



Creating Confidence in the Kitchen: Scratch Cooking Edition

April 21, 2026

1:30 PM - 2:00 PM

**Professional Standards Learning Codes: 1100, 2100,
2200**



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 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. Overview of Scratch Cooking and Culinary Skills
2. Achieving Scratch Cooking Success at Yuma Union High School District
3. Resources

Overview of Scratch Cooking and Culinary Skills

What is Scratch Cooking?

Definition

Scratch cooking refers to preparing meals using unprocessed ingredients to make wholesome, real food.

- Incorporating whole, fresh ingredients
- Fewer meals that are pre-assembled or processed
- Prioritizing raw proteins, whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables
- Local foods are a great source for schools to receive whole, fresh ingredients for scratch cooking

Speed-Scratch cooking is a hybrid meal preparation method combining fresh, whole ingredients with high-quality convenience or pre-prepared products.

Cost Comparison

Scratch Cooking

- Reduces food costs by purchasing more raw, whole ingredients
- Requires additional labor and time due to extra preparation and training
- Involves numerous steps before the food reaches the tray, including:
 - Washing
 - Chopping
 - Cooking
 - Portioning
 - Cleaning up

Cost Comparison

Speed Scratch Cooking

- Involves using some prepped or cooked ingredients, which minimizes preparation time and labor
- Typically, these items come at a higher cost compared to raw ingredients

Given staffing shortages and limited kitchen time, many school nutrition programs opt for speed scratch cooking. This method helps maintain meal consistency without overwhelming the staff.

Benefits

Health Benefits

Promoting Overall Healthy Behavior

- Schools that provide more scratch-cooked meals typically have:
 - enhanced student nutrition
 - greater consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables
 - improved cognitive function

Decreasing Unhealthy Foods and Disease Risk

- Scratch cooking eliminates processed foods that are high in sodium, added sugars, and saturated fats
 - can reduce the risk of chronic disease

Benefits

Student Benefits

Enhances Attendance and Participation

- Students who consume healthier foods are shown to have fewer behavioral issues and show greater engagement in school

Boosts Test Scores and Grades

- Higher quality diets correlate with improved academic performance
 - Attributed to improved cognitive function, and increased capacity for completing school work

Common Challenges

Labor and time: Scratch preparation requires considerable time, and many kitchens lack sufficient staff.

Skills and training: Scratch recipes often involve more steps, necessitating additional time and training for teams to ensure consistent execution each day.

Equipment and space: Limitations in ovens, prep areas, and storage can restrict the practicality of scratch cooking.

Common Challenges

Food safety: Increased scratch preparation introduces more food safety protocols to monitor, including temperature control, cooling, holding, and other critical control points.

Compliance and documentation: Scratch menus still require standardized recipes, proper crediting, and documentation to comply with USDA regulations.

Budget and products: Some ingredients may be more expensive, and the quality of products can differ depending on the vendor.

- For programs aiming to **enhance scratch cooking** and **reduce** reliance on **processed foods**, additional resources can impact success. This includes funding, time for recipe testing and menu design, culinary training, staffing assistance, and upgrades to equipment or facilities.

Culinary Skills

Scratch cooking typically requires more steps and culinary expertise than simply heating and serving, it:

- Provides a chance for creativity and personalization within school meal programs
- Enables cooks to explore flavors, textures, and techniques, transforming each dish into a unique culinary masterpiece tailored to students' preferences
- Enhances the culinary skills essential for school meal programs while deepening the understanding of ingredients and their interactions
- Boosts confidence as cooks become more adept at various methods, leading to more adventurous and satisfying meals for students
- Offers a rewarding experience for school chefs when preparing food from scratch

Culinary Skills

Training via the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN):

- [Basic Culinary Math for School Nutrition Professionals](#)
- [Common Food Preparation Tools](#)
- [Produce Lab Techniques](#)

Achieving Scratch Cooking Success at Yuma Union High School District

Yuma Union High School District

School Profile:

