Stiritup

THE COUNTRY RANGE GROUP MAGAZINE FOR CATERERS

WestCountry FOODSERVICE

EDUCATION

MENU SOLUTIONS GUIDE

FRESH SOLUTIONS

for school meals

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For help, advice or further information on anything covered in this guide simply contact our team.

WestCountry FOODSERVICE

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Feeding large numbers of children every day with different needs, lifestyle preferences, and at different stages in their education provides one of the most challenging roles in catering.

Pressures in this sector come from all sides: more pupils than ever before have a specific dietary requirement, families are facing a cost of living crisis which is pinching the price of school meals, and parents are vociferous in their demand for menu variety and improved dining environments for their children.

Yet education caterers must find a way through the chaos to ensure children get the nutritious food they need to help them develop and learn.

Over the years there have been a number of new initiatives designed to improve the connection between children, the food they eat and its journey onto their plates. Efforts such as the Whole School Food Policy and Natasha's Law have been critical in achieving this, however it is also important for caterers to understand what is and is not working to drive the perpetual motion of improvement. When we look at how Generations Z and Alpha are responding to the world around them, not only are they forming opinions earlier than ever before, but they are actively driving trends, demanding their voices are heard and for their opinion to matter. It is only by seeing school children as a consumer group and treating them as such; feeding their hearts, minds and tummies that we can find a perfect balance between mandatory practice and happy, engaged children.

In this publication, we explore how to truly engage children and encourage healthy meal choices through the creation of a more positive dining experience and a 'whole school' approach to food education, as well as providing advice on new legislation, trend updates and product news.

83% OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS HAVE A SCHOOL MEAL AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

47% OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL PARENTS OPT FOR A SCHOOL MEAL FOR THEIR CHILD SO THEY HAVE ACCESS TO HOT FOOD

Source: 2022 School Meals Report. Author: ParentPay, Cypad and LACA

A whole school approach TO CATERING

Encouraging students to eat healthily and develop positive lifelong eating and drinking habits takes a multi-disciplined approach, more commonly known as a 'whole school approach' to food. Recommended in the National Food Strategy report published in July 2021, a whole school approach to catering is designed to create a strong food culture in schools, bringing together all aspects of food and drink in a clear, consistent plan that permeates the entire school, establishing effective partnerships between teachers, caterers, parents and students.

Nottingham Catering work with schools to develop bespoke menus that encourage the pupils to eat healthily and their Development Chefs support a range of activities including training for staff, focus groups and taster sessions for pupils. However, Nottingham Catering recognise that some pupils will need a little extra encouragement, so their Development Chefs have undergone training with TastEd, who are a charity that aims to revolutionise the way Food Education is taught in the UK.

Nottingham Catering have been working in schools to deliver TastEd lessons to pupils, where they bring fresh vegetables and fruit into the classroom to talk and write about what they see, smell, touch, hear and taste and whether they enjoy it or not.

These are simple taste education lessons tailored to the UK curriculum. The feedback they have received has been extremely positive from pupils, teachers and parents.

This positive exposure to fruit and vegetables helps them at lunch times and encourages them to try something new. The next step is to extend this training to the Midday staff as they believe this will enhance their work and help them encourage the pupils to eat more fruit and vegetables.

Case Study: Nottingham Catering (LACA Member)

"SCHOOL MEALS ARE SO VITALLY IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS SO IT THEREFORE GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT THE BEST EDUCATOR ON FOOD SHOULD BE YOUR CHEF."

From lessons through to playtime, after school clubs, event sponsorship and meals, a whole school approach to food delivers consistency by reflecting what is taught about food and healthy eating throughout the school, promoting the function of the dining room to an extra classroom.

Many schools have already adopted a whole school approach and are seeing the benefits of instigating changes, not only with regards to the wellbeing of their pupils, but also in the relationships the school has with the wider community.

With no two schools operating the same way, there are no hard-and-fast rules to apply, however a good starting point is to open up communications between all staff and start brainstorming how to build better connections between the curriculum, the school environment and the catering team.

"I think the only key thing that you need to have is the will to do this." comments Nicole Pasani, Founder of Chefs in Schools, "If it comes from senior leadership or if it comes from the kitchen staff, as long as you understand the importance of the impact of the food in a school setting, then there's no reason why you wouldn't start seeing how you could link it in any way or form."

5 TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO FOOD

1. MAKE USE OF THE SCHOOL GROUNDS – Most schools have a lot of land, so think about how you can transform specific areas into a kitchen garden or by planting fruit trees around the grounds. "The school gardens are fundamentally important. The kids just love getting their hands in the soil. They love pulling out veg and it's guaranteed that if they pull out a carrot, they're going to eat it two minutes later. They're eating raw beetroot, they're eating sorrel because it's not forced." says Nicole.

2. RE-EVALUATE THE ROLE OF YOUR CHEF – School meals are so vitally important to students so it therefore goes without saying that the best educator on food should be your chef. Integrating school chefs into the classroom forges a much deeper connection between children and mealtimes, but it also develops relationships between the faculty, encouraging teaching staff to eat in the canteen more often. Practical activities such as pickling veg or fire cooking are great for secondary school pupils, while making wraps and growing mushrooms introduce younger pupils to a variety of food from field to fork.

3. ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION – Serving food three hours a day, your Kitchen Assistants have a fantastic opportunity to connect with students. Upskilling that role to encourage interaction and communicate who cooked each dish and why, not only enhances children's conversational skills but it can also convince them to try something new.

4. LINK YOUR MENU TO THE CURRICULUM – When you understand what children are being taught in the classroom, it is easy to extend that learning into the dining hall, so ask food tech teachers what they are teaching that term. "If they are teaching about sugar, we can then make sure that when they come into the dining hall, there is a cake made with 50% apples, 20% pears and 10% honey to show them the natural sugars versus processed white sugar." comments Nicole.

