children's school lunch has been at the forefront of recent legislation, the most prominent being the "Improving Nutrition for America's Children Act." This bill was passed in the House and will improve the quality of meals by adding six cents per child to the budget, encouraging partnerships with local farms and will improve food safety. It allots $8 billion over ten years to achieve these goals. "From our view (the Improving Nutrition for Children Act) is really the best child nutrition bill that we've ever had. It includes stronger nutrition

standards and grants for farm-to-school programs," says Gordon Jenkins, program manager for Slow Food USA (http://latimes).

The U.S. House of Representatives gave final approval to another bill requiring schools to provide more nutritious school meals and vending-machine offerings. This bill also encourages schools to develop relationships with local farmers to serve more locally grown foods. It also aims to make more students eligible for school meals. As Senator Harkin of Iowa put it, "For too long, we have allowed the unchecked sale of junk food in our schools to undermine not just the health of our kids, but also the desires of parents, and our taxpayers' investment in school meals" (*Omaha World Herald* December 30, 2010). The bill reimburses schools by six more cents which will help cover the cost of serving more nutritious meals. As Tammy Yarmon, Omaha Public Schools director of nutrition services said, "Cooking more nutritious meals will definitely cost more."

California recently passed legislation that restricts the fat, sugar and calories of competitive foods sold in the elementary schools. An Illinois resolution adopted in 2003 urges the U.S. Department of Agriculture to update and improve the nutritional quality of food packages covered by WIC and to update nutritional labeling and nutrient targets to reflect current science at least every 10 years. There is still much to do regarding our school lunches and improving the quality and health of what we offer. We must continue to be a voice for the children as well as educate our children about healthy practices for overall wellness. Educating our children about food and nutrition can be a cross-curriculum endeavor. Showing our children the interconnectedness of food to the world enables them to relate to experience and see food in a different way. The final part of my paper will offer some examples of how to incorporate this into the classroom.

V.

Curriculum Options/Bringing Food into the Classroom

In order to bring food to the entire curriculum, we must look at it as an interdisciplinary subject and allow students to experience, understand, and learn about food through many different lenses. We will look at food throughout the curriculum and give some examples of what a unit based on food might look like in each discipline or across disciplines. Many of these lessons will be cross curricular in nature because the topic of food is broad and complex. I will, in each lesson, attempt to connect it in some way to the school lunch.

Social Studies (History/Geography):

Unit: Breads around the World:

All countries and cultures have some form of bread. Bread is the world's most widely eaten food and has been a main part of the human diet since Prehistoric times. There are three main types of breads: yeast breads, quick breads, and flat breads. The first lesson could focus on breads around the world. How many different grains are used to make bread? Wheat, corn, and rice are the three main grains in the world. These three grains provide more than half the world's food from plants. The history of wheat, corn, and rice should be a large part of the first lesson.

Lesson two:

How is each grain cultivated and what climate and environment does this crop thrive in? Rice thrives in tropical areas because it requires a warm, wet climate. Rice is grown in more than 100 countries. Corn, on the other hand, can be grown in most mild and tropical regions. It will grow wherever there is suitable soil and must have freedom from

frost and cold nights for at least 60 days. Corn grows best in the Northern Hemisphere where daily July temperatures are in the 70 to 80 range. Wheat is by far the world's most cultivated crop and grows in fairly dry and mild climates. In general wheat needs lots of sunshine and temperatures of between 70 to 75 degrees.

Lesson three:

Distribute a map of the world. The students must use the information they have gathered to identify the bread which goes to the region or country it represents. Share with students details about the best climate and top grain producing countries or regions for each grain. What do they notice about the regions and the grains found in each region? How would a climate of the country affect the kind of bread the people eat?

What particular breads does your family prepare or eat related to holidays, religious ceremonies, or special occasions? Does your family use old family recipes? If so do you know what culture or country this comes from? What breads have you heard about but never tried?

Lesson four:

Lesson four could revolve around actually baking different types of breads from different cultures. Invite observations about taste, texture, smell, and color and guess the main grain within each bread. Ask students to break into groups and research one particular bread, not only presenting an oral report to the class but relating it to their own cultural heritage. Encourage the students to research breads that are important in their cultural heritage and share their findings with the class.

Lesson five:

Ask them how bread connects to a good nutritional diet. Look at grains in the Food Guide Pyramid. A balanced diet consists of a certain amount of grains and a large percentage of the world depends on these carbohydrates as a main source of energy. Corn, rice, and wheat are essential to the world's food supply. Donuts, muffins, and sweet rolls are also made from grains. The grains' nutrition is compromised, however, with all the sugar and fat added. Discuss with the class the difference between a plain bagel and a glazed donut, not just in calories but also in nutritional benefits. Ask them what they had for breakfast. Did they have any grains? If so were they healthy grains or laden with fat or sugars? Read a breakfast school menu and find the grains within the menu. Are they healthy grains? Are their many different choices and is one significantly better than another? For example you have the choice between Apple Jacks or Raisin Bran what would be the healthier choice? Why?