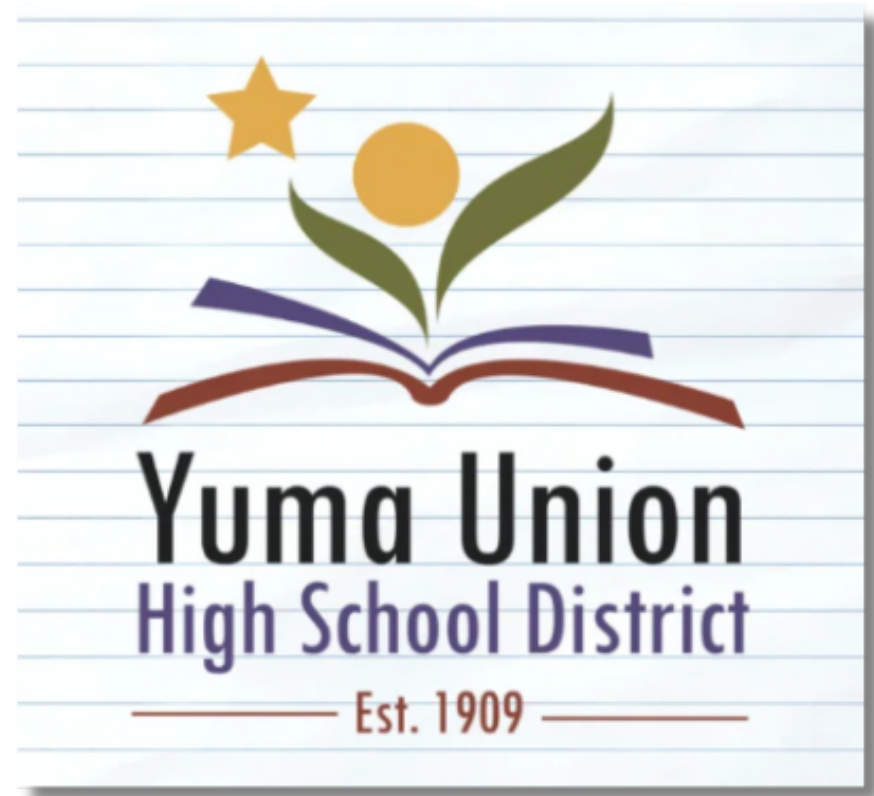
- 7 Schools
 - 6 Production Kitchens
 - 1 Satellite
- 11,000 Students

Meal Statistics:

- CEP School
- Breakfast ADP: 48%
- Lunch ADP: 54%

Team size:

- 82 Staff Members
- 23 Student Workers



Yuma Union High School District

Why Scratch Cooking?

Yuma Union High School District (YUHSD) had already started preparing a few items from scratch, but upon being accepted into [The Chef Ann Foundation](#) Program grant, YUHSD increased their scratch and speed scratch offerings.

A strategic plan was developed to create a program utilizing both scratch and speed scratch recipes.

Scratch vs Convenience

Getting Started

- 1 Reviewed the existing "heat & serve" menu items.
- 2 Identified opportunities in current recipes.
- 3 Provided training for staff to prepare items in-house.

Now average 30% scratch and 25% speed scratch with goals to add more!

Labor Considerations

Labor Management

- Staff possessed the necessary time and knife skills for preparing breakfast recipes requiring two days of prep
- Hired student workers, enhancing the program's perception among the student's peers
- The organization operates six production sites, including a satellite for an alternative school highlighting a need to uniform staff training with the scratch and speed scratch cooking techniques

Scratch Menu

Pilot Recipe

Ranch Dressing

- Offered numerous benefits: lower food costs, reduced calories, and minimal sodium
- Finding the perfect recipe that matched the desired flavor profile and consistency took some time



Cooking Skills

Special Staff Cooking Training

On July 16, 2025, YUHSD collaborated with ICN to host a small-scale, in-person training session. All Managers, Assistant Managers, and cooks participated in this event, where they worked alongside an ICN Chef. The training covered topics such as recipe preparation, understanding recipes, and handling raw meats.