5. INTRODUCE TASTING POTS – Whether you are showcasing fruit and vegetables grown on site or introducing new ingredients, tasting pots give children a low-risk opportunity to try something new. Mini asparagus salad pots, edible flowers, raw cauliflower florets or single spoon portions of a new dish will leverage natural curiosity, start conversations and get students excited about food.

THE 4P'S of menu planning

When planning school menus for the new term, there is much to consider. Breakfast, snacks, lunch and after school meals need to offer variety and contain the vital nutrients children need to fuel their learning journey. Referring to the School Standards guidelines as well as evaluating successes and failures from previous terms forms the framework of the preparation process, however to make your menus more appealing, we suggest adding the following 4 P's to your planning:

1 PERFECT PAIRINGS

- Pair familiar foods with new foods, including a new food several times in the menu cycle
- Celebrate culture and diversity with your menu, introducing world foods, pairing current events with local or international dishes to continue the learning journey from the classroom into the kitchen. Speak to your suppliers about the latest food trends and product innovation
- Convert popular meat dishes into vegetarian alternatives to increase the uptake of more plant-based options, exploring meat substitutes that have the texture and flavour of meat to overcome any resistance

2 PERSUASIVE PROMOTIONS

- Make the healthy choice an easy choice, lowering the price or including it in promotions such as meal deals
- Introduce competitions to engage students and carve deeper connections between the students and your catering team
- Use "Specials" as a means to offset any dishes that may need to be cancelled or changed last minute, especially when using ingredients that may be short in supply, or when introducing a new ingredient elsewhere on the menu with no history of how popular it might be

"I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE NEW THINGS EVERY DAY OR BRING NEW DISHES EVERY WEEK SO IT'S LESS REPETITIVE, OR SELL BETTER COLD FOOD AND MAKE THE PRICES CHEAPER FOR THE COLD FOOD." AIDEN, AGE 14

3 PROACTIVE PARTICIPATION

- Regularly eat with the students, not only to see lunchtime through their eyes, but to listen to what they enjoy and canvas opinion
- Involve students in the introduction of new foods & ask them what they like/don't like to improve school meal up-take and reduce wastage
- Introduce tasting pots to test new ideas and ask students to give their feedback via a star rating system

NICOLE PASANI, FOUNDER OF CHEFS IN SCHOOLS IS PASSIONATE ABOUT USING SEASONAL PRODUCE AS LOUISE NICHOLS, HEADTEACHER OF GAYHURST PRIMARY SCHOOL IN LONDON DESCRIBES, "NICOLE CONNECTED US WITH GREAT SUPPLIERS OF FRESH FOOD AND USED AN APP TO ENSURE THAT WE'RE ALWAYS GETTING SEASONAL, BEST-VALUE RAW MATERIALS FOR OUR SCHOOL MEALS. THIS MEANS THAT THE FOOD QUALITY HAS GONE UP WHILE THE COST HAS GONE DOWN. FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS OF THIS WORK I'VE ROLLED THE SAME MODEL OUT INTO MY OTHER TWO SCHOOLS AND HAVE SEEN HUGE IMPROVEMENTS."

4 PORTIONS & PRODUCE

- Determine portion sizes during your menu planning to ensure the benefits of healthy meals are not undone
- Use seasonal produce. Often, we get set in our ways and use the same ingredients because they are familiar. Exploring alternatives using seasonal produce charts can make your menu more enticing and cut costs because you are not importing out of season produce
- Think about colour and texture – use crinkle cut knives, cut carrots at an angle and avoid "beige food" by bringing it to life using a rainbow of fruit and vegetables

ESSENTIALS THAT MAKE THE GRADE

The value foodservice brand you can trust

CATERING ESSENTIALS

Ask your local **Country Range Group** wholesaler for details on the full range

THE RISE of wrap around catering

The fight to combat hunger and food insecurity for children is still in its infancy, recent figures have shown an increase in the number of children qualifying for free school meals, rising 3% between January and October 2020 to 1.63 million. Activities during and post COVID-19 have encouraged more school caterers to add after-school takeaway meals to their wrap-around catering offer, ensuring children have access to nutritious meals when they need it, supporting working families and vulnerable parents across the country.

"LACA conducted a sample survey of our members in March 2021 and found that 89% were serving breakfasts. Almost half also said meals were provided after-school; and a quarter are already providing meals during the holidays. We expect this trend to continue upwards with the advent of the Holiday Activities and Food programme." comments Stephen Forster, Former National Chair, LACA – The School Food People.

Wrap-around catering is not solely focussed on families living in food poverty, it supports parents who are unable to make their children breakfast or dinner due to work commitments and childcare challenges.

If your school catering team is looking to add breakfast to the menu, try starting the day with a breakfast muffin, banana bircher muesli, vegan potato hash or huevos rancheros, providing a mix of hot and cold, simple-serve and handheld options for takeaway. Consider the dietary requirements for students at breakfast and include items such as gluten free breakfast cereals and non-dairy milk or yoghurt.

Missing breakfast can affect energy levels, concentration and can also lead to over-indulgence at lunchtime, so if your school is offering a breakfast club for students, make sure they have enough time to eat properly and rotate the menu as you would do at lunch.

When providing after-school meals either as part of a club or as an additional meal service, dishes should be simple to re-heat or best served cold so they can be eaten on or off site. Meals such as poached salmon pasta salad, roast vegetable rice, crudites & quiche or a wrap work well as chilled options or try a curry, pasty, chilli or moussaka for hot dishes. To make preparation easier and reduce food waste, cook pasta or rice prior to your lunch service, storing it so that you can quickly add it to a sauce for lunch and serve hot, or combine it with raw veg and salad for an after-school meal.