Physical Education/Health

One of the first connections to make to our NSLP and our relationship with food in general, is our physical bodies and overall health. We must teach students the connection between what we put into our bodies and how that affects our physical well being. One curriculum idea would be to implement a Fitness and Food unit.

Fitness and Food Unit

You want the student to make the connection between how much food you intake and how much exercise you get. First take a look at the typical school lunch meal. How many calories are you eating? What is a calorie? How do you measure a calorie? Does the cafeteria provide you with the calorie information? If not, how can we research the school lunch in order to find the information? Divide the students into small groups and

ask them to research the calorie count of a typical school lunch. If they have difficulty in obtaining the information, ask them to present that to the class.

Lesson two

Connect the information you obtain about the calorie count of a school lunch to a physical education class. Our activity is flag football. Our P.E. class is forty five minutes long. How many calories are we burning in our P.E. class? If this is the only activity we do all day, did we burn the appropriate amount of calories for our daily caloric intake? If this a high school class that has many options in the lunchroom you could ask, did you make unhealthy choices or smart choices in the cafeteria line?

Lesson three

Each student would be given a step counter. They must wear the step counter all day, everyday for an entire week. We are trying to assess how much exercise we get in our everyday activities as well as our vigorous exercise times. This will help the students see if they are moving a lot during the day or are leading sedentary lives that need more activity. After a week of calculating our steps the students will chart the activities, and will make a self assessment on whether or not they are getting enough exercise. Simultaneously the students will be recording their food intake for the week in a food journal. This will allow them to see the relationship between exercise and eating.

Biology: Start a Garden

One way in which to connect students to their food is to start a semester long project of planting a garden. Planting, cultivating, and tending a garden of vegetables and flowers can be a transformative experience for some students. As Mollie Nicholie, the coordinator of Growing Minds, the Farm to School part of the Appalachian

Sustainable Agriculture Program, points out, “It is a myth that children won’t eat healthy food. If they have a connection to it saw it growing on a farm, met the farmer who grew it, grew it themselves, or helped prepare it they will eat it” (Poppendieck 238).

One of the biology standards is how people interact with their environment. School gardens can introduce students to vegetables and herbs and soil in a truly personal way. Connecting to nature in this personal way can enable students to understand the food system in a different light and perhaps become more invested in what they eat.

Lesson One:

How the Earth Becomes Food. This lesson will focus on how things grow and decay. For example we will define the nitrogen cycle and go over terms such as soil formation, photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, mineralization, and nitrification. The students will diagram the soil nitrogen cycle.

Lesson Two:

Research what it takes to plant a garden. What type of soil is needed?

What is in our local soil? Find out how to test the soil in the area you will plant your garden. Does the soil need anything added to it to make it a better planting soil? Are the sand, silt, and clay in equal proportions or do we need to add something to the soil? Where would an ideal location for the garden be? A good area is easily accessible and receives at least 6 hours of sunlight a day. Ask the students to find areas on the school grounds that might be feasible.

What vegetable, flowers and herbs will we plant? How do these plants interact or enable one another? How do we fight pests without toxic substances? What types of bugs could be detrimental to the garden? What type of bugs might be good for the garden?

Plan the dimensions of your garden. You would need to find somewhere on campus to plant that has enough sun and access to water. What plants you will grow? In most cases, the peak growing season does not coincide with the school year. Can we plant in spring and harvest in summer when school is out? Starting some plants in the classroom with each person responsible for the watering of one plant would be a good way to begin.

Lesson two: Sustainable Horticulture

First break the students into groups of four. Each group determines a group leader and a group recorder. Begin a group discussion on what sustainable horticulture means to them. What are key components needed to practice sustainable horticulture? Have each group come to a consensus on a definition of sustainable horticulture. Share with the entire class, remembering each person's ideas are important.

Now give some diverse definitions of Sustainable Horticulture. Are they similar to the classes? Hand out a list to each group containing words and terms relating to agriculture. Ask the groups to decide which of the principles and practices are sustainable and which are not.

Lesson Three: Understanding Food Pathways

Break the classroom into groups of four or five. Ask each group to choose a fresh produce item of which they will track the production and distribution pathway. Encourage the students to pick a locally produced item that can be grown in the region. Have the students develop interview questions to ask the local producer in order to trace the pathway of the item. The students must be able to identify all parts of the pathway from the farm to the grocery store. Invite the local producer to the class.

Biodiversity standards will recognize changes in organisms and also recognize seasonal changes in animals and plants. One unit could focus on crop diversification and why this has less impact on the land, including soil conservation. You could focus on a local farm. How much petroleum does it takes to make one acre of corn or wheat or soy? Has the topsoil erosion affected the crop? Is overproduction a problem? How dependent is our agricultural system on fossil fuels and how do we calculate that?

In this unit you could teach the environmental impact of our food system. One of the curriculum standards is our relationship to and our impact on our environment. One unit could be the impact of meat eating on our environment. How is oil involved in our food system and how much oil does it takes to produce one cut of meat? We grow more corn for livestock and ethanol fuels than for humans. As a Midwestern school we could think about taking a field trip to one of the area farms or meatpacking plants. What meat do we eat in our families? Do we know any vegetarians? How do they get protein in their diets?

