



CREATING SUCCESSFUL FOOD BARS: WHAT STAFF NEED TO KNOW



Nutrition (1110), Operations (2210, 2220, 2240), Administration (3310) & Communications & Marketing (4160)



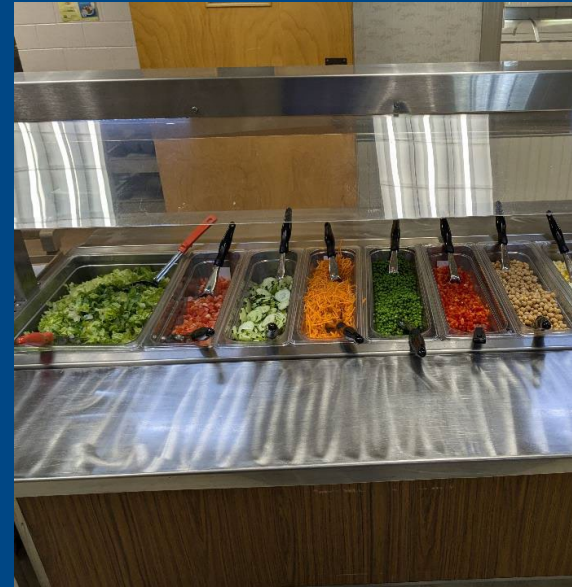
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Explain** the benefits of implementing food bars
- **Apply** regulatory requirements in a food bar setting
- **Implement** efficient setup, service flow, and food safety practices
- **Monitor** compliance and reimbursable meal requirements



WHY A FOOD BAR?

- Increased participation – not your “everyday” serving line
- Nutritional benefits – increase variety and access
- Easy ways to incorporate fresh, local foods
- Lower plate waste – taking the items they will eat
- Fun – themes, seasonal, cultural
- Adult participation



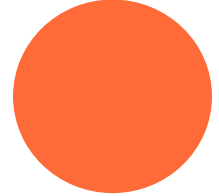
Courtesy of Dinwiddie County SFA





TYPES OF FOOD BARS

- Salad
- Baked potato
- Taco
- Deli
- Pizza
- Burger
- Pasta
- Breakfast/Snack
- Mediterranean/Greek
- Pre-plated bowl





Regulations



NSLP MEAL PATTERN FUNDAMENTALS

- Offer all five required food components daily
- Meet weekly vegetable subgroup requirements
- Follow grade group–specific daily and weekly minimums





OVS IN A FOOD BAR SETTING

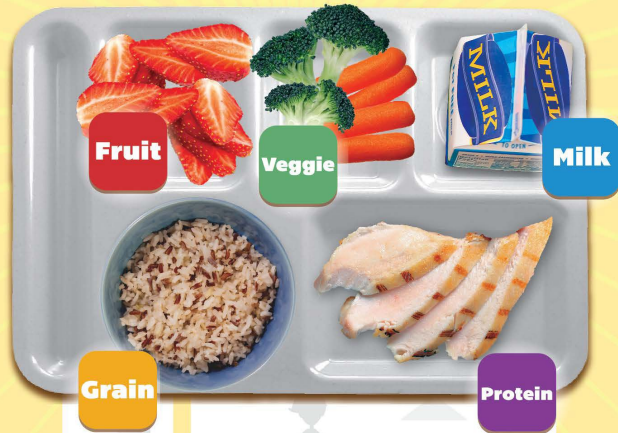
- Select at least three required components
- Include at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fruit and/or vegetable
- Meet minimum creditable serving sizes
 - $\frac{1}{8}$ cup (fruit and vegetable)
 - 0.25 oz eq (grain and M/MA)
- Post clear reimbursable meal signage



Color Your Lunch Tray!

