



Introducing Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions!

September 16, 2025

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

**Professional Standards Learning Codes: 4110,
4120**



Meet Your Host



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HEALTH AND NUTRITION SERVICES SPECIALIST

Welcome!



upLIFT was designed specifically for child nutrition professionals like you. It offers resources to help you LEARN about nutrition, get INSPIRED on meal choices for your participants, FEED students healthy meals, and TEACH others in your community about your programs.

You can look forward to helpful materials and monthly webinars featuring unique upLIFT content showcasing Arizona child nutrition professionals, and providing ongoing inspiration throughout the year. This will empower you to upLIFT your programs in your own unique way!

Overview

- 1. Introduction to the Plate to Palate Initiative**
- 2. Launching the Fresh Perspectives Series**
- 3. Kitchen Creations Cookbook**

Introduction to the Plate to Palate Initiative

Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions

Introducing the School Year 2025-2026 upLIFT Initiative!

The **Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions** initiative will concentrate on the **TEACH** component of the four upLIFT pillars and its potential to greatly **boost** enthusiasm for **nutrition** among students and staff alike. By employing **storytelling** to depict the journey of ingredients from local farms to students' plates, as well as **dispel common myths** about the food that is served in school meals, we can effectively cultivate a sense of community and promote a deeper **appreciation** for the provided meals!

Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions

What to Expect:



Monthly **webinars** discussing topics ranging from innovative menu design to taste testing and feedback!



Fact Sheets highlighting nutrition education skills and resources on improving **perceptions** of school meals!



Monthly **in-season produce** highlights via the Taste AZ Initiative, and **more!**

Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions

What is the Plate to Palate objective?

We are **dedicated** to helping our School Food Authorities (SFAs), as well as the public they serve, gain a deeper understanding of the school meal program. Our **support** is aimed at ensuring SFAs can effectively convey *accurate* information and engage with their communities.

In addition to providing **clarity**, we are committed to **dispelling** common myths and misinformation. By sharing **accurate information**, we strive to improve everyone's awareness of the school meal program.

Poll Question

Have you heard or experienced misconceptions about your school nutrition programs?

1. Yes.

2. No.

Transforming the Narrative

Combating Misconceptions

We gathered information from **31** Arizona Local Education Agencies (LEAs), encompassing public schools, public charter schools, private schools, and more.

They provided valuable **insights** and **feedback** regarding perceptions of school meals from their administration, parents, and students.

Common Misconceptions

"The public thinks school food is unhealthy and made with mystery meat"

"Food service doesn't provide fresh food for students only ultra-processed food."

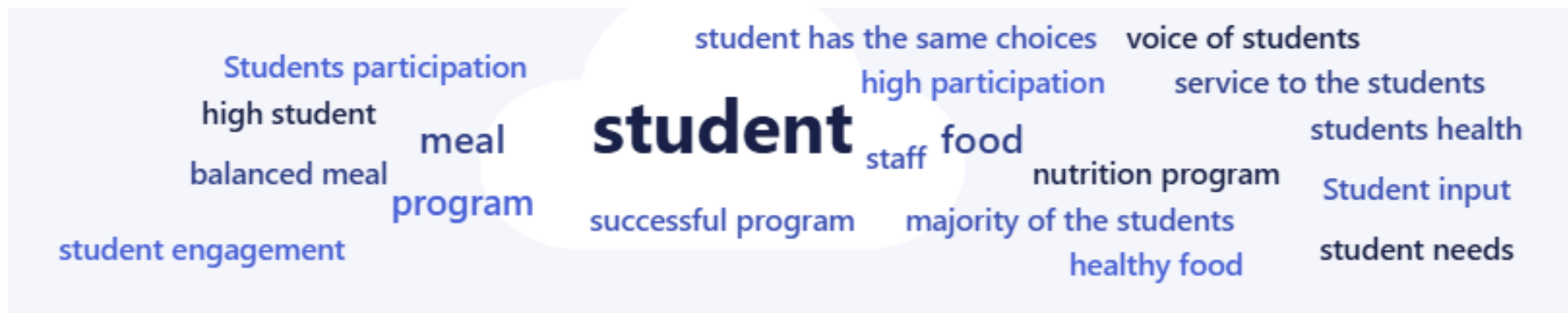
"That we serve subpar, unhealthy, bland, tasteless food."