Economics

Unit one: Ask the students if they know how much the average American spends on their food per month. How has this changed historically? Ask the students to research

one of the major agricultural food producers, such as ConAgra or Nabisco. How much does this company spend on advertising? How did our entire food industry become the dominated huge business conglomerate it is today? Have any family farms survived? Research the connections between large agricultural companies (fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicide manufactures) and agricultural distributors (the packers, processors, packagers, distributors, marketers, and retailers). How have farm subsidies and our federal government affected our food system?

Lesson two: Ask the students to pick one local food producer. Ask them to research what a farm laborer makes a day for that particular product. Is it a just wage? Locally, you could look at the meatpacking plants or the dairy farms. You could look locally at our legislative body and how our food system is important to who stays in office and why. For example, in Iowa the pork industry and the corn industry are important and legislators and senators try to protect farmers, manufacturers and producers.

Environmental

Lesson One: This unit could focus on the use of fossil fuels in the farming industry. Break the class into groups. Ask the groups to pick one product and track this one product from the farm to the grocery store. Focus on a product not typically produced in the region and track the cost this product might expend in fossil fuels. The students, as a group, could brainstorm and record possible solutions to the problems of our food being transported from across the country or world, such as local markets, diversification of farms, and re regionalizing food. You could track just one food item to your table – from planting, production, transporting, grocery store, etc. Show the impact the choices

of what we buy can have an impact on the environment. List ten everyday things you do that have environmental impact on the Earth.

Lesson two: Could focus on the impact of pesticide use in farming on our environment as well as our health. Another issue you could focus on is the new factory-like, confined animal feeding operations. You could look at issues of animal welfare as well as food safety. How do pesticides or Confined Animal Feed Operations (CAFOs) affect our health and the health of our planet? Write a paper on the impact of pesticides or CAFOs on our environment.

Ethics

One of the more pressing issues of our current food system is malnutrition. One form of malnutrition flows from eating too much of the wrong choices from an abundance of available foods and the other derive from not getting enough food when there is plenty of food in the world to adequately feed every person alive. We have both aspects here in the United States. Is such a contradiction wrong? Is it an ethical issue? Can systems and not just individuals be unethical?

Language Arts

Unit One: Read the novel *The Grapes of Wrath.* Chapter one: What does the imagery in chapter one bring to your mind? How are the Joads connected to the land throughout the novel? Discuss the injustice of the food system as portrayed in chapter twenty five. How are the Joads treated in each working camp they encounter? Who do the Joads represent in today's society? Write a reflective paper about the following quote from Tom Joad about his friend the preacher (570)

"He didn' duck quick enough. He wasn' doing nothin' against the law, Ma. I been thinkin' a hill of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan'

> layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch-" (Steinbeck 570)

Nutrition

One of the main lessons of this unit would be to create a meal together. The first lesson would be about what makes a complete and healthy meal. We would generate ideas for our meal from the class. What components of the food pyramid would we need to hit all the major food groups? What is your favorite meal and why? Does your favorite meal have all the components necessary to make it healthy? Once we have all the ingredients for our meal, we must find recipes for each item. For everyone to participate, dividing the class into working teams would be the easiest way to implement each task at hand. Math skills, communication skills, time management skills, and cooperation will be needed for this lesson.

Lesson Two: How food becomes us. Looking at the anatomy and physiology of the human digestive system would be the focus on this lesson. Digestion involves the mixing of food, its movement through the digestive tract, and chemical breakdown of the large molecules into smaller molecules. Using a diagram of the digestive system ask the students to color each part and describe what that particular part of the system does.

Conclusion

There are many other ways to incorporate food into the school curriculum; these are just a few ways of showing students the interconnectedness of food to the subjects they are studying. Educating our children has always been a priority in our country. We believe our children are the future and that a good education is the foundation of our

democracy. Educating our children includes teaching them the importance of the role food plays in our history, culture, and health. It should also include a holistic look at our children as social, emotional, physical and psychological people. We should be educating the whole person.

Our food system intersects with every aspect of our society and culture, and after researching the National School Lunch Program I understand how important it is to our nation, our planet, our children and future generations. Changing our entire food system may seem a bit overwhelming and unrealistic, but there is a growing movement in this country toward locally grown and organic food choices. This movement is a growing, vital entity that could make a difference in our system with purchase and political power. It is possible to change of our way of thinking about food and teaching our children a new paradigm can begin the process. Our school lunch program can provide healthy, local produce to our children regardless of income or region, and this will impact our nation's health for the better.

Our federal government has seen the need for a shift as well and on Thursday, June 2, 2010 presented a new symbol of healthy eating to replace the food pyramid. The new graphic resembles a plate containing the recommended amount of food it should contain for each meal: half a plate of fruits and vegetables, and the other half protein and grains (Omaha World Herald, June 3, 2011). This graphic reinforces the need to consume more fruits and vegetables. Nationally, fewer than one-third of adults eat fruits or vegetables a couple of times per day, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (OWH). If we allow children access to fresh fruits and vegetables at

lunch time (and possibly breakfast as well), we are cultivating the taste for healthy, wholesome foods and teaching children to make good choices.