Check out the ICN Website to inquire about in-person trainings at your sites!

[Request ICN Training](#)

Cooking Skills

Annual Training

- Conducted a professional development training day in September
- Each kitchen team was led by a team leader to create recipes
- Participants evaluated and ranked the recipes
- Will continue trainings in future, adding an additional day, allowing for two full 8-hour days
- This training showcased the impressive culinary skills and creativity of the team

Equipment

Tools for Scratch Cooking Success

Equipment used:

- Cutting boards
- New knives
- Knife sharpener
- Better cut gloves
- Digital scales
- Measuring cups & spoons
- Vegetable peelers
- Immersion blenders



Student Perception

Utilizing Taste Tests and Poll Questions

- YUHSD satisfaction approach involved leveraging monthly **student advisory meetings** on each campus to promote, explain the process, and sample new items
- Since the team developed the new recipes, it fostered a **community culture**, instilling a sense of pride and enhancing passion for the extra effort involved
- YUHSD features a weekly **poll question** related to the previous week's menu

Community Perception

Administration Perception

YUHSD Administration loves scratch cooking!

- Yuma is all about homegrown and community culture
- Increased adult meal sales, especially on **Pozole** day



Menu Highlights



Student Favorites

- Homemade ranch dressing
- Spaghetti & fresh ground beef meat sauce
- Pozole
- Cinnamon breakfast cake



Student Least Favorites

- Green Chili Chicken & Rice
- Chicken Fajitas
- Oatmeal bake with fruit

Benefits

- Increased team **ownership** of menu items
- Improved control over ingredients, reducing allergens, sodium, calories, and sugar
- Successfully managed USDA changes regarding ultra-processed foods and dyes
- Utilized bonus and surplus commodities for **quality** ingredients
- Developed recipes to **maximize ingredient use** and **minimize inventory**, such as taco meat, meat sauce, and chili from fresh ground beef
- Created speed scratch recipes using frozen pizza dough, sub roll dough, and dinner roll dough

Challenges

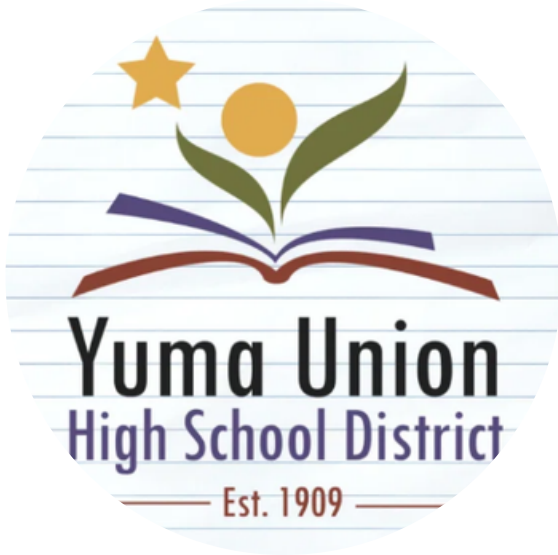
Staff understanding in meal preparation:

- Staff must know meal components, measure ingredients, understand portion sizes, project production, read recipes, and maintain consistency
- Transitioning to scratch and speed-scratch cooking requires a thorough understanding of standardized recipes
- Crafting recipes in a relatable manner is challenging due to the team's primary Spanish-speaking background

Top Tips for Success

- ✓ Know the difference in measuring liquids and solids using measuring cups & spoons.
- ✓ Take advantage of helpful tools and utilize a digital scale.
- ✓ Become proficient in successfully following a recipe.
- ✓ Manage leftovers and shelf life of scratch items, also inventory management.
- ✓ Remember the importance of standardizing recipes!

Contact Info



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Yuma Union High School District

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Resources

Resources



TASTE AZ
PROMULGATING LOCAL FOOD

Beans

FIND LOCAL BEANS IN ARIZONA:

2026 Producer List

Bean Type	Producers	Local Producers
Mexican	Medium, pale yellow	Cooked by Farms
Pinto	Medium, speckled legs	Arriba Bean Company
Black (Pinto)	Small, high protein	Arriba Bean Company
Black (Pinto)	Small, black/white	Cooked by Farms
Garbanzo	Medium, round, beige	Arriba Bean Company

BEAN HARVEST FACTS!