Choose **3** or more food groups

Pick at least **1/2** cup fruit and/or vegetable



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#5formaxflavor

5 food groups = Maximum Flavor



Select at least **1/2** cup fruit and/or vegetable

Choose at least **3** food groups



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PORTION SIZE

- Consistent with the meal pattern for the age-grade group
- Ensure students take minimum required portion size
- Use signs or visual aids





CREDITING

- Are meals containing food from the salad bar reimbursable?
- Yes!
 - if foods from the salad bar are served in the minimum amounts required and
 - contribute to an eligible reimbursable meal, that meal can be reimbursed.

Tip: Weigh & Document!

Weigh individual servings, weigh each full pan size, and weigh after service to determine how many servings were taken



Salad Bar Signage

_____ pieces of BROCCOLI equals
_____ cup vegetable



_____ pieces of CAULIFLOWER
equals _____ cup vegetable



_____ CARROTS equals
_____ cup vegetable



_____ CELERY sticks equals
_____ cup vegetable



_____ CRACKERS equals
_____ servings of grain



_____ BREADSTICK(S) equals
_____ servings of grain



_____ CROUTONS equals
_____ servings of grain



_____ pieces of EGG equals
_____ servings of protein



_____ pieces of CUBED CHEESE
equals _____ servings of protein



_____ scoops of CHEESE equals
_____ servings of protein



_____ scoops of MEAT equals
_____ servings of protein



_____ pieces of TOFU equals
_____ servings of protein



_____ scoops of BEANS equals
_____ servings of protein



_____ scoops of SPINACH equals
_____ cup vegetable



_____ scoops of LETTUCE equals
_____ cup vegetable





DOCUMENTATION & RECORDS

- Document all items offered daily
- Record actual quantities prepared and served
- Maintain crediting documentation
- Ensure records support reimbursable claims





Operations

FOOD SAFETY



Must follow state and local code

Site specific food safety plan

Train staff

Educate students on health, hygiene with food bars

Work with local health department

PREVENT CONTAMINATION

- Follow Hygiene SOPs
- Gloves for ready-to-eat handheld foods
- Change utensils at each meal period
- Keep allergen-free foods isolated
- Replace existing containers when replenishing



EQUIPMENT & SET UP

- Stand-alone bar vs. Integrated into the serving line
- Measurements for standard bar
- Accessibility: Special "child-height" food bars (28 inches from the floor) are used to make self-service easy for elementary school students.
- Location considerations, including directing traffic
 - Decals on floor, cones, queue line ropes (stanchions)





REGULAR SERVICE LINE WITH COLD WELLS

FREESTANDING, MOBILE-INSULATED SALAD BARS

- Available in four-well and five-well configurations
- Can compress through doorways
- Height-adjustable
- Cold hold for four hours



- Requires a freezer for chiller packs configurations

TABLETOP
INSULATED
SALAD
BARS





- Holds temperature without needing a freezer by requiring a plug
- Expensive
- Not compact

Tips to consider:
Use excess balance funds

Use portable POS tablets, to run separate lines for salad/food bars from the regular serving lines.

FREESTANDING, MOBILE, MECHANICALLY-COOLED SALAD BARS



FOOD BAR LAYOUT

TRAFFIC FLOW 

Bullet Red Leaf Lettuce	Bullet Arugula	¼ Pan Black Beans	Bullet Cucumbers	Bullet Cherry Tomatoes	Bullet Roast Eggplant	Bullet Melon	Bullet Peaches	¼ Pan Cranberries	¼ Pan Dressing
		¼ Pan Red Pepper						¼ Pan Sunflower Seeds	¼ Pan Dressing

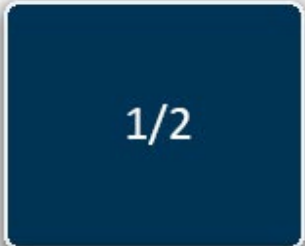
TRAFFIC FLOW 

Consider food pan sizes, depths, materials.