Teaching our children healthy living choices will also make them healthy adults that have a voice in how our government produces, manufactures, and advertises food. Food is a justice issue and the National School Lunch Program is a vital link to creating and sustaining a fair system for all children.

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Appendix A

Interview with Tracy Wassabaum Nutrition Specialist at Westside Public Schools.

Okay, so we are trying - - we are doing farm to school and local farmers. We have Blair, Norfolk, and I think those are the two local areas right now that we're receiving produce from. I can give you exact produce if you want it. We have zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelon, muskmelon, those are just the ones that come off.

Now, are they serving all different schools or are they going to one specific school?

Nope. They would be all the schools. Now our elementary schools have a published monthly menu and what I do is I take that menu and I complete a nutritional analysis using a computer program and then that analysis is posted on our website, so parents who have diabetic children can go and count carbs or any other parent who is health conscious can go in and count fat grams or whatever they need to do or calorie count and they can look at the nutritional content of the menu. The middle school and the high school publish not necessarily publish but they post a weekly menu on a school communication that's called Blackboard. I'm not sure if you're familiar with that.

Yeah.

And so then the kids can go on Blackboard and see, well yeah I'm take a lunch on Wednesday, I don't like what they're having. I don't do nutritional analysis just because they serve - - not just because, but there's a salad bar every day. There's two hot entrées, two hot vegetables, including 2-3 cold vegetables and then a wide variety of fresh fruits and canned fruits, yogurts and cheese sticks and uncrustable sandwiches which are peanut butter and jelly packaged sandwiches that have the crust cut off. So there's just such a wide variety of foods. I do work with the school nurse for any children or any students that are diabetic or have any special needs. We do specifically work one on one with them. They have to visit the school nurse for insulin, blood sugar checks, most of them have pumps now, so it's just a matter of entering in the number and then it's automatic, or I should say it regulates it rather than getting shots. A lot of the student just have the pump. So anyway.

Okay, you've answered a bunch of my questions. Let me just back up and can you introduce yourself and let me know how you got into food service or what brought you to service or what is your background?

Okay. My name's Tracy Wassabaum[?]. I've been with Westside 66 Schools for six years. I am the nutrition specialist. I have a four-year degree. I have a degree in dietetics. I am not a registered dietician. I just haven't completed an internship and then the exam. Got married, started having kids, so - - my work experience, I was a dietician for the WIC program and then took a small break and also worked part time as a dance teacher but that has nothing to do with my degree. But it worked well with our schedule and kids and when I was ready to come to back to work full time, this opportunity arose, so I was able to get the job and so I've been here for six years.

So you're the whole entire Westside district, so it's District 66 Nutrition Specialist?

Right. And so we have 10 elementary schools and we have a middle school, high school. In this building is what they call the career center or what was formerly known as the Alternative School, so it's high school students who are having trouble with the mainstream - -

I didn't know you had that.

So if they're having trouble for whatever reason with what I would call mainstream schooling, then there's the alternative school which is available to them and then also the learning community has a school. It's called a Focus School at Underwood, Underwood Hills, and it is our nutrition service program at that school because of our building - - is a Westside community building, so it was our equipment in the kitchens and so anyway it is our program. So considering that it is 11 elementaries that we serve including the Focus School.

Now, if I get on a website, do you have a mission or a nutrition policy or wellness…where would I find that? Or, speak to that.

Yep. Okay, the nutrition services does have a mission statement. I can provide that for you.

Is it on a website or do you know?
I believe - - we also have a wellness policy. The district has a wellness policy and it is included in that and I can provide a copy of that if you'd like.

What would you consider your primary goal as a nutrition - - for the district or what's your primary goal for the students of your district. Like, for example, OPS has a wellness policy that says, we want to help students eating behaviors.
I'm going to defer that to Diane. When we talk about policy, that would be something that we need to talk to Diane about. She does want to visit with you. She's willing to do it in person or just over the phone, whichever - - and she says I'll give her all the things she needs.

Okay. That'd be great.
But when we start talking about policy, I usually - - defer to Diane.

Sounds good. Just within your last six years, have you witnessed changes in the nutritional - - have you seen a lot of changes?
Yes. We have. We have. As always, there's trends. The trend right now is whole grain. A lot of local manufacturers such as Rotella[?] are coming out with new products that are the whole grain, not necessarily 100% whole wheat, but whole grain and opposed to the enriched white bleached flour and it's - - I'm not exactly sure but it's a softer bread than the whole wheat or 100% whole wheat but it's not enriched so they consider it whole grain. Then a lot of the manufacturers that sell to food service type operations have come out with products that are whole grain. A lot of products - - well trans fat. Trans fat has been almost eliminated from all products. It is just amazing. We are trans fat free. So, but at first it was a little bit of a challenge but as the year went by, it was just amazing how easily these companies were able to remove trans fat from their products. So trans fat, whole grains and there was one more.

Milk, anything with milk? Are they going more lowfat milk, lowfat dairy?

