

**Healthy Future Students and Planet Coalition**  
**Comments on Proposed Rule re: Meal Pattern**  
**NEW Deadline: May 10, 2023**

## **Background**

**Our nation's underfunded schools often do not provide healthy, plant-based options for students.**

School meals are the primary source of nutrition for many kids – but those who prefer or need plant-based options often face scarce options for what is sometimes their *only meal* of the day. The USDA only examines and updates its school meal standards every 5 years, so it is *critical* to voice your thoughts and opinions now when you have the chance! Advocating for plant-based food options, whether for religious, environmental, philosophical, allergy, or other reasons, will help make healthy and climate-friendly foods easily accessible to students across the country. Students deserve nutritious options to fit their dietary needs – **and this is your chance to share your thoughts on the USDA's nutrition standards in child nutrition programs.**

## *How to comment*

A template comment is provided below, and customized based on your wants and needs in the highlighted sections below. If you would like more guidance on what topics to write about - see this [talking points document](#).

There are two options to comment:

1. Directly on [regulations.gov](#)
2. Fill out this [google form](#), and we will submit your comment for you!

## **Template Comment**

May 10, 2023

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

**Re: FNS-2022-0043, Proposed Rule: Child Nutrition Programs – Revisions to Meal Patterns  
Consistent with the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans**

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

[Introduce yourself - your name, where you live, what grade you or your kids are in, and where you or your kids go/went to school]

I am writing to request that USDA expands access to plant-based foods and plant-based milk options in K-12 schools through its new proposed meal patterns. I support these changes because... [add your own reasons for supporting plant-based school food here - you are encouraged to tell YOUR story]

[USDA specifically asked for feedback from students and parents who want to or have tried to get non-dairy milk substitutes. If that is you, please share:

- Have you tried to get a non-dairy milk substitute from your or your child's school? Did you know that you are allowed to request one?
- If so, what was the process like? What worked well and what didn't work well? What would have made it easier for you?
- Were you successful in getting a non-dairy milk substitute? If not, what stood in the way?]

Thank you for considering my comment and trying to improve the child nutrition programs so that every child has access to nutritious, climate-friendly, and culturally appropriate food at school.

Sincerely,

[your first and last name]

### **Example Comment**

*Student Example*

May 10, 2023

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

**Re: FNS-2022-0043, Proposed Rule: Child Nutrition Programs – Revisions to Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans**

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

My name is Sarah Dosanjh. I am 18 years old, and I attended K-12 in a predominately Asian-American school district, Milpitas Unified School District.

I am writing to request that USDA expands access to plant-based foods and plant-based milk options in K-12 schools through its new proposed meal patterns.

I had no dietary restrictions up to high school and frequently ate animal products. In elementary school, I often had to eat school lunch since my parents were constantly working. However, a lot of this food consisted of chicken nuggets, burgers, and cheese. Over time I started asking my mom for hamburgers

instead of my ethnic food. I felt very disconnected from my own culture, and as of now, I am still struggling to reconnect with the food from my own culture. Additionally, I would sometimes try to get the healthier, vegetarian option even though I was not officially registered as vegetarian by the school. I was always denied because of this. I used to wonder why I was not allowed to get the vegetarian options. As I entered junior high and high school, I watched my peers waste food or opt to go hungry instead of eating school lunch. They all felt it was disgusting, the meat and greasy cheese. Moreover, most of my peers are lactose intolerant. However, they were forced to get the dairy milk which they either threw away or it upset their stomach. Looking back, I realize this is not equitable towards BIPOC students, which are majorly lactose intolerant. They are either forced to consume or waste a beverage they can not drink. Many of them have voiced that they want an alternative to dairy milk.

In high school, I went vegetarian in freshman year. I was forced to pick chicken out of my salad as that was the only thing I could eat at school. The only other vegetarian option was PB/J, which is very unfulfilling and not nutritious for a growing teenager. Additionally, a lot of my existing gut problems subsided or completely went away after eating a healthier, vegetarian diet. In my senior year, I implemented more plant-based foods in my school cafeteria. Among these included more ethnic foods, such as lemon rice with garbanzo curry. Dozens of students thanked me for adding these meals; they were delicious, cultural, and healthy. For once, I saw students praise the school food and get excited for lunch, something I never saw with school lunch. Besides plant-based food being healthier for students and better for the environment, I believe the diet culture in school cafeterias needs to change. If we tell our students that the main diet they should have for lunch is burgers and cheesy foods, we are telling them that this is what they should continue eating as they grow older. This encourages diabetes and heart conditions, two recently common issues in the country. School food should be inclusive, exciting, and healthy for all students. They deserve at least the option to pick this type of food. As I enter college, I am grateful my dining halls are more inclusive and centered on eating healthy. We always have the choice to eat healthy. I want to see this reflected in K-12 schools so that students do not have to face the same frustration and struggles I did whilst growing up in public schools.

Thank you for considering my comment and trying to improve the child nutrition programs so that every child has access to nutritious, climate-friendly, and culturally appropriate food at school.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Dosanjh

*Parent Example*

May 10, 2023

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

**Re: FNS-2022-0043, Proposed Rule: Child Nutrition Programs – Revisions to Meal Patterns  
Consistent with the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans**

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

My name is Jane Miller, and I am the parent of a fourth grader at Anonymous Unified School District.

I am writing to request that USDA expands access to plant-based foods and plant-based milk options in K-12 schools through its new proposed meal patterns. At home, we eat meat a couple times a week, but there is meat on the lunch menu every single day at my daughter's school, including processed meat options like deli sandwiches and pepperoni pizza. This doesn't reflect the balanced diet that we would like her to have at school. I'm especially concerned about all of the processed meat since that is a Group 1 carcinogen.

Plus, my daughter is lactose intolerant, and the process to try to get a non-dairy milk option was very confusing. Her school told us we needed a note from a doctor saying she had a disability so she could have soymilk, but lactose intolerance isn't a disability - most people of color are unable to digest lactose. I wish she could just choose not to put cow's milk on her tray in the first place, but instead she takes it and throws it straight in the trash.

Thank you for considering my comment and trying to improve the child nutrition programs so that every child has access to nutritious, climate-friendly, and culturally appropriate food at school.

Sincerely,  
Jane Miller

### **Social Media Actions**

*Post to share (IG):*

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ng4LbyLwdQ6HW0o8FYghovkmwulyLnLj/view?usp=sharing>

*Caption to share (IG):*

Are you someone that is plant-based, vegetarian, lactose intolerant or supports more plant-based, healthier options in your cafeteria? Well this is your chance to make it happen! The USDA only examines and updates its school meal standards every 5 years, so it is *critical* to voice your thoughts and opinions now when you have the chance!

Have you had a hard time finding healthy plant-based options or getting non-dairy milk at your school? What do you wish was different about school meals?

Every experience matters and USDA wants to hear directly from students, so please share! A template comment toolkit with more information and guidance can be found at <https://bit.ly/mealpattern toolkit>