

Food Education Every Day!



Vermont FEED



Taste Testing New Foods in the Classroom and Cafeteria

Classroom and cafeteria taste tests were started in the VT FEED program when staff realized that students wouldn't necessarily eat the fresh foods and whole grains being introduced in the school food program. Students needed some experience with the food first, because they can be hesitant to try new foods. In the school lunch line, there is barely enough time to get food and eat, much less be introduced to a new food item.

Even the most creative school food providers have difficulty changing kids' tastes without education. Vermont FEED has found that by connecting the three C's (the Classroom, Cafeteria, and Community) taste tests of new food can be successfully carried out in either the classroom, often during snack time, or in the cafeteria during lunch. The most important thing is to make it a hands-on experience for students; "If they make it they will eat it."

You will need key players involved from the beginning: administration, food service, community/parent volunteers, school nurse, and a least one classroom teacher. Start small and set up a system that can be easily coordinated, hopefully by a volunteer. Whatever food you test, it needs to be at a price and in a form that will work within a school food program. Otherwise you may be exposing students to new foods, but they won't connect it to the school food they see every day.

Taste Testing in the **CLASSROOM**

Some teachers have successfully introduced new foods in the classroom in a short, informal, and regular weekly session. Working with the food service is crucial so that food tested in the classroom will be featured on the school menus. Parent and community volunteers can help organize the taste testing for more than one classroom or provide some of the foods

to be tested. The key is to keep it simple: sliced cucumbers, different types of lettuce, or sliced pear can be part of a dynamic taste testing lesson. Accompanying the tasting with some 'fun food facts' helps students become more familiar and accepting of the new food. Also, if they can be involved in preparing the food to be tested, they will be more likely to eat it.

Excerpt from Janet Lynch, teacher, Milton Elementary School, research on taste testing in her classroom:

Another component of the nutrition education unit was taste testing in the classroom. A study by Baxter and Thompson (2002) reported that children would not eat fruits and vegetables offered in school lunches if they had not tasted them previously. After observing plate waste in the cafeteria, I targeted eight fruits and vegetables that had been on the menu that week. Using observation, I determined how much of a portion the children had eaten.

We then taste-tested four of these fruits and vegetables in the classroom: fresh pears, canned pears, fresh carrot sticks and different types of lettuce. After the nutrition unit, I again observed plate waste in the school cafeteria to determine how much of a portion my students had eaten. Three of the four foods tasted in the classroom showed an increase in the portion eaten by my students. The third item, salad greens, decreased very slightly. The fresh carrot sticks, which increased from 14%

of a portion to 45% of a portion, showed the most significant increase. The fresh pears also showed a significant increase, from 11% of a portion to 25% (see Table 1). On average, the consumption of these targeted fruits and vegetables increased by 59.1%.

I then examined the portions consumed of the four fruits and vegetables not tasted in the classroom: canned corn, canned pineapple, cooked broccoli and canned peaches. The average portions eaten by my students stayed the same or decreased in size (see Table 2).

Although sample size was small, it appeared obvious that taste testing had increased the consumption of the targeted fruits and vegetables. Children's comments also supported the findings that taste testing in the classroom encouraged them to try new foods. They reported being more willing to try new foods at home and in restaurants. The children perceived taste testing in the classroom

as a safe and fun thing to do. Even the children labeled by their parents as fussy eaters were willing to try new foods in the classroom.

TABLE 1

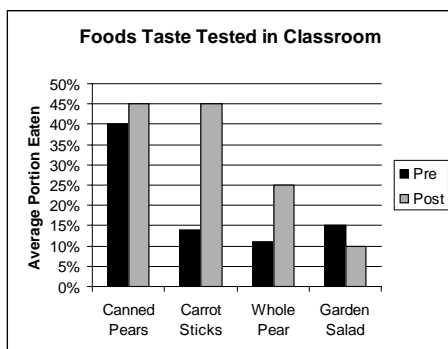
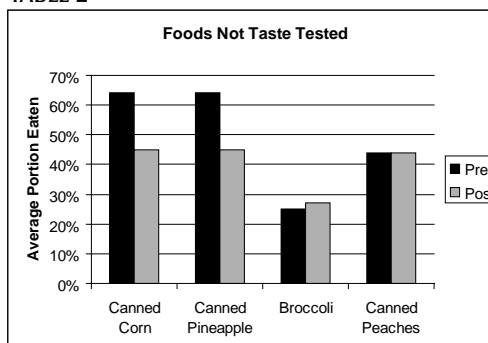