If you are offering an after-school takeaway that does not form part of a club, consider recyclable/compostable takeaway containers and cutlery to make it easier for children to transport or consume on-the-go and include labels with reheating instructions.

Top tip

KEEP YOUR MENU FRESH BY SWAPPING OUT THE CRANBERRY AND MAPLE SYRUP FOR RASPBERRIES AND HONEY.

Cranberry greek yogurt maple syrup granola breakfast pot

INGREDIENTS

- 25g Country Range Cranberry Sauce
- 75g Greek Style Natural Yoghurt
- 25g Granola (Country Range recipe)
- Country Range Pecans, broken
- Country Range Maple & Agave Syrup

METHOD

1. Layer the cranberry sauce, Greek yoghurt and granola.

2. Top with pecans then drizzle over the maple syrup.

Kitchen trends MEAT FREE MEALS

According to a recent survey, school caterers are leading the charge towards more plant-based meals within the public sector[1], with just under half introducing a meat free day every week, citing the students' concerns about climate change, nature loss and animal welfare driving their decisions.

The plant-based trend has been gaining pace over the years in hospitality so it is no-longer a new phenomenon, but it may surprise you to learn it has grown to such an extent that only 23% of young adults surveyed eat meat 7 days a week.

The opportunities for caterers to provide vegan or vegetarian meals has never been so great, however many are still struggling to deliver variety across the menu. Fortunately, there is an increasing number of products coming to the market every term to make life a little easier. This year alone has seen the introduction of a wide variety of products from Tofoo, vegan burgers and banana blossom fish substitutes to condiments such as the Country Range Vegan Mayo.

Keeping abreast of the innovation and new plant-based products available will be a challenge for school caterers because the market is moving at such a fast pace, so when planning your menus for the new term, connect with your suppliers in advance to learn more about the new plant-based products available. In many instances, it is now possible to swap non-vegan ingredients for plant-based to simplify storage and procurement without compromising on flavour.

WITH THE PLANT-BASED JUGGERNAUT SHOWING NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN AS INCREASING NUMBERS OF CONSUMERS RE-ASSESS THEIR CONSUMPTION OF ANIMAL PRODUCTS, WE'RE DELIGHTED TO ROLL-OUT OUR NEW SMOOTH AND SILKY COUNTRY RANGE VEGAN MAYO.

To introduce more vegetarian options to your menu, international food awareness organisation, ProVeg suggests making the following 5 changes:

1. Ensure there is a daily offering of meat free meals
2. Make your meat free meal different to the meat-based one
3. Have at least one meat free day each week
4. Ensure the wording on your menu is enticing
5. Remove all processed red meat from your menu

27%[2] OF 11-18 YEAR OLDS SURVEYED WHO WOULD LIKE TO EAT LESS MEAT SAY THE LACK OF MEAT FREE OPTIONS IN THE SCHOOL CANTEEN IS PREVENTING THEM FROM DOING SO.

In 2021, BBC Good Food surveyed 1,000 children aged 5-16 in the UK and found:

8% of children are following a vegan diet and of those who don't follow a vegan diet, **15%** would like to.

13% of children are vegetarian and of those who are not currently vegetarian, **21%** would like to be.

The Poke Bowl

SERVES 1

INGREDIENTS

- 10g edamame
- 1 tin lotus root slices
- 1 radish, sliced
- ½ avocado, sliced
- ¼ firm silken tofu, diced
- ½ carrot
- 15g red cabbage sliced
- 1 spring onion sliced
- 30g Country Range Easy Cook Basmati Rice
- 1 tbsp mirin
- 1 tbsp rice wine vinegar
- ¼ tsp wasabi paste

FOR THE DRESSING

- 1 tbsp Country Range Vegetable Oil
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tsp Country Range Sesame Seeds
- 1 lime juice and zest
- 1/8 tsp Country Range Chilli Flakes
- 1 tsp Country Range White Wine Vinegar
- 1 tbsp Country Range Maple & Agave Syrup
- 1/8 tsp Country Range Coriander Seeds

METHOD

1. Make up the dressing by mixing all the ingredients together then pour over the diced firm silken tofu to marinate.

2. Cook the basmati rice as per pack instructions and keep warm.

3. Mix the wasabi, mirin and rice vinegar together and mix in with the rice.

4. Place the rice in the takeaway bowl and arrange all the thinly sliced and washed raw vegetables in the bowl to show off their colour and beauty.

5. Top with the marinated tofu in the centre and serve.

Top tip

FOR EXTRA FLAVOUR WHY NOT COMBINE WITH COUNTRY RANGE KATSU CURRY SAUCE

[1] Public Sector Catering & Eating Better, 2021. Public Sector Caterers' Progress Towards Serving Less and Better Meat
[2] YouGov & Eating Better 2019. Youth Survey

School catering TOP 12

Delivering value for money without compromising on taste or quality, Country Range products are created for the makers, specifically developed for professional use and tested to deliver consistent performance which is why they are widely recognised as the best in foodservice.

The range comprises of ambient, chilled, frozen and non-food products, all of which have full traceability, complying with the British Retail Consortium Global Standard for Food Safety.

