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ACTION SHEET: OVERVIEW OF CONDUCTING A HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCH INITIATIVE

School Lunch

Are you concerned about the lack of plant-based options being served at the school(s) in your community? Across the country, parents and community members have had significant successes working with school nutrition programs to improve lunch offerings. At the outset, you will be well-served by clarifying your objectives, networking with Pod members and other stakeholders in the community, recognizing the challenges you may face, along with the challenges these programs face, and building on that to develop an informed strategy. This Action Sheet offers an overview and some guidance on how to get started, provides resources to help achieve a wide range of goals, and includes a listing (at the end of the document) of organizations that we've identified doing work to advance healthy school lunches - with information from their websites.

Step 1: Who's Involved? Securing Wide Buy-in from the Pod and Forming a Committee

- Determine the level of interest of Pod members, ensure there are enough Pod members interested and committed to working on this, and build ownership early. It may also be worthwhile to understand the nature of their interest, e.g., do they have children that attend the school? Are they involved in the school as a teacher, administrator or food service director?
- Consider making a formal presentation at a Pod meeting and securing a formal commitment of the Pod to participate in this initiative.
- Identify if there are key stakeholders who might be allies (food service director, school nurse or school administrator), and who might want to join the Pod or participate on a wider committee of community members. (Note: Approach the food service director first, before reaching out to other school staff for support).
- Consider what groups in your community would care about this issue. Alumni organizations, sustainability organizations, and local nonprofit groups may be interested and willing to help.
- Identify resources that may be available to support the initiative, such as staff and programs offered by one or more of the organizations listed below.
- Determine how decisions will be made by the Committee and how often the Committee will meet. Clarify how the Committee will operate vis a vis the Pod.

Step 2: Brainstorming - Think about the following when determining the goals of your initiative:

- First things first - Ensure your committee understands the national school lunch program regulations before you start. It is important to be informed of all rules and regulations prior to speaking to a food service director.



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Here is a link to the national school lunch program nutrition standards: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

- What kind of an impact would you like to have on school lunch options?
- Consider the challenges you're up against.
- Research past efforts: find out if any groups/organizations have tried to improve the quality of the school lunches in the recent past (in the target school and/or school district) and learn from their challenges/difficulties.
- Research if there are schools in the region who have successfully implemented changes. Refer to *Info Sheet: Successes Around the Country*.

Step 3: Setting a Goal (List of Potential Goals/Objectives) -

Once the brainstorming is underway, think about what you would like to accomplish and work with your Committee to set a goal(s). Here are some examples of possible goals and suggestions for where you might find information that will support you in pursuing them. Keep in mind that some of these goals may be introductory ways to start, with an eye toward achieving bigger successes later.

1. Institute a Meatless Monday Campaign: Get your school to go meatless on Mondays (or Tuesdays or Wednesdays). Refer to *Info Sheet: Initiating Meatless Monday in a Local School*.
2. Introduce Plant-Based Nutrition Education to Schools: To bring nutrition education into your local school, there are several organizations that might be able to assist you during this process. A few of the organizations that offer educational programs are: [Ethical Choices Program](#), [HEART](#), [CHSF](#) and [PCRM](#). Many of these educational programs include a 'humane' component (i.e., animals).
3. Connect Healthy Food with Gardening/Growing Food: Gardening in your school and community can be an educational and rewarding experience. Empowering children to learn about where their food comes from can help lead them to make healthier food choices. Here are some organizations that offer gardening programs: [Square Foot Gardening Foundation](#), [Slow Food USA](#), [CHSF](#), and [Edible School Yard](#).

Gardening grant: [Whole Kids Foundation Grant](#) - Any nonprofit K-12 school (public, private, or charter) and/or a 501(c)(3) organization that is developing or currently maintaining a garden project on school grounds can apply. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

4. Other Changes to School Lunches/Make Menu Changes: If a Meatless Monday campaign is not viable, explore the possibility of adding one meal/day that is Vegan/WFPB. Check out the programs offered by these organizations for assistance on making changes to the school lunch menu: [HSUS's Forward Food](#), [PCRM's Healthy School Lunch Campaign](#), and [CHSF](#).

Step 4: Considering the Challenges -

Making changes to school lunch programs always comes with its own set of unique challenges that can complicate the process. Please refer to the FAQs, located in the [School Lunch Toolkit](#), for specific questions and issues regarding potential challenges you may face.