"Tons of food and money wasted. No public knowledge of federal nutrition regulations"



Common Misconceptions

We also collected insights from LEAs regarding their views on creating a **positive** school food environment and an effective food service program for students. The prevailing consensus is that a successful school nutrition program strikes a **balance** between *nutritional quality, student engagement, and operational excellence*.



Dispelling Misconceptions

Why is this information important?

- **Dispelling negative ideas** about school meals is crucial to debunk myths that may hinder students' nutrition.
- **Misconceptions** about school meals' quality may deter some families from participating.
- **Clarifying facts** can increase participation, ensuring students receive tasty, balanced meals that boost performance and health.
- **Disproving myths** builds a well-informed community supporting school meal programs.
- **Better understanding** encourages advocacy for improvements and funding, benefiting students.
- **Understanding school meals** reduces stigma and promotes inclusivity, allowing all children to access the food they need comfortably.

Strategies for Advocacy

Leverage education to emphasize the advantages of school meals.

- ✓ Highlight nutritional value.
- ✓ Share success stories.
- ✓ Provide data and research.
- ✓ Utilize various communication channels.

Strategies for Advocacy

Generate excitement from stakeholders to build support.

- ✓ Involve parents and guardians.
- ✓ Partner with teachers and administrators.
- ✓ Engage students.
- ✓ Build connections with community groups.
- ✓ Connect with local farmers.

Strategies for Advocacy

Debunk common myths and misconceptions.

- ✓ Address negative stigmas.
- ✓ Debunk specific myths with facts.
- ✓ Showcase the variety of meals offered.
- ✓ Emphasize the expertise behind the program.

Help us in this effort!

Please share Your Exceptional Work with ADE HNS!

ADE HNS aims to **celebrate** your outstanding efforts, showcasing your dedication. We want to narrate tales of:

- Excellent school meals
- Nutrition education
- Participation in the Farm Fresh Challenge
- Engaging students in taste tests
- And more! Anything you think helps promote this initiative!

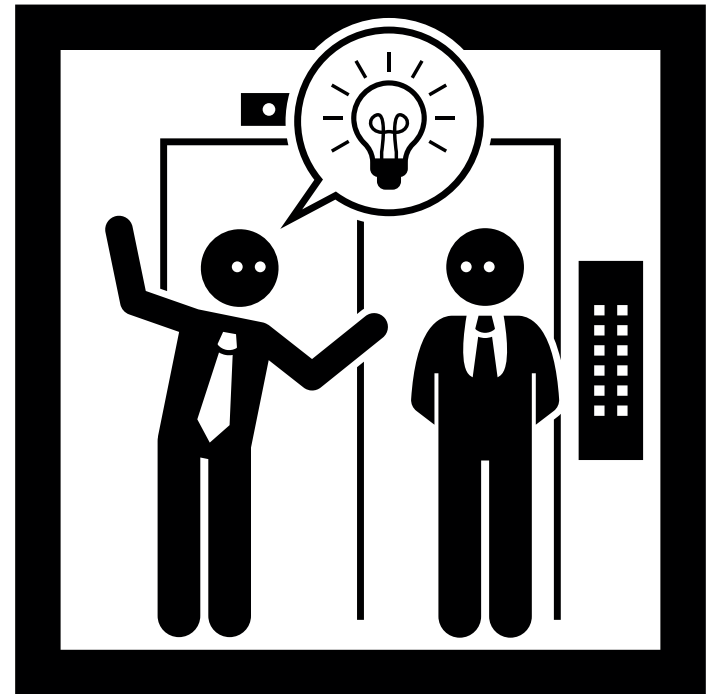
We would also love to feature your stories in our monthly upLIFT bulletin. Please send your submissions to ashley.kennedy@azed.gov.

Launching the Fresh Perspectives Series

Fresh Perspectives

Why this resource?

The goal of this series is to offer a monthly resource filled with data and talking points to **empower** school food professionals to have discussions within their communities. Think about it as a one-pager filled with elevator pitches.