1 COUNTRY RANGE FREEZE CHILL FRIES

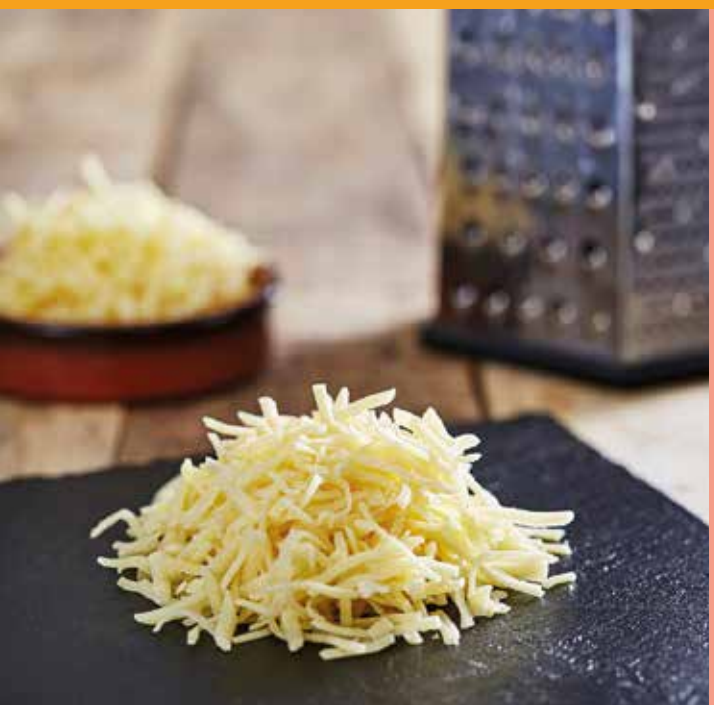
Pack Size: 2.5kg

Pre-fried and deep frozen, our French fries are produced from carefully selected premium potatoes for a fluffy texture and great taste. Allergen free and suitable for vegans and vegetarians, they cook in 3.5-4 minutes in a commercial fryer from frozen.

2 COUNTRY RANGE TUNA CHUNKS IN BRINE

Pack Size: 400g/800g/1.7kg

Ideal for creating healthy sandwiches, pasta dishes, salads and jacket potato fillings, Country Range Tuna is responsibly sourced and sustainably caught using the purse seine method, ensuring the future protection of fish stocks.



3 COUNTRY RANGE GRATED MOZZARELLA & CHEDDAR CHEESE

Pack Size: 1kg

The best of both worlds, our grated mozzarella and cheddar cheese blends the elasticity and creaminess of mozzarella with the tangy flavour of a classic cheddar. Use it to top savoury muffins for breakfast or add a golden crust to fish pie – the possibilities in the kitchen are endless!

For more great products or recipe information visit https://countryrange.co.uk/

4 COUNTRY RANGE UNSMOKED RINDLESS BACK BACON

Pack Size: 2.27kg

Bacon is also a firm favourite amongst school children. Not only does our bacon create the perfect bacon butty, it can be used to add flavour to other dishes such as minestrone soup or bacon and thyme potato cakes.

Country Range Bacon was awarded the 'Best of the Best' in the butchery category in the CCM Own Brand Awards. Each 2.27kg pack contains 24-42 tasty rashers of quality unsmoked rindless back bacon.

5 COUNTRY RANGE CLASS A CHICKEN BREAST FILLET

Pack Size: 5kg

Our Class A fresh chicken breast fillets are skinless and boneless for convenience in busy school kitchens. Calibrated to between 200 – 230g to ensure consistency in size and to aid portion control, they are delivered chilled and ready for cooking.

A chicken rice box is a protein rich, substantial take-out food offering for older children. Create a dip using lime juice, soy sauce and honey with the option of adding chilli flakes for a spicy kick.

6 COUNTRY RANGE SLICED GAMMON HAM

Pack Size: 500g

Perfect for sandwiches, wraps or rolls, our ready to eat gammon ham is cured, cooked and boneless. Pre-cut for convenience, each 500g pack contains 15 slices.

7 COUNTRY RANGE GRATED MILD WHITE CHEDDAR CHEESE

Pack Size: 1kg

Mild and creamy, our cheddar cheese is pre-grated for convenience and is ready to use in sauces or as toppings on pizza, toast or pasta dishes like macaroni cheese.

8 COUNTRY RANGE SWEETCORN

Pack Size: 1kg/2.5kg

Deliciously sweet and always a favourite with school children, our sweetcorn is blanched then frozen to lock in the nutritional value and ensures it tastes as good as the day it was harvested. Microwave or boil from frozen.

9 COUNTRY RANGE CHOICE GARDEN PEAS

Pack Size: 1kg/2.5kg

Harvested at their peak, then blanched and frozen to lock in flavour and nutrients, our frozen peas are calibrated for quality and size to give caterers consistency in the kitchen. Microwave or boil from frozen.

10 COUNTRY RANGE REDUCED SUGAR & SALT BAKED BEANS IN TOMATO SAUCE

Pack Size: 2.62kg

Perfect for jacket potatoes, sausage casseroles, pizza toppings or breakfasts, our baked beans are naturally high in protein and fibre, providing children with 1 of their 5 a day. Allergen free and low in fat, sugar and salt, they are a flexible school catering friend.

"WE USE A LOT OF COUNTRY RANGE PRODUCTS, FROM THE BATTERED FISH TO SPONGE MIXES, OIL, TINNED TOMATOES, SAUCES AND DRESSINGS. IT REALLY IS GREAT VALUE WHILST AT THE SAME TIME BEING GREAT QUALITY." SCHOOL CATERER

11 COUNTRY RANGE CHOPPED TOMATOES

Pack Size: 6 x 800g

Peeled and diced Italian tomatoes in tomato juice - a versatile store cupboard essential that is perfect for sauces, stews, soups and curries.

12 COUNTRY RANGE APPLE JUICE

Pack Size: 27 x 200ml cartons

100% pure apple juice from concentrate perfect for schools, hospitals and kids catering events. Apple juice is associated with important phytonutrients, which reduce risk of health problems like asthma, cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure.