- The top five beans grown in the United States are pinto beans, navy beans, black beans, red kidney beans and great northern beans.
- They come in tons of colors. Beans can be black, white, red, green, yellow, purple, and even speckled!
- They're part of the "legume" family. Beans grow in pods, just like peas. That makes them part of a plant group called legumes.
- Beans and other legumes are "nitrogen-fixing" plants, putting essential nutrients back into the soil, which helps other plants grow.
- They're high in plant protein and fiber. They are also a good source of magnesium, iron, potassium and folate.
- Soaking dried beans helps them cook faster, makes them easier to digest, improves texture, boosts nutrient absorption, and removes dust or impurities.

LOCAL BEAN RECIPE:

Yield: Approximately 20 cups cooked.
2 oz. eq. MNA per 1/2 cup serving or credits as 1/2 cup bean/pea/legume vegetable sub-group.
(Always refer to the nutrition label provided for the product or access the Food Buying Guide for meal component compliance.)

For a delicious, homemade beans, follow this simple ingredient guide for any kind of dry bean when cooking:

On average, you'll need:

- dried beans, 28
- water, 8-10 cups
- salt, 1/2 tsp
- olive oil, 1/2 medium
- salt, 1 tablespoon (add later)

Soaking & Washing: Soak beans thoroughly under cold water until the water runs clear to remove dirt and any rocks or debris.

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Taste AZ



Navigating Dietary Restrictions

Understanding restrictions helps ensure everyone can eat safely and comfortably. Read through this fact sheet to learn about options for different medical and preferential dietary needs.

Vegetarian/Vegan
A preference, or dietary/cultural need to avoid meat or animal products.

Guidelines:

- Vegetarian: no meat; may include dairy/eggs.
- Vegan: no animal products at all.
- Check for hidden animal ingredients (broth, gelatin, lard, fish sauce, whey).

Safe options:

- Beans, lentils, tofu, hummus
- Veggie burgers or plant-based nuggets
- Eggs and cheese for vegetarians

Nut-Free*
A medical need to avoid peanuts and/or tree nuts due to an allergy.

Guidelines:

- Avoid peanuts, tree nuts, and products processed with nuts.
- Prevent cross-contact during prep and service.
- Read labels every time and check for: peanuts, almonds, cashews, walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, "Processed in a facility with nuts"

Safe options:

- Sunflower seed butter
- Nut-free granola bars and snacks
- Baked goods made in nut-free facilities

Gluten-Free
A medical need to avoid gluten due to sensitivity, celiac disease, or wheat allergy.

Guidelines:

- Avoid wheat, barley, rye, and foods made with regular flour.
- Use gluten-free substitutes when needed.
- Check labels for: Wheat, Barley, Rye, Malt, Brewer's yeast.

Safe options:

- Naturally gluten-free and/or gluten-free labeled products

Dairy/Lactose-Free*
A medical need to avoid dairy or lactose due to an allergy or intolerance.

Guidelines:

- Lactose-free: avoid lactose but may tolerate cheese/yogurt.
- Dairy-free: avoid all milk ingredients.
- Check ingredients in breads, sauces, mashed potatoes, and desserts for: milk, whey, casein, butter, cheese, cream, "Contains milk"

Safe options:

- Approved lactose-free and plant-based milk substitutes
- Dairy-free cheese, yogurt, margarine

Kosher
Religious dietary laws that guide how foods are selected and prepared.