Fresh Perspectives

Why this resource?

It is crafted to equip SFAs with the **knowledge** and **confidence** necessary for effective engagement, promoting a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges linked to school nutrition programs. By providing these professionals with current information, the series seeks to encourage **transparency** and **collaboration**, ultimately improving the well-being of students and the wider community!

Fresh Perspectives

How to best use this resource?

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with each talking point, ensuring you understand the core message and how it aligns with your school's values.
- ✓ Engage with stakeholders and use these points to highlight the importance of nutrition and its impact on student well-being and academic performance.
- ✓ Personalize your approach and share personal success stories along with the resource to foster connection.
- ✓ Print out the resource and make them available to your community - parents, administrators, etc.!

Fresh Perspectives

Fresh Perspectives Series
Examining common misconceptions surrounding school meals to offer guidance on how to steer the conversations within your community!

 **Claim: "School Meals are Too Processed"**
Let's Take a Closer Look...

Response: The concern that school meals are "too processed" is common among parents and the general public. While some processed foods are included, the United States Department of Agriculture ensures that meals meet specific nutritional standards under the National School Lunch Program. In general, while school meals incorporate processed ingredients, **many schools are actively working to increase the amount of fresh, whole foods on their menus.** To better understand the reality of what is served in schools, it is essential to know the difference between processed and ultra-processed foods:

 Processed Foods Definition: Any food that has been changed from its raw, natural state. Examples: Washing, cutting, cooking, canning, freezing, drying, mixing, and packaging.	 Ultra-Processed Foods Definition: Foods that have been heavily altered through industrial processing and contain numerous additives. Examples: Often high in sugar, salt, unhealthy fats, artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives.
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Crucial Points to Chat About...

Here are our recommended points to offer up during any discussion to effectively **express your commitment and efforts** to offer minimally processed foods at your sites!

- ✱ **Processed Foods in Meal Service:** It's a fact that school meals often feature kid-friendly favorites like pizza, burgers, and chicken nuggets. However, these food items are held to nutrition standards and are typically more healthful than what you find at the store.
- ✱ **Serving Fresh Foods:** Alongside the main entrée, school meals incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables as side options **minimally processed** by washing, slicing and packaging.
- ✱ **Federal Nutritional Guidelines:** School meals must adhere to specific nutritional standards, which include restrictions on fat, saturated fat, sugar, and sodium. This means that when processed foods are served, they may be prepared with healthier, lower-fat ingredients and complemented with nutritious sides.
- ✱ **Variety in School Meals:** Schools are encouraged to provide dishes that reflect the community's preferences, while also prioritizing scratch-made items alongside the processed options they offer.
- ✱ **Impact of Grants:** Local Foods for Schools: Participating schools receive reimbursements for using minimally processed local and regional foods in their meal programs.

 
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Claim

Deep Dive
with Facts

Talking Points

Kitchen Creations Cookbook

AZ Farm to School Month

Enhancing School Meal Programs through Farm-to-School Initiatives

Farm-to-school programs and local food procurement policies **promote collaborations** between farmers and schools, aiming to incorporate **local produce** into school meal offerings.

These initiatives not only bolster local agriculture but also provide students with fresh and **nutritious** food choices. By linking students to the origins of their food, these programs cultivate a deeper appreciation for agriculture and nutrition. Schools frequently **weave** these experiences into their curricula, featuring activities such as school gardens, cooking classes, and farm visits!

Kitchen Creations Cookbook

About Kitchen Creations

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) awarded FY21 Team Nutrition Training Grants to state agencies that administer the NSLP to assist states in helping schools offer meals supported by recipes that **utilize local agricultural products** and reflect local food preparation practices and taste preferences.

This grant was awarded to ADE and funded the initiation of the **Kitchen Creations** project. This project specifically focused on creating standardized recipes for use in school meal programs!