Snacking your way to SUCCESS

Mid-morning breaks provide much needed time-out from the challenges pupils face in the classroom, giving them the opportunity to rest and recuperate, minimising disruptive behaviour during lessons. Children need to eat every 3-4 hours to fuel their growth and prevent overeating during mealtimes, so breaks are pivotal to providing the nutrition they need.

Breaktimes are usually "pit-stops" – a fifteen minute interval for children to play, socialise and get sustenance, placing pressure on school caterers to serve hundreds of pupils in a short period of time. As a result, snacks should be self-serve or quick-serve items and portable so children can eat them on the go.

For younger children try mini toast bites topped with ham and cheese, hummus and apple or tuna and sweetcorn, providing easy to consume finger food that is quick to make and serve. For older children, take a look at what's trending in cafés out of school, reproducing them for students. Pret a Manger's Protein Pots containing a boiled egg & a handful of fresh spinach leaves are a great example and can be adapted, swapping spinach for edamame beans, blanched broccoli or avocado.

Self service options are ideal for improving the flow of students through the canteen, items such as energy balls made with seeds and dried fruit, wholemeal cheese scones, nut-free flapjacks or banana muffins are popular "to-go" snacks that children are both familiar with and provide the nutrients that will sustain their energy levels throughout the day.

When building your snack menu, variety and interest is key, not only to encourage students to use the service, but to ensure they feed their bodies and minds with the right foods. Adding protein or extra fibre to snacks can help children feel fuller for longer which will aid concentration in the classroom, however sugary foods such as yoghurt coated fruit or chocolate will result in a quick energy boost that is swiftly followed by lethargy.

70% OF PARENTS SURVEYED IN THE 2022 SCHOOL MEALS REPORT SAID THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY FOR BREAKFAST IF IT WERE OFFERED BY THE SCHOOL.

Power packed energy balls

COOKING TIME: 20 MINS

INGREDIENTS

- 25g coconut oil
- 100g Country Range Dried Apricot
- 200g Country Range Dates
- 50ml Country Range Coconut Milk
- 25g Country Range Desiccated Coconut
- 15g Country Range Sunflower Seeds
- 10g poppy seeds
- 1/8th tsp Country Range Tumeric
- 1/8th tsp Country Range Ginger
- 1/8th tsp Country Range Cinnamon

METHOD

1. Whizz apricots, dates, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon in a food processor until very finely chopped.

2. Add the coconut milk and tip the mix into a bowl and use your hands to work in the coconut oil.

3. Shape the mix into walnut-sized balls, roll in chopped sunflower seeds, poppy seeds and coconut.

4. Store in an airtight container until you need an energy uplift.

Top tip

FOR AN EXTRA TREAT WHY NOT MIX IN SOME COUNTRY RANGE 70% DARK CHOCOLATE DROPS

Presentation MATTERS

Most of us have probably walked into a café or restaurant at some point in our lives, looked around and then walked back out again because it didn't "feel right" or look appealing. Fortunately for us, we have that choice, but at school, students who opt-in to school meals do not. The impact of our surroundings cannot be underestimated when it comes to encouraging positive behaviour, so to engage students, operators must think outside of the kitchen, examining all aspects of the dining environment.

WALK IN YOUR CUSTOMER'S SHOES

It is easy to forget that the customer is not just the school, it is also the children, so start by viewing your dining hall from their perspective and walk the floor at breaktimes. Signage and imagery placed at the height of an adult can seem a long way away for a primary school pupil. Make a note of how students approach the canteen asking yourself; what's the first thing that greets you? Is the environment visually stimulating from the onset? Are the kitchen assistants engaging with the kids? Is the queue orderly or is it a bundle? Do children get split up from their friends?

Systems and processes that may have been put in place to ease congestion or improve efficiency could be just as off-putting as a grey, dreary building that looks more like a borstal than a canteen providing a nourishing meal. By viewing your canteen through the eyes of the pupils, you will get a better understanding of what they find easy to navigate, what can be improved and where the pinch points lie. Sometimes small changes such as introducing cashless payments, reassessing the position of drinks stations or alterations to how children are met and greeted can have a big impact.

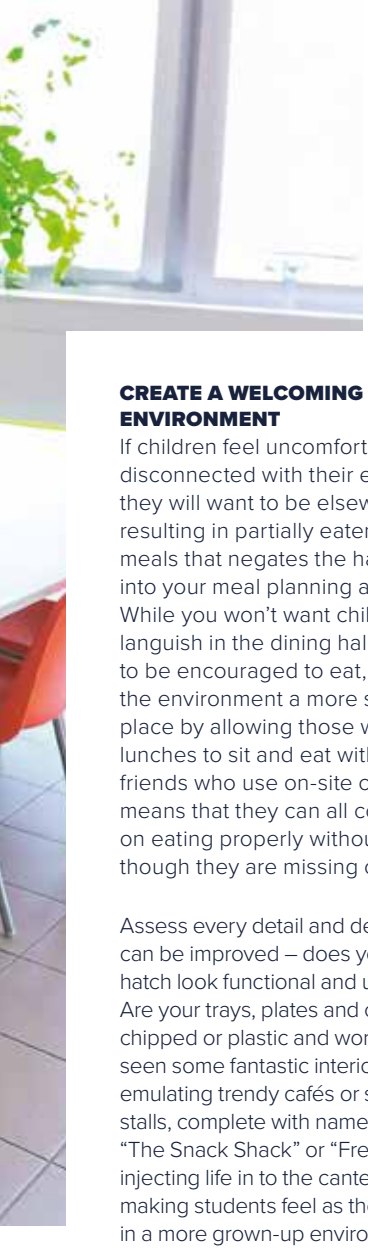
PRE-ORDER PREFERENCES

A nationwide survey of primary and secondary school parents conducted in 2022 highlights a distinct shift in the way they would like to see school meals organised. 70% of secondary and 77% of primary school parents want to pre-select meals, view the nutritional content of each dish and see an image of the food.