That, for us the change was we had been - - since I've been with the district it's been skim milk and

For the whole time you've been here?

Yes. But, during our coordinated review, every five years the school district has a coordinated review from kind of our governing body, which is the Department of Education Common Nutrition Services that's run through the State in Lincoln, I should say through the college in Lincoln and they come and they do a coordinated review, which means they go through - - they spend time with us and they go through all of our recipes and nutritional analysis and they do their own nutritional analysis of our schools and their lunches to see if I'm meeting the requirements and one of the things that came up is that the USDA National School Lunch Program requires us to serve a variety of fatted milk and we were only serving skim. And the intention of that policy was I'm sure to get school districts to come down from whole to 2% or from 2% to 1%. Well, here we're already at skim and we're not being forced to offer 1%. So our schools offer skim chocolate, skim strawberry and skim white in bottles and then we offer 1% milk in cartons and just 1% white.

I know you talked a little bit about this with the farm to school program, do you have any way a student like in high school if they are having weight issues can look at the calorie intake when they are - - like can they go to a website and say this is how much?

Not at this time. There's so many - - our high school cafeteria is set up like a food court. It is kind of in an L shape and they can move around from bar to bar, the salad bar, the dessert bar, the sub bar, they can order sub sandwiches, just like you would at Subway and put your toppings on and then they have three hot bars and those bars rotate and the fry bar. So except for those rotating bars, we do have - -not plans in place but one of our goals is to provide nutritional information and then post it not necessarily something just on a piece of paper but to have it on a sign above each bar so the students can - - French fries are this many calories and this many fat grams. Salad bar you know your salad dressings is this many calories and fat grams, but we kind of are stumped on how to do it

for the bars because there's sometimes when we - - stuff - - like you know we always do corned beef and hash during St. Patrick's Day and do more comfort foods during holidays. Like we'll try to do a nice Thanksgiving dinner and so those things that - - there's some things that we only serve once or twice a year. We try to do Ruebens in the wintertime and so that's not something we serve on a regular basis. So I don't know if we would be able to have [?] up - - we haven't figured out how we're going to handle that.

If a student is subsidized or they get a free lunch, they can do anything though? They can go to any area of the cafeteria?

Absolutely. They are required to pay a reimbursable lunch and if they choose to have something ala carte or like a double serving, what we call seconds, then they are required to pay for that. Are you familiar with what a reimbursable lunch is?

I don't know.

A reimbursable lunch is five components. It must contain meat or a meat alternate. A meat alternate would be like cheese, eggs, beans, something like that. It must contain a grain, a bread, so that could be any type of bread but it could also be rice. And we consider potatoes a vegetable, even though they are a high start content, they are considered a vegetable and then milk and there's no substitution for milk, 8 ounces of milk, and then fruits and vegetables and they put fruits and vegetables in the same grouping but they say that you can have - - the rules state that you can have two from that grouping. So they can choose two fruits but they have to be two different kinds of fruits or they can choose two vegetables but they have to be two different kinds of vegetables or they can choose one or the other. So a student could come through with applesauce and strawberries or an apple and a banana or a student could come through with French fries and maybe some steamed broccoli, they could get that but if a student chose apple juice and an apple, they can't have that. Mashed potatoes and French fries, they can't have that. So that can get kind of tricky. So out of those and then this is for all of our school levels, we exercise offer vs. served and so a student can deny two of those components and it will still count as a reimbursable meal. They can deny one or two. So if they take everything but the milk, it still counts as a reimbursable meal. If they take

everything but the milk and the vegetable, it still counts.

But can they go to a salad bar or they can do all that?

Absolutely. Mmm hmm. As long as they have the three components.

How much time is typically given to like high school lunch, elementary, is it all the same time or?

No. The high school runs on a modular system and every student's schedule is different. It's very complicated. So some students may have 20 minutes to eat. Some students may have 80. Just depending on let's say and they don't have like scheduled study halls. They students are free to go to what they call IMCs or if they choose to spend their time in the cafeteria during lunch, that's their choice. IMCs are like independent study centers and they have one for each language, for language, for social studies, math, and so it's designed so you can go if you're having trouble with math, you can go to the match IMC and get help and so you're not always staying after to meet with teachers, but some students choose not to use that and they are able to sit in the cafeteria if they choose. So some kids have more time than others and I wouldn't say that their schedule's the same every day. Now, in the elementary level it is very scheduled. I believe and the schedules are made by the principals. I believe they have 20 minutes to eat and 20 minutes recess on the average, but that includes going through the line.

Yeah, which is tough.

Which is tough. We have worked with principals over the years because it takes too long to get through the line. We have what is the word, standards that are set and I believe it's 10 seconds per student to go through the line which doesn't seem like a lot but when you have 60 kids lined up to go through the line and once we have kind of - - and we haven't set those standards, those are standards that are set by not necessarily schools but any kind of service - - so we've worked with the principals to stagger their classes so they're not all coming down. Each class depending on how many students needs that many minutes and for the most part when we do time our student they are usually seven seconds or under.