Guidelines:

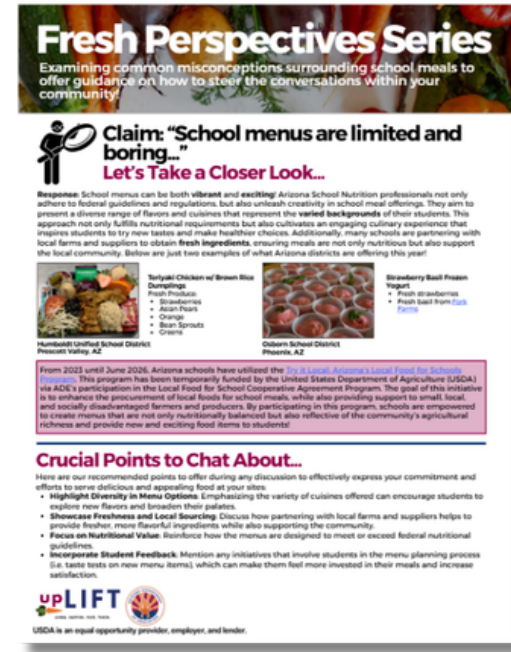
- No pork or shellfish
- Meat and dairy cannot be served together
- Foods may need kosher certification

Safe options:

- Look for symbols: OU - OK - Star-K

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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.

Claim: "School menus are limited and boring..."
Let's Take a Closer Look...

Response: School menus can be both vibrant and exciting! Arizona School Nutrition professionals not only adhere to federal guidelines and regulations, but also unleash creativity in school meal offerings. They aim to present a diverse range of flavors and cuisines that represent the varied backgrounds of their students. This approach not only fulfills nutritional requirements but also cultivates an engaging culinary experience that inspires students to try new tastes and make healthier choices. Additionally, many schools are partnering with local farms and suppliers to obtain fresh ingredients, ensuring meals are not only nutritious but also support the local community. Below are just two examples of what Arizona districts are offering this year!

Torrey Pines School District
Humboldt Unified School District
Pescadero Valley, AZ

Strawberry Basil Protein Yogurt
• Fresh strawberries
• Fresh basil from local farms

Osborn School District
Phoenix, AZ

From 2023 until June 2026, Arizona schools have utilized the **Local Food for Schools** program. This program has been temporarily funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) via ADE's participation in the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program. The goal of this initiative is to enhance the procurement of local foods for school meals while also providing support to small, local, and socially disadvantaged farmers and producers. By participating in this program, schools are empowered to create menus that are not only nutritionally balanced but also reflective of the community's agricultural richness and provide new and exciting food items to students!

Crucial Points to Chat About...

Here are our recommended points to offer during any discussion to effectively express your commitment and efforts to serve delicious and appealing food at your sites:

- Highlight Diversity in Menu Options:** Emphasizing the variety of cuisines offered can encourage students to explore new flavors and broaden their palates.
- Showcase Freshness and Local Sourcing:** Discuss how partnering with local farms and suppliers helps to provide fresher, more flavorful ingredients while also supporting the community.
- Focus on Nutritional Value:** Reinforce how the menus are designed to meet or exceed federal nutritional guidelines.
- Incorporate Student Feedback:** Mention any initiatives that involve students in the menu planning process (i.e. taste tests on new menu items), which can make them feel more invested in their meals and increase satisfaction.

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Fresh Perspectives

<https://www.azed.gov/hns/ns/p/uplift/>

May Webinar

Join us in May!

Taste Testing and Feedback: Involving Students to Improve Meal Programs

May 19, 2026

1:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Join us for an engaging webinar session where we'll delve into innovative approaches to enhance student meal programs through direct feedback and taste testing. In this session, you'll learn effective strategies to engage students in the meal planning process, how taste testing can provide valuable insights into student preferences, and ways to implement student feedback to create more enjoyable and nutritious meals.



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 recorded webinar: [Creating Confidence in the Kitchen: Scratch Cooking Edition](#)

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: Creating Confidence in the Kitchen: Scratch Cooking Edition

Professional Standards Learning Codes: [1100](#), [2100](#), [2200](#)

Length: [0.5 hour](#)

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 ADE Professional Learning Development (APLD) Account.

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

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

- Training Title: [Creating Confidence in the Kitchen: Scratch Cooking Edition](#)

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