The change is driven by their desire to ensure children get their preferred meal instead of skipping lunch. It also helps them better manage their children's diet, especially for those with allergies. Parents who can pre-book meals for children with allergies stated they felt more confident allowing their children to eat meals prepared by school caterers.

Pre-ordering food also helps caterers plan ingredient requirements and reduce food waste - keeping costs under tighter control.

(stat source: 2022 School Meals Report. Author: ParentPay, Cypad & LACA)



CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

If children feel uncomfortable or disconnected with their environment, they will want to be elsewhere, resulting in partially eaten or rushed meals that negates the hard work put into your meal planning and cooking. While you won't want children to languish in the dining hall, they need to be encouraged to eat, so making the environment a more sociable place by allowing those with packed lunches to sit and eat with their friends who use on-site catering, means that they can all concentrate on eating properly without feeling as though they are missing out.

Assess every detail and determine what can be improved – does your serving hatch look functional and uninviting? Are your trays, plates and cutlery chipped or plastic and worn? We have seen some fantastic interior designs emulating trendy cafés or street food stalls, complete with names such as "The Snack Shack" or "Fresh Bites," injecting life in to the canteen and making students feel as though they are in a more grown-up environment.

IMPROVE YOUR BRAND

Every brand needs to engage with their target consumer to be successful and school catering is no exception. Children are influenced by many different factors so thinking beyond the obvious touch points is important. For example, if teachers don't eat school meals, students may feel the meals are inferior, so encouraging teaching staff to eat at the school canteen could improve popularity. At St George's College, Weybridge the faculty and office staff are all encouraged to eat in the canteen with the children, creating a more inclusive environment.

"OUR SCHOOL MEALS COULD BE MADE MORE APPEALING IF THEY MADE THE ENVIRONMENT WE EAT IN NICER."

LUKE, AGED 13

When introducing new dishes or ingredients, offer tasting samples while students wait in line, asking for their feedback. This will make them feel valued, considered and they might also step outside their comfort zone to try something new.

Presenting meals and menus in a way that speaks directly to the issues and topics children care about is another great way to forge connections. Linking events such as World Book Day or the Olympics to menus (think football frittata, Hufflepuff pastry pinwheels and Velocirap-tortes) adds a little fun and turns mealtimes into a talking point.

BE CONSCIENTIOUS ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Bright walls with menus clearly communicated as students enter the canteen either digitally or on blackboards are attention grabbing and visually stimulating. They enable children to discuss the menu and pre-select dishes as they wait in line, reducing indecisiveness and improving the flow at each serving point. But is this enough? Research has shown that by adding creative descriptions to the menu not only makes dishes more enticing, but it also makes selection easier. There is no doubt that "sustainably sourced chargrilled salmon with honey, soy and ginger Asian noodles" sounds a lot better than "salmon stir fry."

As students reach the serving hatch, make sure every dish is easy to view and clearly labelled so they can identify the meal they want from further back in the queue. We all eat with our eyes so if you want children to select healthier options, make them look more appealing and dial down the communications labelling it as healthy.

By understanding what is important to children, how they want to be treated and communicated to as a customer, caterers will be able to identify quick wins that will make a huge impact to their service and the levels of enjoyment children attribute to mealtimes.

Top tip

THESE QUESADILLAS GO PERFECTLY WITH OUR LOADED FRIES RECIPE

Double Chicken Quesadillas

INGREDIENTS

- 2 Country Range Chicken Breast Fillets, sliced
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 1 yellow pepper, sliced
- 150g Country Range Grated Mature Cheddar Cheese
- 1 red onion, sliced Country Range Jalapeños, sliced
- 3 Country Range Flour Tortillas
- 1 tbsp Country Range Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 2 tbsp Country Range Fajita Seasoning

METHOD

1. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C.
2. Heat the oil in a large frying pan and fry the chicken until cooked through.
3. Add the Fajita Seasoning, peppers and onion and continue to fry for 2-3 minutes, then set aside.
4. Place one tortilla on a baking tray and top with half the cooked chicken mix, then top with cheese.
5. Layer another tortilla on top and repeat the process.
6. Finally, place the third tortilla on top and finish with cheese and jalapeños.
7. Pop in the oven for 10 minutes and serve with Country Range Salsa.

Funding research to prevent & eradicate food allergy

Campaigning for policy change to make the world safer for the allergy community

Increasing understanding and awareness of food allergies to save lives

Giving a voice to the allergic community

Help us prevent food allergy deaths

Our mission is to prevent and eradicate allergic disease, creating a world without allergy.

Text SAFER 3 to

70480

to donate £3*

Natasha Allergy Research Foundation

A Registered Charity: 1181098 (England and Wales) SC051610 (Scotland).

NATASHA'S LAW *are you compliant?*

Natasha's Law, which came into effect in October 2021, requires all caterers to provide a full list of ingredients, clearly highlighting any allergens on all pre-packaged food for direct sale (PPDS). Allergens can be highlighted in bold, italics or a different colour, but they must be clear and legible.