- Standardize implementation
- Tailor specific location resources
- Elevate student experience
- Manage and control food costs
- Improve traffic flow



SIZE **DEPTH**



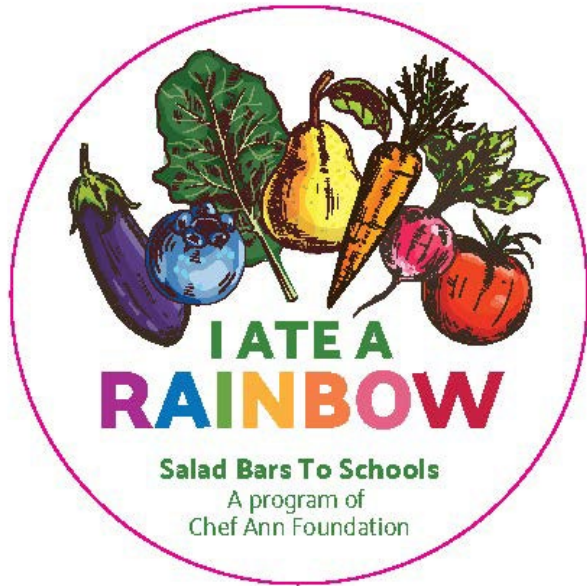
2 1/2"



4"



6"



Today's Salad Bar Menu

<h4>Features</h4>	<h4>Vegetables</h4>
	<h4>Fruits</h4>

Make a RAINBOW
at the Salad Bar today!
www.thelunchbox.org
A Program of the Chef Ann Foundation

THE LUNCH BOX
Tools for school food change
A Program of the Chef Ann Foundation



SERVICE FLOW & MONITORING

- Position staff for peak periods
- Direct efficient line flow
- Monitor student selections before POS
- Maintain portion control
- Keep stations stocked and organized
- Monitor food safety and temperatures



Please use utensils...
and **NOT** your hands.



Take at least
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruits
& vegetables.

Salad Bar

Take what you want, eat what you take.



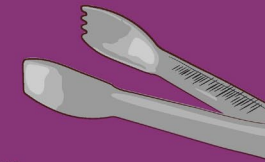
How to Use Your

Salad Bar

Hints
& Tips



Take what you want,
eat what you take.



Always use
serving utensils.



It's good to try
new things!



$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup

Take at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
of fruits & vegetables.



Set your tray down
when serving yourself.



Mix & match to build
a complete meal.



Salad Bars
To Schools

List your tips here _____



POINT OF SALE EFFICIENCY

- Train staff to quickly verify reimbursable meals
- Use visual cues to eliminate guesswork
- Keep extra food near the register
- Place the register at the end of the bar



CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS

- Administrative hesitation
- Limited space and staffing
- Student behavior
- "The mess"
- Food costs
- Food waste
- Menu fatigue