Kitchen Creations Cookbook

Standardized Recipes

- Blue Corn Mush with Roast Squash & Pepitas
- Blue Corn Mush with Roasted Corn
- Blue Corn Mush with Strawberries, Banana, and Honey
- Soam Bav'i (Brown Tepary Bean) Bowl
- Three Sisters Enchilada Casserole
- Triple Berry Parfait with Fresh Berries
- Triple Berry Parfait with Fresh Strawberries and Blueberry Compote

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State-Developed Recipe

Blue Corn Mush with Strawberries, Banana and Honey

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

State-Developed Recipe

Soam Bav'i (Brown Tepary Bean) Bowl

The Soam Bav'i bowl is a dish that features the tepary bean over a bed of

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

State-Developed Recipe

Three Sisters Enchilada Casserole

Recipe Description: These enchiladas feature fresh indigenous winter squash as the star ingredient. Sweet white corn and black beans.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture

State-Developed Recipe

Triple Berry Parfait with Fresh Berries

This parfait is a refreshing dish featuring Sonora wheat berries. It's a simple recipe made with yogurt, strawberries, blueberries. Served with a drizzle of honey.

Recipe Project Name: Fiscal Year 2021 Cohort A Team Nutrition Training Grant for School Meal Recipe Development
Recipe adapted from Salt River Pima-Maricopa Community Schools

Preparation Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 45 minutes

NSLP/SDP crediting information:
1 1/2 cups provides 1 oz eq mealtime alternate, 1 oz eq whole grain and 1/2 cup fruit

INGREDIENTS

Water, cold

Salt

Blue Corn meal, stone ground

Food and Nutrition Service

INGREDIENTS	50 SERVINGS		100 SERVINGS		DIRECTIONS
	Weight	Measure	Weight	Measure	
Water		5 qt 1 cup		10 qt 2 cups	1. Add water to pot and bring to a boil.
White Sonora wheat berries, dry	4 lb 4 oz		8 lb 8 oz		2. Reduce heat to medium, add white Sonora wheat berries, and lightly boil until berries are soft (approximately 45 minutes).

Food and Nutrition Service | This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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Kitchen Creations Cookbook

Mark Your Calendars: Call for Recipe Proposals!

Do you have a **delicious** recipe that inspires your students while featuring local ingredients?

Throughout **October**, ADE HNS is welcoming recipe submissions. Stay tuned for announcements from HNS Communications regarding the call for recipe proposals!

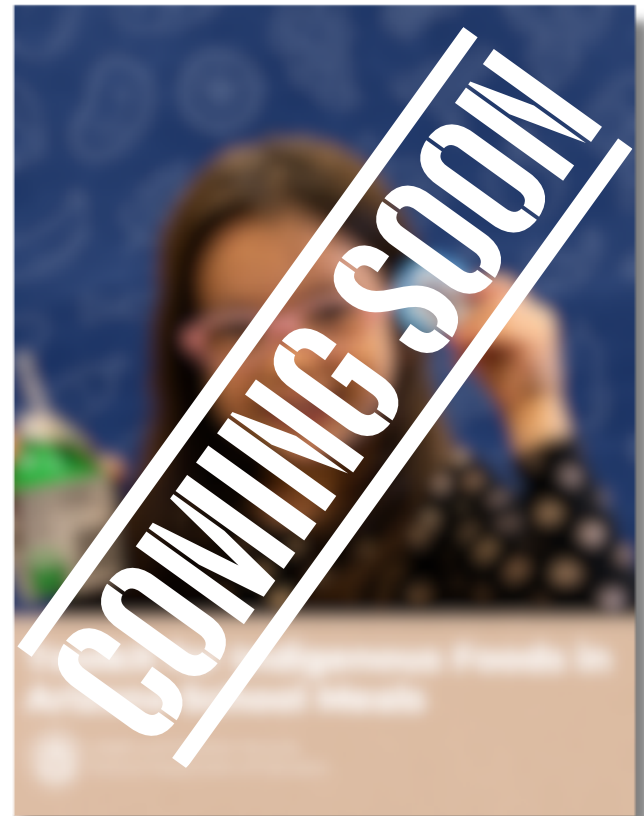


Coming Soon

Kitchen Creations Recipe Toolkit

This toolkit was created for food service directors operating the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (NSLP and SBP) to support the procurement and successful incorporation of traditional foods into their menus.

Keep an eye out in the coming months for access to this amazing toolkit!