Okay. That is good. Do you make anything or is it a lot of stuff that comes in and then you heat? Are you able to make stuff from scratch? So what does that look like?

Yeah, we do some heat and serve and we do some from scratch. For example, at all levels, elementary and middle school and high school.

Do all elementary schools have a kitchen?

Yes. We have a minimum of two people in every kitchen. Then we have student workers in every kitchen. They help us

Even elementary?

I should say only with elementary and the middle school they're called work-study, so they get paid and then at the high school, I don't know if we have any work study at the high school. We used to but I don't think we do right now. We have a couple at the middle school. I think four or five. But it's nice because they get a little paycheck for that.

That's great.

But getting back to scratch. So, for example, we serve chicken nuggets and that's a frozen product that comes in. It's heat and serve. But also, we serve homemade calzone where our pizza dough is frozen product. We have sometimes if we have the raw ground beef we ground that at our high school, which is our largest kitchen and then we send that out frozen, cooked ground beef frozen up to the elementary. If that is not available sometimes we get that - - then we purchase beef crumbles, but then we have the sauce and the meat and the cheese and we build those calzones in the kitchen. We do spaghetti with meat sauce. We do lasagna. We do chicken enchilada casseroles. We do enchiladas, we do turkey over gravy, open-faced turkey sandwiches. Just this year we've done from raw[?] chicken drum, little legs, not wing drums but a smaller chicken leg. In a couple weeks we're doing from raw pork roast, we're going to do barbecue pulled pork. So I'll show you a couple of our menus.

That would be great.

And I can kind of key on there what is homemade. We do homemade French toast. We're doing a homemade quiche in September.

What's your participation rate of breakfast? Do you have a large participation for the breakfast program?

No. Depending on the school and the percentage of free and reduced, that kind of seems to dictate which kids eat breakfast and also if the school has what we call before school care program. They call it Club 66. If the kids participate in the Club 66 program, their breakfast is included in the price of the daycare. In that case, the daycare gets the reimbursement for that. It's kind of like a contract, but including the Focus School, 9 out of 11 schools serve breakfast. We have two schools at this time that don't serve breakfast.

Of the elementary schools?

Of the elementary. They are to start serving breakfast after the first quarter. So finally.

The only other thing, your vision for the national school lunch program, do you seeing it changing a lot in the future, kind of moving the same way it is? You talked about the whole grain and the farm to school program is really exciting to me. What do you kind envision for the future of the national school lunch program?

You know, I really see a change in the regulations. I don't know what Diane sees. That is one question that I do want you to ask Diane too in addition. I see when we worked on the wellness policies, a lot of the emphasis was I think on the ala carte items offered. For example, pop, we do serve pop - - I shouldn't say that, we don't serve, we have a convenience store at the high school, it's called the Café Express and it has a wide variety of foods in there and large milk, large flavored milks, yogurt smoothies that we make but we also serve candy and chips and pop. This year there was a law passed, we only serve diet pop. There is no full sugar pop in any of the drinks such as tea or fruit juices, Gatorade. They can only be a certain weight of sugar and I don't know that off the top of my head what the weight is, but I believe it's equivalent to a low sugar or a diet.

And they did that for the vending machines as well?

Yeah, mmm hmm.

And now are you vending machines on during the whole day or do they have to be turned off at all?

Ask Diane. I'm not sure. It might different for the middle school.

Might be different from school to school.

Elementary schools don't have them. But I think they have vending in the teacher's lounge. It's not available to any elementary schools at all. Middle school I think is after school only and the high school - - I think it's on except for during the lunch hours. Ask Diane for sure.

And so you think regulations might have an impact

The ala carte yeah. I don't know what they would - - I mean the - - in my opinion the requirement for the school lunch reimbursable meal are pretty stringent or it is hard to sometimes make sure that you have enough protein and bread never seems to be a problem or the other part of it is just trying to find new and different ways to introduce vegetables and fruit to make - - because you can offer it but if the kids don't take it you know it's not doing them any good. So we're always looking for different ways to serve vegetables and make sure kids get the vitamins they need. So I think the change we're going to see is what they allow for ala carte. So and we offer no ala carte foods in the elementary. We do offer ala carte things in the middle school and high school such as Gatorade and - - we do chips and they are baked chips rather than fried, baked Cheetos, Bake Doritos, things like that, Sun Chips. So that's where I see. But please do ask Diane that. She may have a different kind of take.

I really appreciate your time. This was very helpful for my paper. I know you're a busy person, so I really appreciate it.

My pleasure.

Thank you very much.

Let me give you my card and also Diane's card. So please call her.

[END]

Appendix B

Interview with Tammy Yarrow Nutrition Director of Omaha Public Schools

Good morning, Nutrition Services, this is Tammy. May I help you?

Hi Tammy, this Jen Kennedy from Creighton.

Hi.

How are ya?

Fine.

Are you okay with…

Yeah, that's fine. We can go ahead and do that now.

Okay, super. I am recording it just so I have a transcript of it, but it won't be used any other way.

Okay.

So, my first question is: How long have you been in food service management?

I've been here in Omaha Public Schools since 1990 and prior to that I was in college food service.