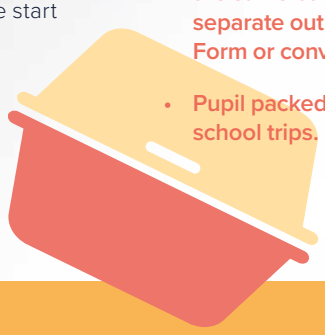
The legislation aims to protect people with food allergies, giving them greater confidence in the food they purchase. Schools in particular will be under scrutiny - any food made, packaged and wrapped on site such as snacks, sandwiches, wraps, salad pots and cakes must be compliant. This includes self-selection options and items that are pre-wrapped and kept behind the counter.

To protect school caterers and students from any future allergen related incidents, we strongly advise all new team members to be fully trained on this legislation, and refresher courses are undertaken by staff at the start of every school term. Further advice can be found at www.food.gov.uk via the allergen labelling page.

https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/introduction-to-allergen-labelling-changes-ppds

To help identify food which is pre-packed for direct sale in schools and must therefore comply with the new legislation, CMC School Food have created the following list of examples:

- Sandwiches packaged by the catering team and sold or offered from the same premises.
- Fast food which is wrapped or packaged before a pupil or member of staff selects or orders it – burgers, sausage rolls, panini, etc.
- Bakery products which are packaged before a pupil or member of staff selects them.
- Any potted items made on site with lids on – salads, jellies, mousses, fruit pots, yoghurt/granola pots etc.
- Free issues or hospitality of cakes if they are packaged at the premises.
- Food packaged and sold by the same business at a separate outlet – i.e. for sixth Form or conveyed meals.
- Pupil packed lunches for school trips.



Dairy free chorizo calzone

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tsp garlic puree
- Red Onion
- 500ml Country Range Tomato and Basil Sauce
- 100g Diced sliced chorizo
- Pinch of Country Range Chilli Flakes
- 1 tsp Salt
- 100g Dairy Free Cheese
- Half a tsp Country Range mixed herbs
- 2 Country Range Doughballs

METHOD

1. Once the doughballs are defrosted cut them in half and reshape so you have 4 small doughballs.

2. Allow to prove in a warm place for 20 mins.

3. Meanwhile in a frying pan fry off red onion, garlic until soft in tbsp olive oil.

4. Once soft add tomato and basil sauce, mixed herbs and chilli flakes. Remove from the heat and add sliced diced chorizo.

5. Check seasoning with salt and pepper and allow to cool.

6. Roll out the doughballs into 4 small saucer sized disks.

7. In one half of the circle without going to the edge add a mound of the sauce and a quarter of the cheese. Lightly moisten the edge with water and fold over to form a crescent. Calzone shape, pasty style. Press the edge tight and crimp edges with a fork or finger and thumb.

8. Place on a baking tray and bake in the hot oven 250°C 8-12 minutes. Allow to cool for 5 mins before eating.

Chicken firecracker rice

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS

- 2 shallots, diced
- 4 spring onions, sliced
- 50g Country Range Peas
- 50g peppers, diced
- 6 baby corn
- 2 garlic cloves
- 0.5 tsp Country Range Turmeric
- 0.5 tsp Country Range Peri Peri Seasoning
- 100g Country Range Basmati Rice, cooked
- 1 Country Range Chicken Breast
- 50ml chicken stock
- 1 small handful chopped coriander

METHOD

1. Fry the rice and vegetables in oil.
2. Add the garlic, herbs and spices.
3. Add the sliced chicken and chicken stock.
4. Serve when piping hot.

Natasha Allergy Research Foundation

Country Range GROUP

THE COUNTRY RANGE GROUP AND NATASHA ALLERGY RESEARCH FOUNDATION LAUNCH NEW PARTNERSHIP

Your wholesaler is a member of The Country Range Group (CRG), a leading foodservice buying group.

CRG has entered into a three-year partnership with The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation. The unique relationship will see the Group and its member wholesalers work alongside the charity to raise compassion, understanding and vital funds to support research projects aimed at ending allergic disease.

The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation is the only charity in the UK dedicated to scientific and medical research into allergies. One such project is the Natasha Clinical Trial which focuses on children and young people with milk and peanut allergies. The study aims to deliver life changing treatments for hundreds of thousands of allergy sufferers at a fraction of the current cost for the NHS.

"We're delighted to welcome the Country Range Group to Natasha's Foundation and are overwhelmed by their generosity to name us as their chosen charity for the next three years. Our vision is to make allergy history, something we wouldn't be able to do without the support of companies like the Country Range Group. Their knowledge, expertise and reputation in the foodservice sector is second to none so we're thrilled we're able to partner with them and their incredible independent members on our groundbreaking work." Nadim Ednan-Laperouse OBE, Co-Founder & Trustee of The Natasha Allergy Research Foundation

Did you know...

THIS RECIPE IS FREE FROM THE 14 MAJOR ALLERGENS

How to identify allergen labelling requirements for your SCHOOL CATERING

DOES THE STUDENT CHOOSE OR ORDER THE FOOD IN PERSON AT THE PREMISES

- **No** → Food sold via distance communications is not affected by the changes to prepacked for direct sale labelling
- **Yes** → Is the food presented in either fully or partly closed packaging as the final product?
  - **No** → This is non-prepacked food and is not affected by the changes to prepacked for direct sale labelling
  - **Yes** → Is the food packaged before the consumer selects or orders it?
    - **No** → This is non-prepacked food and is not affected by the changes to prepacked for direct sale labelling
    - **Yes** → Is the food packaged at the same place where it is sold?
      - **No** → This is non-prepacked food and is not affected by the changes to prepacked for direct sale labelling
      - **Yes** → This food is prepacked for direct sale and must comply with the changes to prepacked for direct sale labelling laws

