



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 7, 2011

New Fed Guidelines Would Limit Potatoes in School Cafeterias

President Obama and the First Lady are continuing their war against so-called “unhealthy” food, particularly in the nation’s school cafeterias. After first targeting chocolate milk, they are now turning their attention to limiting the use of potatoes in school menus. The endeavor is prompting growers of potatoes to rally against such efforts before the rules are scheduled to take effect next year.



Under the new guidelines, students would be permitted only one serving of potatoes, peas, lima beans, or corn during lunch each week. If, for example, a student consumes a cup of peas or corn on the cob on Monday, the school cannot serve any of the other items for the remainder of the week. Additionally, serving potatoes in any form for breakfast whether hash browns or home fries will likely be outlawed under the new guidelines.

Unsurprisingly, the rules have drawn a sizeable backlash. *The Washington Times* reports,

The regulations, which are now under internal review after the Agriculture Department was flooded with more than 100,000 comments from opponents and supporters, would apply to students who qualify for low-or-no-cost meals under the federal School Lunch Program and would greatly limit what schools could serve up each day.

More than likely, the result of the regulations will be that schools nationwide will eliminate items such as tater tots, hash browns, and French fries. According to Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack, Oftentimes, it isn't the potato it's the way in which the potato is produced or made available to students that may create an issue.

The guidelines were reportedly introduced because research revealed that school cafeterias are serving too much fat, too much sodium, too much sugar, not enough fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy and whole grains.

Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine), whose home state is a large producer of potatoes, reacted negatively to the proposal: The rule simply goes too far. It makes no sense whatsoever. The potato isn't getting the credit it deserves, she insisted, noting that it is rich in vitamins, potassium, and fiber. She also mentioned other advantages of potatoes: They're inexpensive, kids like them, they're easy to store, and they absolutely have nutrient value that can contribute to a healthy diet.

Likewise, the new regulations could potentially have the opposite effect, as students may reject the



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changes and simply not eat the food served to them. Collins explains, If you prepare a meal and it ends up being dumped into the trash, youre not doing those students any good.

The demonization of the potato has some jumping to its defense, including Ron Adams, food service director for Portland schools. The potatoes and some of those other starchy vegetables are part of a balanced diet. Its about how often that those items are on the menu, he explained.

Other critics of the guidelines contend that the effort is yet another big-government push to regulate every single detail of peoples lives.

Those supporting the changes assert that students should be consuming a limited amount of starch and sodium, and that it is the function of schools to meet that need in order to combat child obesity a cause being heavily championed by First Lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack.

Dr. David Heber, director of the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, supports the proposal, [indicating](#), Regardless of whether its baked, boiled or fried, a medium-sized potato packs up to 220 calories and is a food that has been associated with weight gain in the U.S. He adds of school children, Theyre not going to stop eating potatoes. Theyll be eating them at home, and theyll be eating them in restaurants. But I think the school cafeteria should be a place where children learn about healthy nutrition, not a copy of a fast-food restaurant.

However, critics of the guidelines point out that if the school lunches are intended to ensure that students are getting a filling, quality meal at least once a day, then the potato is a good choice because it contains the necessary nutrients to keep students [full](#) longer, such as fiber. The very law under which the school lunches are regulated is called the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, indicating that hunger is still something to be targeted by school menus. Students still require satiability in their diet, and given the small portions that are typically served in schools, opponents of the new rules say they will not reach satiability with a tray full of vegetables.

The National Potato Council predicts that the proposed changes will have an inestimably high cost to farmers in lost sales, as well as an additional \$6.8 billion tab for school districts which will be responsible for purchasing more costly foods under the new guidelines.

Fearful of the impact that the regulations may have on the potato industry, on Wednesday the Potato Council put pressure on the U.S. Department of Agriculture, unveiling a new survey wherein school food service directors nationwide were asked what they thought about the proposed guidelines. The poll revealed that 40 percent believe that the quality of childrens health would actually decrease under the new proposal, while 60 percent expect the cost of running the meal programs in school to increase dramatically. The survey also shows that 65 percent believe fewer students will eat the food presented to them in the cafeterias if the new guidelines are implemented.

Similar assertions were made when the USDA and First Lady proposed removing chocolate milk from school cafeterias. Studies showed that 70 percent of milk consumed in schools was flavored, mostly chocolate. Critics of the ban feared that eliminating the product from the cafeteria would reduce consumption of milk. According to the School Nutrition Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dietetic Association, the American Heart Association, and the National Medical Association, the nutritional value of flavored low-fat milk or skim milk outweighs the harm of added sugar, as milk contains nine essential nutrients, as well as calcium, vitamin D, and protein.

Potatoes have already been targeted under the WIC [Women, Infants, Children] federal program, as low-income pregnant women and their children are now barred from using WIC dollars to purchase



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potatoes.

Constitutionalists warn that the federal governments use of its programs to manipulate the habits of its citizens in such a way is a dangerous precedent, though not an unexpected one. Since federal money inevitably brings federal control, allowing the federal government to go beyond the powers granted to it by the Constitution always presents risks to freedom. Conservative pundit Glenn Beck [likens](#) it to being enslaved by the government: If you rely on someone else to feed you, you do become a slave because you do whatever they say.



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