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Step 5: Set up a Meeting with the Food Service Director at Your School -

The food service director is the person in charge of planning meals at your local school, and many times for the entire school district. It is important to establish a relationship with the food service director and get him/her on board with your goal early in the process. Ideally, the food service director would be on board when initial outreach is made to HSUS's Forward Food, CHSF, or other organizations.

Organizations that Work to Advance Healthy School Lunches

- **Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF):** A nonprofit that works to get plant-based entrees added to school menus and educate the school community about the benefits of plant-based eating. CHSF accomplishes this by conducting pilot programs, creating educational resources, holding conferences, speaking engagements, workshops, the Healthy School Food hotline, and working to change legislation. To date, the organization has been active in New York, and their plan is to expand nationwide. For more information check out their website: <http://www.healthyschoolfood.org/>
- **Edible Schoolyard:** The goal of Edible Schoolyard's education curriculum is to empower students with the knowledge and values to make food choices that are healthy for them, their communities, and the environment. The lessons are fully integrated into academic subjects and support content standards, Common Core State Standards, and Next Generation Science Standards. At the same time, they are designed to achieve a specific set of edible education learning goals (which are referred to as ESY standards) and life skills, such as communication, personal and community stewardship, flexibility, and perseverance. For more information check out their website: <http://edibleschoolyard.org/>
- **Ethical Choices Program (ECP):** ECP is a nonprofit that is centered around helping students understand the realities behind their choices and the many benefits of healthy eating. They offer videos and activities to help students to identify widespread assumptions about human health, the environment and the use of animals. For more information check out their website: <http://www.ethicalchoicesprogram.org/>
- **Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART):** A nonprofit whose services are specially designed to provide a combined focus on human rights, animal protection and environmental preservation. HEART works in New York City, Chicago, Indianapolis and Portland (Oregon) areas and offers free services to public schools and nonprofit agencies. To learn more visit their website: <http://teachheart.org/>, email them at: email@teachheart.org or call at: (347) 766-7650.
- **Humane Society of the United States (HSUS):** A nonprofit that is leading animal advocacy efforts in the U.S., and also very active in the field of improving school lunches. HSUS has an online toolkit and variety of resources to support schools looking to increase plant-based menu options or launch initiatives, like Meatless Monday, through their Forward Food program. For more information on HSUS's work in the K-12 schools visit the Forward Food website: <http://www.forwardfood.org> and also check out PPC's *Info Sheet: Initiating Meatless Monday in a Local School*.
- **Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM)'s Healthy School Lunch Campaign:** PCRM's Healthy School Lunch Campaign is dedicated to improving the food served to children in schools by educating government and school officials, food service workers, parents, and others about the food choices best able to promote children's current and long-term health. For more information visit their website: <http://www.pcrm.org/health/healthy-school-lunches>



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- **Out Teach:** Out Teach (formerly known as REAL School Gardens) builds outdoor learning labs in low-income schools and then spends years training teachers to use the garden to improve Math, Science, and Language Arts instruction. Certified educators provide on-site one-on-one training with teachers, sharing proven tips and techniques tailored to each teacher's individual needs. For more information, visit their website: <https://www.out-teach.org/>
- **Square Foot Gardening (SFG) Foundation:** SFGF believes in teaching future generations about Square Foot Gardening by bringing SFG to the classroom, whether it's a public, private or homeschool. The goal is to help children learn about growing their own healthy food and be environmentally conscience by practicing the 3Rs. This program helps them to learn science, math, writing and art in a hands-on, fun learning environment with their Classroom Workbook. For more information, visit their website: <https://squarefootgardening.org/2018/07/humanitarian/>
- **Slow Food USA:** Slow Food USA's National School Garden Program supports local Slow Food chapters in their efforts to provide garden and food-based educational opportunities for schools in their communities. They also partner with many national and local organizations, as well as schools outside the Slow Food network, to provide resources and technical assistance to support the long-term sustainability of school gardens. For more information on Slow Food USA visit their website: <https://slowfoodusa.org/school-gardens/>

We welcome you to send suggestions and ideas to info@plantpurecommunities.org. This material may not be used out of context. Please refer to PPC's terms and conditions for more information. Updated May 2021.