Resources



TASTE AZ
NOURISHING LOCAL FOOD

SUMMER SQUASH

TEACH

FIND LOCAL SUMMER SQUASH IN ARIZONA:
HARVEST MONTHS: JUNE - OCTOBER

Farms to get the local produce:

- Agular Farm, Paulden
- Blooming Reed Farm, Paulden
- Double Adobe Farm, Double Adobe
- Mortimer Farm, Dewey
- Larry's Veggies, Marana
- Whiptstone Farm, Paulden

Connect with Local Producers!
[SCHOOL INTEREST FORM](#)

TASTE LOCAL RECIPE:
Calabacitas Casserole Recipe

Serving size: 1 cup. Yield: 6 servings
NSLP Vegetable Credit/Information:
1/2 cup Other, 1/2 cup Starch, 1/2 cup Red Change.

- 4 cups zucchini, sliced
- 2 cups corn kernels
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 cup diced tomatoes
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

This Calabacitas Casserole is a hearty mix of zucchini, corn, tomatoes, and cheese. It's easy to make, bursting with flavor, and makes the perfect side dish for many entrees.

To ensure food safety with summer squash always thoroughly wash them under running water before cutting, eating and/or cooking.

UPLIFT
September 2025 | TASTE AZ | The Arizona Department of Education
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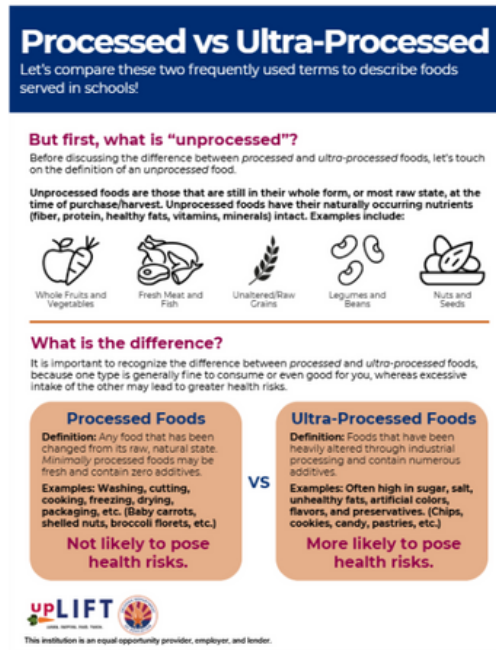
ARIZONA HARVEST FACTS!

- Summer squash is native to the Americas and was a staple in Native American diets.
- The most common summer squashes are crookneck, zucchini, scallop, or patty pan.
- Squash belongs in the Cucurbitaceae family, which also includes cucumbers and melons.
- Summer squash is considered easy to grow and requires minimal maintenance to harvest.
- Summer squash grows quickly and is harvested during the summer months. It can be ready to pick just 50 to 65 days after planting.
- For all varieties of summer squash, choose squash that are glossy, small to medium sized, and heavy for their size. Choose squash that is firm and free of blemishes and damage.
- It is best not to peel the squash before cooking since vitamins and minerals are found mainly in the skin.
- Summer squash is high in vitamin C, vitamin A, potassium, and magnesium.

QUICK MATH:
Summer Squash

Zucchini	Yellow Squash
1 pound as purchased yields approximately 1 1/2 cups, raw (sliced)	1 pound as purchased yields approximately 1 1/2 cups, raw (sliced)
1 pound as purchased yields approximately 1 1/2 cups, cooked (sliced)	1 pound as purchased yields approximately 1 1/2 cups, cooked (sliced)

Taste AZ -
Summer Squash



Processed vs Ultra-Processed

Let's compare these two frequently used terms to describe foods served in schools!

But first, what is "unprocessed"?

Before discussing the difference between processed and ultra-processed foods, let's touch on the definition of an unprocessed food.

Unprocessed foods are those that are still in their whole form, or most raw state, at the time of purchase/harvest. Unprocessed foods have their naturally occurring nutrients (fiber, protein, healthy fats, vitamins, minerals) intact. Examples include:

- Whole Fruits and Vegetables
- Fresh Meat and Fish
- Unaltered/Raw Grains
- Legumes and Beans
- Nuts and Seeds

What is the difference?