And where were you there?

Concordia College, Carney State College, Briarcliff College and then I traveled some other colleges.

Oh wow, Concordia in Oregon?

No, here in Nebraska.

Oh okay, very good. Okay, so you have a lot of experience obviously in the industry.
Correct.

Okay, so one of the wellness policies in OPS's website says the primary goal of nutrition education is to influence students' eating behaviors. How do you think OPS is doing that now or what are some ways that you're implementing that wellness policy?
Are you talking about as far as nutrition education or the wellness policy as a whole?

I think the nutrition education in particular.
Okay, well the nutrition education part of it there is nutrition education that occurs in the classroom through some of the teachers, through the P.E. teachers and through the nurses. Additionally, from our office I have two dieticians on staff who also go out into the classrooms, plus we have newsletters, daily nutrition tips, it's on our menus, posters, flyers. We do two nutrition education campaigns every year. We do 5 to 9 a Day in September and we do Nutrition Month in March.

And when you say your dieticians come in the classroom, are they giving helpful hints? Is it a dialogue or what do they normally do?
It depends on what the teachers ask them to do, what the topic per se. If a teacher says you know I'd like to have you come in and talk about healthy snacking or I'd like to have you come in and talk about

fruits and vegetables, it's whatever you know the teachers would like to have them do.

Okay great. And since you've been at OPS have you witnessed a lot of changes or some changes?

Oh yes. There's been a lot of changes, especially with our menus. When I started in 2000, that's when we really made the big push towards nutrition education but since 2000 we've you know gone to 1% and skim milk. We've added high fiber breads, whole wheat and whole grains. Our pastas are whole grain, more fruits and vegetables. We do a fruit and vegetable of the month where we introduce something new that the children haven't seen before. So there's been a lot of change since you know since about 2000.

Great. And when - - this is more probably geared toward the high school this question. Does OPS have a uniform vendor policy as far as are the vendors all the same?

No. Each principal of each high school handles their own vending machines and their own contract.

Okay and so is there a vendor policy for the lunch program as far as they have to run off the machines or is there anything like that?

The machines do have to be turned off a half hour at the start of each meal through a half hour at the end of each meal for breakfast and lunch. That's a state regulation.

Is it a federal policy or state regulation?

The state enforces it.

Okay. My paper is getting at the fact that there's an obesity crisis right now obviously. So can a student monitor their calorie intake when they go to their lunch? Is there any way for them to know how many calories they're getting for the lunch program?

Only if they look on our website. We also have posters in the schools that list the calories in everything but there's not anything where the student goes through and adds up their calories.

Okay and so if you're a student that is subsidized, let's say you're getting a free lunch, is there certain things they can get or can they get anything on the menu?

They can get anything on the menu.

Okay, so if they want to get a salad bar or whatever…

Yeah if they want to get a salad or sandwich box or the hot item or yogurt, whatever, they can get themselves.

Okay and in OPS is it a uniform, like everybody has a salad bar? Like does Central have the same thing that North has?

Yes.

So there are sandwiches and salad bars everywhere?

We don't offer like a salad bar per se. We offer a fresh vegetable bar, which has different vegetables and they can have as much of that as they want in the secondary schools but we don't have a salad bar.

Can you give me an example of what would be at the fresh vegetable bar?

Mini carrots, cucumber slices, zucchini slices, radishes, you know romaine mix, cherry tomatoes, just a whole variety of vegetables.

And right now there's a lot of legislation up right now obviously about the school lunch program. What do you see happening for the future of the school lunch program?

I think that whole grains are going to be an emphasis. I think lower sodium. I think more fresh fruits in the morning at breakfast, less juice. I think the calorie count, you know the number of calories required might drop a little. Those are just some of the things I think might happen. I think they're going to mandate 1% or skim milk. Anything over 1% I don't think they're going to allow, but those are just some of the things I think are going to happen.

And typically in each school, how much time does a student get for lunch?

20-30 minutes.

Do you see that changing at all?

No I don't.

All right and then my last question is: Do you feel like the students at least that you come in contact with are fairly educated on nutrition or understand what they put in their bodies is important?

Yeah, I think more so now than it used to be. You know I think with all the you know nutrition education they get in the schools plus in the

media, I think it's better than it used to be. I think as always everything can always improve. I don't think anybody's ever going to be 100% knowledgeable about anything, so I believe that it's always going to be a learning process because you know it seems that science always determines that something's good for you and then a couple years later they say well, you know it might not be that good for you or what wasn't so good for you now is okay to have. So I think it's just always going to be a learning process for everybody.

All right, well thank you so much for your time, I so appreciate it.

Oh yeah. Not a problem. If you have any other questions, give me a buzz.

Okay, thanks so much.

You bet, bye bye. [END]

Appendix C

School Lunch Survey

Name Blair Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

2 times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Pizza because I like cheese

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Soy busers because it is a little burnt

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would have Juice for the types of drinks for lunch

School Lunch Survey

Name Sam Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch? some times
Zero Sometimes One

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?
Chicken or chese But per I just like
it

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?
spagetti Because I don't like
Sause

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?
I Would Make it so kids
could Choose What they would
like to eat

School Lunch Survey

Name Alexis Christiansen Age 10

Please !!