It's never too cool to be an ECO-SCHOOL

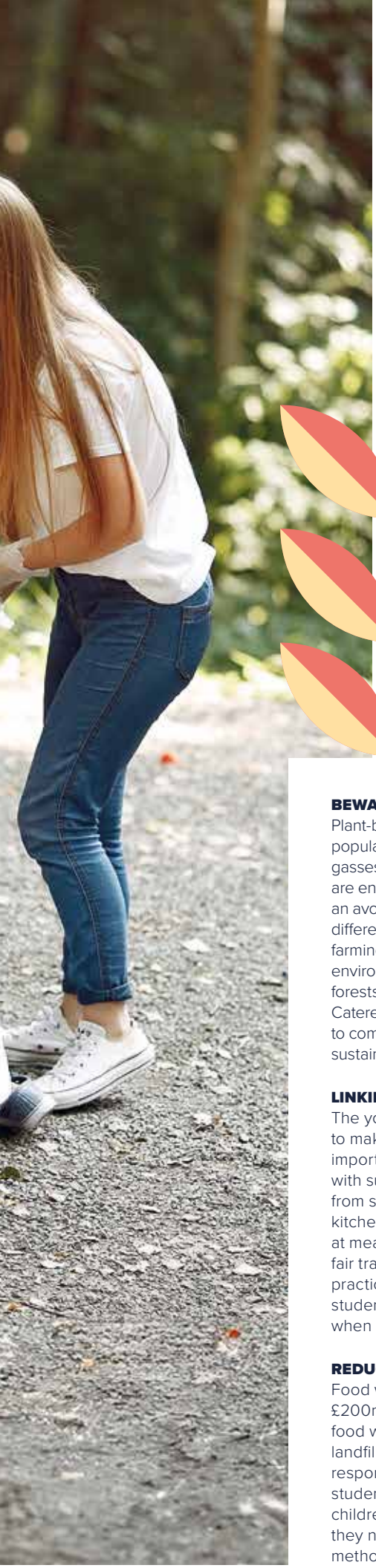
Whether using vegetable peels to make stock or converting leftovers into soup, school caterers have a huge opportunity to connect with pupils on environmental issues. Never before have young people been so acutely aware of the damage we are doing to the planet and they are turning to schools to be more active in the fight for a more sustainable future. From the introduction of more recycling bins and collecting food waste for on-site composting to upcycling milk cartons into planters for growing vegetables, there are many ways caterers can work with schools to enhance their green credentials.

Did you know...

THE GREEN KITCHEN STANDARD

Developed by the Soil Association, the Green Kitchen Standard recognises caterers who adopt sustainable, energy efficient approaches within their operation. Aligned with the Resource Efficiency section of DEFRA's Balanced Scorecard for public sector caterers, it reflects best practice to reduce energy, water and waste, verifying a caterer's green credentials. Comprising of 3 assessment stages, operators must achieve a score of at least 60% to be awarded the Green Kitchen Standard which may be used on promotional materials and within school communications.

https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/catering/green-kitchen-standard



Top tip

GO PAPERLESS

Distributing menus online, using chalkboards in canteens or digital menu boards are a great way to minimise the use of paper in the kitchen. Take a look at your printed assets and evaluate whether any of them can be transformed to support a more environmentally friendly kitchen.

BEWARE OF IMPOSTERS

Plant-based options are becoming an increasingly popular method of reducing greenhouse gasses, but not all vegetarian or vegan meals are environmentally friendly. The food miles of an avocado compared to British Beef are vastly different and the land damage caused by soybean farming on an industrial scale is creating an environmental hazard of its own, contaminating forests, poisoning rivers and destroying wildlife. Caterers must therefore be careful when it comes to communication that connects their menu with sustainability.

LINKING MENUS TO TOPICAL ISSUES

The younger generation are much more likely to make decisions around issues that are important to them, so making a healthy meal with sustainably sourced ingredients or cooking from scratch using vegetables from the school kitchen garden can influence decision making at mealtimes. Highlighting responsible farming, fair trade ingredients or the ban of unethical practices on the walls of your canteen will give students the information they are searching for when it comes to their food.

REDUCE FOOD WASTE

Food waste costs the education sector over £200m a year, producing 13% of all non-domestic food waste in England, all of which goes into landfill. Reducing food waste is everyone's responsibility, from the catering team to the students. A quick starting point is to ensure children do not pile their plates with more than they need, but there are a number of other methods that are equally as simple to implement.

The practise of keeping a close eye on what sells and what doesn't, using the previous week's sales to guide the quantity ordered and using better quality produce to improve the yield, can be actioned by any school catering team instantly. Live cooking is another great way to reduce waste, producing omelettes and stir fries during lunchtime rather than batch cooking a larger volume beforehand.

If your catering team is interested in reducing food waste and saving money, start by measuring how much you throw away every week so you have a benchmark and monitor the impact of each change as it is introduced.

52%[1] OF SCHOOL CHILDREN WOULD LIKE THEIR SCHOOL TO RECYCLE MORE TO HELP THE PLANET.

A YOUGOV SURVEY FOUND THAT 63%[2] OF 11-18 YEAR OLDS SAID THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE WAS ONE OF THEIR MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE COUNTRY.

[1] Onepoll 1,000 parents of children aged 6-16 in the UK, Feb 2020 courtesy of Heinz
2 YouGov & Eating Better 2019. Youth Survey

Country Range

Created for the makers

new look,

same trusted quality and value

At Country Range, we believe that catered food should always be good quality, regardless of budget.

Our range of over 700 products are created specially to meet the needs of caterers, who take pride in making food for other people. We know caterers need consistently good quality, good value products, in the right amounts and formats. As well as the right menus that reflect changing trends and the right mix of products to maximise margin.

Everything we do at Country Range is created with caterers in mind, helping those who serve food to others, to always serve their best.

www.countryrange.co.uk