Schools in Virginia

Harrisonburg, VA

Eastern Mennonite School



Harrisonburg, VA

Eastern Mennonite School



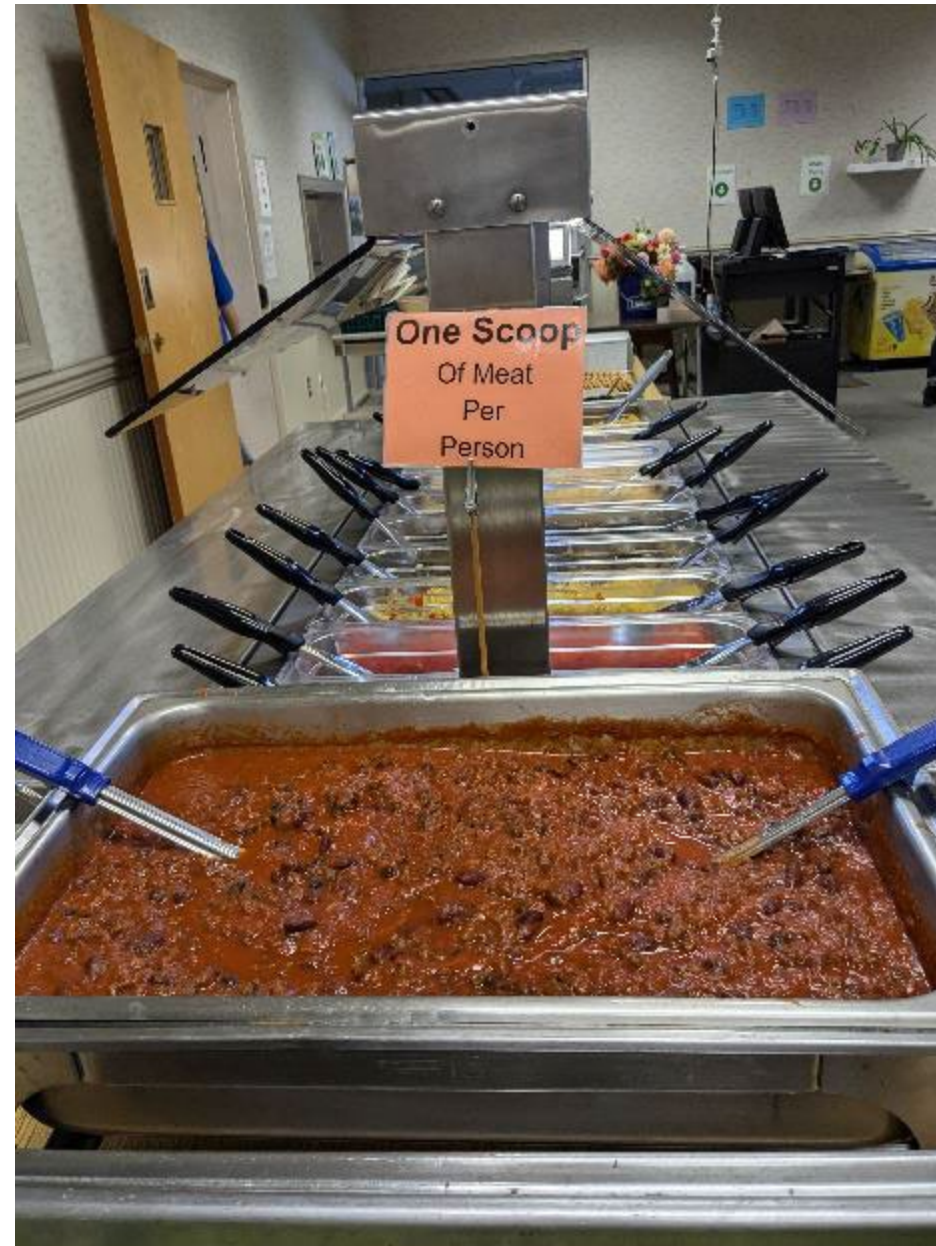
Harrisonburg, VA

Eastern Mennonite School



Harrisonburg, VA

Eastern Mennonite School





Student Feedback

“Taco bar is straight fire no cap. It gives me skibidi rizz.”