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

Usually none but at least once

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

HOTDOG because it is so delicios

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Pancakes all except and mozzerella sticks and Hotdog because the rest is gross

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

Have things everyone likes and better tasting choices

I would not put pizza but every other week like Lewis Central

School Lunch Survey

Name Jacob christenson Age 9

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

3 times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

hot dogs because there better than everything

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Chesseburger ~~nasty~~

Because thees nasty

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

the Soy burgers to auchual cheese burgers

School Lunch Survey

Name NaThalia Ramirez Age 9

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

3 times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Pizza Because of the chese

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

the BBR Because the meat

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

By Better meat like a Different Brand to make it good

School Lunch Survey

Name Tay Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

5

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Hotdogs because its not under or over cooked

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

grilled cheasse because the cheasse tast unusal

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

adlest 1 or 2 sweets

School Lunch Survey

Name Jassica Levine Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

5

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Mozzarella sticks because it's yummy like my tummy.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

I don't have one.

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

When we have carrots I would put Ranch with them.

School Lunch Survey

Name Cage Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

everyday

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

mozzarella cheese sticks Because of the taste

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

grild cheese it needs to come out of the oven sooner because it tastes Burnt

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

get fresher ingredients

School Lunch Survey

Name Dayton Hiers Age 9 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

all the time

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Chesse pizza Because it is good

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

hamburger Because they taste nasty and Because they are overcooked

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would Change it to where you get to pick what you want out of 3 things

School Lunch Survey

Name Sean Age 9

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

5 days a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

lunch/breakfast because it has ~~panka~~ pancakes

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

ravioli because it looks weird

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

take ravioli out for lunch and have more lunch/breakfast

School Lunch Survey

Name Alyssa Emily Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

All the time
5 times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Nacos because
the Chees

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

grild chees
Because the
Cook it to much

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

Cook it less

School Lunch Survey

Name Hunter Hendrix Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

5 days a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

pizza because it is big and I like the taste

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Grilled cheese because it's to hard

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

there would be more pizza days and have cereal

School Lunch Survey

Name Kebie Baten Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

5 Days

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Pizza because . . .
Well I don't know
Why I just like Pizza.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Grild Cheese
because the cheese
is gross and it
I hate the cheese,

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would for some days
give the kids a free choice
or something like that!

School Lunch Survey

Name William Jones Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

About four times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

the pepperoni pizza because I love pizza.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

the spegatti because it's not really good

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I have spicer and 100 pepperonis and less greasyer pizza.

School Lunch Survey

Name Hunter Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

4 times a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Pizza because I like the crust

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

hamburgers because the cheese it taste like it has the paper still on it

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would not burn the food

School Lunch Survey

Name Hannah Olson Age 8

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

about three or four

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

hot dogs because it's not over cooked

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Ravrol because it's too saucey

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would have desarts instead of gram crakers or teddy grams

School Lunch Survey

Name Ethan Snead Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

3

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

pancakes because they taste good and the meat on other meals taste fake

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Ravioli It's all slimey and gross And I don't like it anymore

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

- warm stuff up better
- get new meat
- get orange juice as a every day drink

School Lunch Survey

Name Jessee Deakes Age 9

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch? 0

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

Make it healthier and let some studenees choose there favorite lunches that they would have at home, and the cafitera Ladys make the some other Days.

School Lunch Survey

Name Amanda Age 9

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

~~Only when there Sacts is good because I really~~ 2 days a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Motzerella Cheese Sticks because there not grass or nothings rong with it.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

I don't like thure pizza to gresse and there Burritos they have Peppers in it.

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would let every body have Breakfast and make it so they have diffent ~~s~~ foods like cheseburger and ~~Stuge~~ Mozzerella Cheese Sticks

School Lunch Survey

Name Sarah Kennedy-craft Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

1 time a week

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

my favorite School lunch is pizza because it is really good but it is Probally not hellthy at all.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

My least favorit School Lunch is hot dogs because I don't like hot dogs + I know what they are Made of.

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would have more coices But you have to have all 5 food ~~groups~~ groups

School Lunch Survey

Name Alayna Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

0

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

hamburger. Because meat is my favrite food.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

nachos. Becase I don't want the cheese And chips together.

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

have more options on sides like chips or fruit.

School Lunch Survey

Name Brennon Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

because they dont taste good every but I do not like most of them

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

pancakes brause they are tasty.

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

grilled cheese it taste horrible oful terrible!

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would make it so it's a cafe and you get to choose what to Eat Out of Sertain foods

School Lunch Survey

Name Paytyn Age 10

1. How many times a week do you eat the school lunch?

2 or 3

2. What is your favorite school lunch? Why?

Pizza because it is the yummy! If it does not taste like Rubber, it tastes like pizza

3. What is your **least** favorite school lunch? Why?

Birdo and mach machos because the meat tasts like Rubber

4. How would you change the school lunch if you could?

I would make more than 2 days a month pizza. Sometimes I have hamberger, chez burger, then berito, three days in a row.