It is important to recognize the difference between processed and ultra-processed foods, because one type is generally fine to consume or even good for you, whereas excessive intake of the other may lead to greater health risks.

Processed Foods

Definition: Any food that has been changed from its raw, natural state. Minimally processed foods may be fresh and contain zero additives.

Examples: Washing, cutting, cooking, freezing, drying, packaging, etc. (Baby carrots, shelled nuts, broccoli florets, etc.)

Not likely to pose health risks.

VS

Ultra-Processed Foods

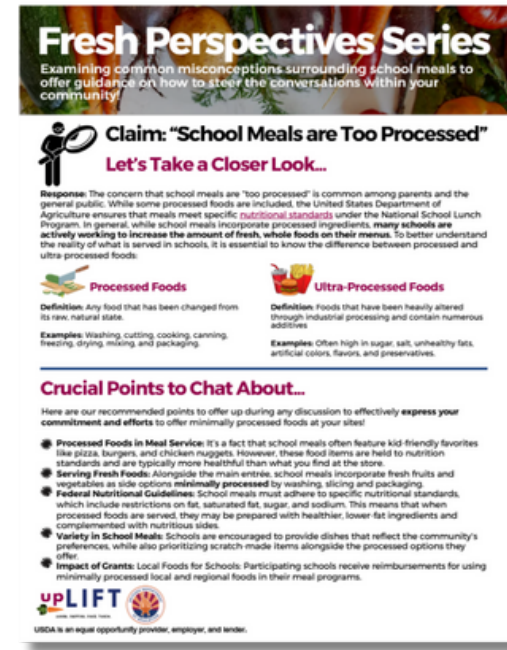
Definition: Foods that have been heavily altered through industrial processing and contain numerous additives.

Examples: Often high in sugar, salt, unhealthy fats, artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives. (Chips, cookies, candy, pastries, etc.)

More likely to pose health risks.

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Nutrition Knowledge
Fact Sheet



Fresh Perspectives Series

Examining common misconceptions surrounding school meals to offer guidance on how to steer the conversations within your community!

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Fresh Perspective
Series

<https://www.azed.gov/hns/nslp/uplift/>

Reminder!

Plate to Palate!

ADE is eager to showcase your hard work serving up appealing, innovative, and nutritious meals! Reach out to Ashley.Kennedy@azed.gov with your stories, photos, examples, or anything that excites you!



Looking Ahead

Join us next month!

upLIFT Webinar - Innovative Menu Design: Creating Tempting and Nutritious School Meals

October 21, 2025

1:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Join us next month, where we will be discussing how you can craft school menus that are both appealing and nutritious. In this webinar, we will explore innovative strategies to design meals that excite students' taste buds while also meeting dietary guidelines. Don't miss this webinar that will provide valuable insights to enhance your menu planning process!



Thank you!

Any questions?
Please type them into the Q&A now.

If you are attending the live webinar, you will receive an email once attendance has been completed. Once you have received this email, your training certificate will be available in Arizona Professional Learning Development (APLD).

If you are watching the recorded webinar, you can access the survey link and certificate of completion at the end of the webinar slides.



Congratulations!

You have completed the [Introducing Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions!](#)

To request a certificate, please go to the next slide.

In order to count this training toward your Professional Standards training hours, the training content must align with your job duties.

Information to include when documenting this training for Professional Standards:

- Training Title: [Recorded Webinar: Introducing Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions!](#)
- Length: [0.5 hour](#)
- Learning Codes: [4110, 4120](#)

Please Note:

- Attendees must document the amount of training hours indicated regardless of the amount of time it takes to complete it.

Congratulations!

Requesting a Training Certificate

Please click on the link below to complete a brief survey about this webinar. Once the survey is complete, you will be able to print your certificate of completion from Survey Monkey.

*This will not appear in your Event Management System (EMS) Account.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/upliftrecordedwebinar>

The information below is for your reference when completing the survey:

- Training Title: [Recorded Webinar: Introducing Plate to Palate: Transforming School Meal Perceptions!](#)

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1. **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. **Fax:** (202) 690-7442; or
3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov.

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