– Very cool 11th grader





Buena Vista City Public Schools

Taco Bar



Buena Vista City Public Schools

Deli Bar





Louisa County Public Schools

Taco Bar



Louisa County Public Schools

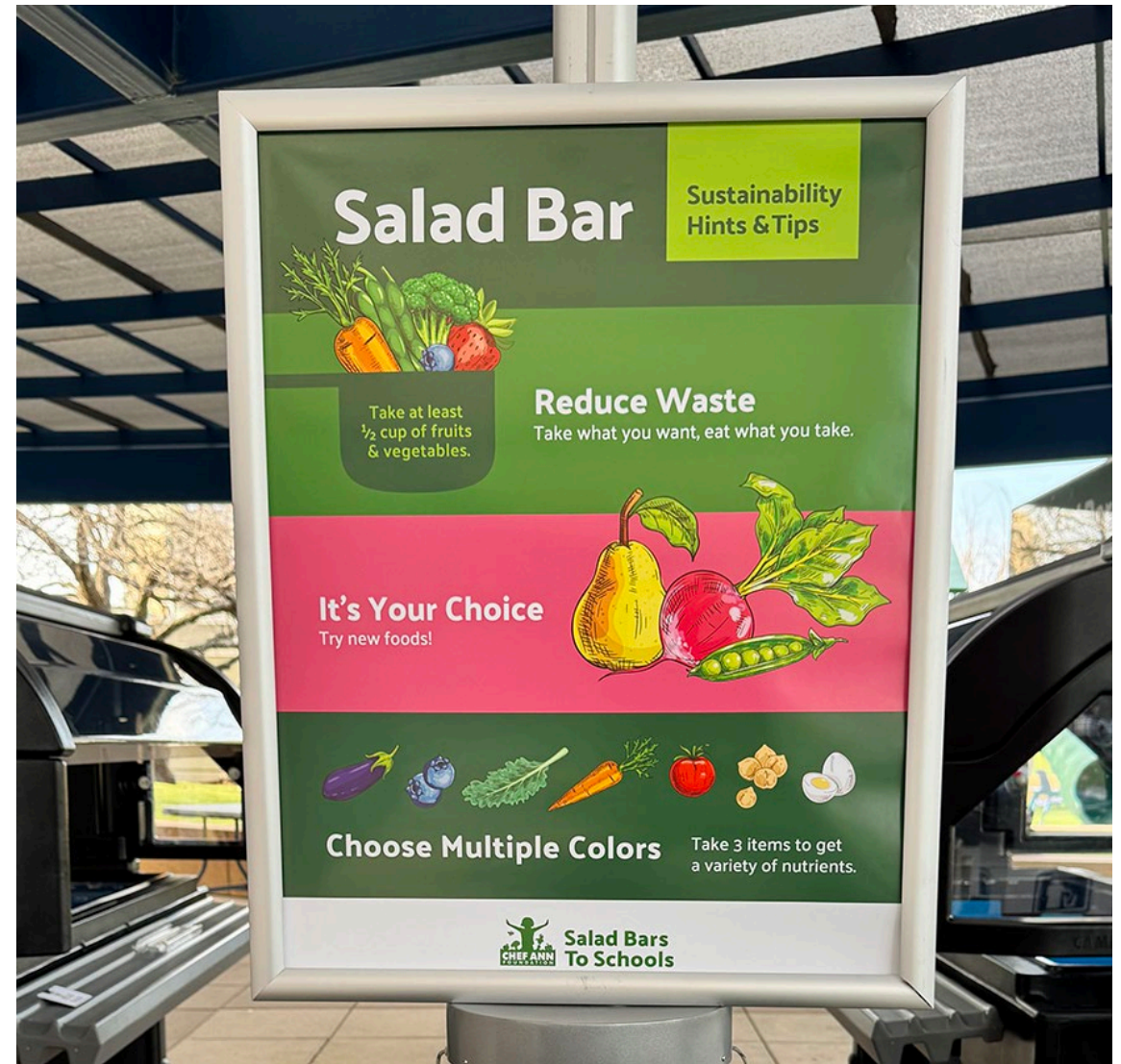
Taco Bar



Fairfax County Public Schools

RESOURCES

- USDA SP 41-2019
- Institute of Child Nutrition
- VDOE *SNP Web Download Forms*
- VDOE Farm to School website
- The Lunch Box
- The Salad Bars to Schools
- School Food Institute's Salad Bar course
- Fellow School Divisions



ICN ONE-PAGER

Food Safety Fact Sheet

Preventing Contamination in Food Bars

INTRODUCTION

Food bars are popular because they provide a variety of healthy foods. School nutrition employees play an important role in food safety during the preparation, serving, and storing of the food.

