

SCHOOL MILK MAKES THE GRADE!

THE SCHOOL MILK PILOT



In the face of escalating rates of childhood obesity and overweight, and heightened public concern about the nutrient quality of foods in schools, a recent study shows that students' milk consumption and nutrition status can be significantly improved by enhanced milk offerings.

In the year-long "School Milk Pilot Test" involving more than 100,000 students in 146 schools nationwide, milk sales increased 22 percent in secondary test schools and 15 percent in elementary test schools after enhancements in milk packaging and merchandising, flavors, varieties and temperature were made. These numbers are significant from a national public health perspective, given that only 12 and 30 percent of female and male teens, respectively, consume the recommended daily servings of dairy foods.

"Based on research, we know that children are drinking less milk while soft drink consumption has almost doubled!" said Stephanie Norris, MS, RD/N of the Dairy Council of Florida. "Children who are not getting their three daily servings of milk are much less likely to be getting the calcium their bodies need. This may put children at greater risk for bone fractures, as well as hypertension and osteoporosis later in life.

"What the School Milk Pilot clearly shows is that children will drink more milk if it is easily available, cold, offered in a variety of flavors and in packaging that is considered cool. Drinking more milk at school can definitely improve the nutritional health of our children and put in place good eating habits that will last a lifetime."

Before the study, 40 percent of children reported they disliked the traditional milk carton offered in schools. That number was cut in half with the

continued on page 2

Pilot Test Result Highlights

- The average daily participation in school meal programs increased over the course of the study in test schools as compared to control schools.
- Not only did milk sales dramatically increase, but consumption improved as well. Children drank more of the milk they took. The average decrease in milk plate waste was 7.2 percent in elementary schools and 5.5 percent in secondary schools.
- Based on survey data, children had a clear preference for plastic packaging over traditional milk cartons. The enhanced bottle was more appealing and was rated "easier to open" by 75 percent of students and "easier to drink from" by 70 percent of respondents.
- Students, particularly in secondary schools, demanded a larger milk package. Not only was the 8-ounce package considered "too small" among survey participants, but when offered the 10-ounce bottle, students drank a significant amount of the additional two ounces of milk.
- The sales and consumption increases suggested the presence of a third flavor was extremely important in maximizing children's in-school milk consumption. A significant majority of the incremental sales came from the strawberry flavor.

April/May/June 2003



(continued from *School Milk Makes the Grade!*
The School Milk Pilot)

introduction of a new plastic package, new flavors and the handling improvements that ensured a more consistent and colder temperature for the milk. In addition, more students reported choosing milk at lunch, and milk plate waste measurements showed that in 8- and 10-ounce packaging, children drank more of the milk they took.

In the student survey, 51 percent of respondents in fourth through 12th grade identify flavored milk as the “type of milk most often drank at school lunch.” This represents a 10-percent increase over pre-pilot survey measures.



Pat Ramos, cafeteria manager for Orlando’s Fern Creek Elementary, experienced these increases at her school. Fern Creek, along with Winter Park High School, were the only Florida schools participating in the study.

“The kids loved it, especially the strawberry plastic bottles,” Ramos said. “It was really our best seller. Milk is so important for their bodies and we try to tell them that. They’re growing up and they’re so young, so it’s very important. Even

the chocolate and strawberry they drank made me so happy because I know they’re still getting what they need from the milk. That’s what we try to impress upon them.”

The Dairy Council of Florida assisted Fern Creek with promotional giveaways and also added a special touch with cow-spot lunch bags. The festivities included a dairy-themed poster contest and another where students had to guess who belonged to a milk mustache by looking at a partial photo of a teacher or administrator. The school’s principal and a teacher even got into the spirit by dressing in cow costumes.

“We had so much fun doing this, but the best part was seeing kids drink more milk,” Ramos said.

Over the course of the study, more students participated in the school meal program after the enhanced milk products were introduced. Average daily participation in meals served was almost 5 percent higher in secondary test schools versus control schools at lunch.

“An increase of this magnitude in school meal participation is significant for children -- from both a nutritional and a performance standpoint,” said Gaye Lynn MacDonald, president of American School Food Service Association. “Research clearly shows us that children who participate in national meal programs have higher intakes of nutritious foods and specific nutrients -- both at lunch and over the course of the entire day. In addition, we know that children who are better nourished perform better in school.”