TABLE 2



Taste Testing in the **CAFETERIA**

Successful cafeteria taste tests involve sampling new foods in the cafeteria during lunch, but at a separate tasting table. With some teamwork, and advertising of your efforts, this can build school-wide excitement. VT FEED encourages you, and can help you to find local farmers willing to be partners for testing their products.

A committee of people can share the responsibilities and make taste testing a regular event. As students become familiar with the taste tests, they will become more accustomed to change and be more open to trying new foods.

Keys to successful taste tests in the cafeteria:

- Start with regular taste tests (monthly is usually not too overwhelming to organize) and focus on simple preparation of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Find parents or community volunteers who can coordinate the classrooms with cafeteria activities. The food service staff will not have the time to do this, although they can participate in some parts. Remember to involve them from the beginning in deciding what food to test, where to get it, and how to prepare and serve it.
- Involve students in any way you can to foster their relationship with food service staff.

- Get teachers to involve some students in preparing the food to be tested. It can be as simple as cutting up cabbage or mixing a vegetable and rice casserole. This gives students a chance to become acquainted with the food and the cafeteria staff, and to spread the word about the new food.
- Have someone announce the taste testing on the day it occurs.
- Offer the taste tests during regular lunch on a table that looks appealing (a tablecloth shows that something special is happening!).
- The students who prepared the food often can help serve the samples, at least for some of the lunches.
- It is important to survey students who try the new foods so that students feel involved in what could be served in school. (SEE SAMPLE OF A TASTE TEST SURVEY).
- When the taste testing is finished, have someone announce the results of the survey to the whole school, along with plans for featuring the food in the regular menu.



Taste Test Survey

DIRECTIONS: Use this form to collect information about your recipe!

1. Visit either each class in the school or the cafeteria during lunch times.
2. Highlight the whole grain, local fruit, or vegetable that is in your product.
(For example: if you are making zucchini bread, bring a zucchini)
3. Column One: Record the number of participants who you are surveying (give them time to taste the new food).
4. Column Two: Record the number of participants who tried the food.
5. Column Three and Four: Record the number of participants who liked the food and then will eat it again (at lunch or breakfast).

Product _____

Number of Participants (at testing table)	"I tried it"	"I liked it"	"I'll eat it again"

Tips & Procedures for Successful Taste Testing in the Cafeteria

BE SURE TO HAVE STUDENTS DO THE SURVEYING FOR THE TASTE TESTING. OTHER STUDENTS RESPOND WELL WHEN SERVED BY PEERS WHO MADE THE PRODUCT!

Preparation: Things to think about and do before you make your product!

- Well before you plan to make your product, talk to Food Service Staff about their needs and possible resources they have to share.
- Identify community and parent volunteers who can work with you and/or donate product.
- Decide with food service staff what fresh and whole grain foods or recipes might be acceptable to students (don't start with seaweed salad!). Foods must be affordable and simple enough to be repeated if the students like it! (Don't forget to use local produce when possible and invite your local farmer or processor to join your taste testing efforts)
- Estimate how many students will take the taste test so you can be sure to prepare enough for all. FOR EXAMPLE: 5 classes, with 25 kids each= 125 tastes (remember small servings)
- When thinking about a food item to make, try to feature a healthy, local product as the main ingredient. FOR EXAMPLE: Carrot muffins with carrots from a local farm
- If at all possible, work with the food service to have a small group of students prepare the food with them. Food education works best through hands-on experiences.

Surveying at Lunch: Things to think about for doing taste tests during lunch!

- You need 1-2 students to serve at each lunch period.
- You need 1-2 students to survey participants at each lunch period.
- Have your students use the survey on the back of this sheet. (You may want to go over the survey procedure with them first.)
- Collect and tally the data from the survey. (This can be a great student math project with graphing.)
- Report the data to school newsletter or local media and report whether the items will be on a menu in the future.