HERE ARE THE FACTS

Food used for food bars can become contaminated, either unintentionally or intentionally. One way unintentional contamination occurs is when bacteria or viruses are transferred from one surface to another (cross contamination). For example, if a customer had a virus on her hand, it could be transferred to the handle of a serving spoon and then transferred to the hands of the next customer who used the spoon. Another way unintentional contamination occurs is when an allergen is accidentally transferred from a food containing an allergen to a food that does not contain the allergen. For example, if a spoon from an allergen containing ingredient was placed into an allergen-free food.

Intentional contamination is the willful intent to contaminate a food. While this rarely happens, it can occur.

APPLICATION

School nutrition employees can prevent contamination at food bars by preparing the food bars properly and by monitoring how the food bars are used by customers.

Preparing the Food Bar

- Follow personal hygiene and handwashing Standard Operating Procedures.
- Wear gloves for handling ready-to-eat foods such as fresh apples.
- Place all exposed food under sneeze guards.
- Provide an appropriate clean and sanitized utensil for each container on the food bar.
- Change utensils at each meal period or when they are contaminated.
- Keep labeled and wrapped allergen-free foods in an isolated location until ready to give to that child.
- Replace existing containers of food with new containers when replenishing the food bar.
- Assist customers who are unable to properly use utensils.
- Store eating utensils with handles up or in a manner to prevent customers from touching the food contact surfaces.

Monitoring the Food Bar

- Place all exposed food under sneeze guards.
- Provide an appropriate clean and sanitized utensil for each container on the food bar.
- Change utensils at each meal period or when they are contaminated.
- If an allergen-free food comes into contact with an allergen, do not serve that food to a child with food allergies.



Preventing Contamination in Food Bars cont.

- Replace existing containers of food with new containers when replenishing the food bar.
- Assist customers who are unable to properly use utensils.
- Store eating utensils with handles up or in a manner to prevent customers from touching the food contact surfaces.

What should you do if you observe these actions?

- Remove and discard contaminated food.
- Demonstrate to customers how to properly use utensils.
- Replace contaminated serving utensil with a clean and sanitized one.
- Clean and sanitize food bar surfaces.
- If cross contact has been observed or if there are concerns that cross contact may have occurred, do not feed that food to a child with food allergies.

Remember, follow state or local health department requirements.

References

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, & Institute of Child Nutrition. (2015). *Food safety in schools*. University, MS. Author.
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, & Institute of Child Nutrition. (2016). *HACCP-based standard operating procedures: Preventing contamination at food bars*. Retrieved from <http://www.fns.gov/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=75>
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Services, Food and Drug Administration. (2013). *FDA food code*. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/food/guidanceregulation/retailfoodprotection/foodcode/ucm374275.htm>

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GRANT OPPORTUNITY



***Application closes on March 31, 2026**

- Salad bar equipment
- Online staff training course
- Marketing materials
- Eligible schools must:
 - Participate in the National School Lunch Program
 - Offer the salad bar as part of the reimbursable meal
 - Run a self-operated food service department, not managed by a food service management company
 - Serve K–12 students with an enrollment of at least 100
 - Have the food services director be involved in applying, with verification form support from the superintendent



Build Your Own Food Bar

Interactive Activity



½ Pan Spinach	Bullet Carrots	¼ Pan Jicama	¼ Pan Cherry Tomatoes	¼ Pan Chickpeas	Bullet Plums	Bullet Watermelon
½ Pan Spring Mix		¼ Pan Broccoli	¼ Pan Cucumber	¼ Pan Grain Salad		



INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

Scenario

You are introducing a food bar at your school.

Design a concept that:

- Features a unique theme
- Supports NSLP meal pattern requirements
- Aligns with your available space and staffing capacity

Questions?



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Nutrition (1110), Operations (2210, 2220, 2240), Administration (3310)
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