

New school lunch patterns proposed

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland recently proposed the most significant changes in meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program since the program's inception in 1946.

"These proposed regulations represent a major step in our efforts to help schools more adequately meet the nutritional needs of children and to reduce plate waste," Bergland said.

"We want to offer our

students meals that are the most appealing and the most acceptable to them within a sound nutritional framework, and we intend to operate the school lunch program as efficiently as possible," the Agriculture Secretary added.

The proposed patterns update the long-standing Type A meal pattern. They are designed to provide children with approximately one-third the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for nutrients (except calories).

The proposed lunch patterns define minimum portions of food for children of five age groups. The proposed patterns reduce the amounts of food served to younger children among whom studies have found plate waste to be the greatest. At the same time, older students with increased appetites and nutritional needs will be offered more food. However, in order to meet the differing food preferences of individuals and to minimize plate waste, students age 12

and older will be able to choose smaller portion sizes of the required lunch components.

The lunch requirements are based on the 1974 revisions of the RDA published by the National Academy of Sciences. This brings the lunch patterns up to date with new knowledge about nutritional needs, and with changing food preferences and consumption habits of children.

The proposed new lunch patterns:

- expand the bread alternates to include the use of enriched or whole-grain rice and macaroni, and noodle products. This avoids situations in which both bread and chop suey over rice must be served at the same meal. It also allows flexible menu planning to meet ethnic and cultural food habits.

- require lunch to be served to 1- through 5-year-old children at two sittings which together meet lunch pattern requirements. Department officials expect this to better meet the food

consumption habits of young children.

- require schools to offer students unflavored fluid lowfat, skim or buttermilk in addition to whole or flavored milk. This provision keeps the amount of fat in the lunch at a moderate level.

- require schools to involve students in their school food service program through activities such as menu planning, enhancement of the eating environment, program promotion and related student-community support activities.

USDA welcomes comments on these proposed regulations from all interested parties, including students, parents, faculty, and community members. Comments are due no later than Oct. 24.

After the initial comment period, interim regulations, reflecting public comment, will be issued. These are planned to be in effect on a pilot test basis, from Jan. 1978 through April 1978. Schools will be permitted to field test the new lunch

patterns under the interim regulations, and the Department will continue to accept and consider public comments on the meal patterns during this period. Further, USDA will hold public hearings this fall on all child nutrition programs, including the new meal patterns.

"There are a number of areas of concern in the school lunch program where the Department believes extensive public discussion is needed before final regulations are promulgated," Bergland stated. "We have identified several matters on which we are especially anxious to have comments from the public before making a decision."

Among the areas identified are:


1. How to determine the appropriate meal pattern in schools with mixed age groupings.

2. Whether to require that second helpings be made available and how to administer reimbursements for such helpings.

3. How to provide the lunch pattern in two separate meal servings to the youngest group of children.

Bergland noted that the Department is also continuing to study alternatives to the Type A lunch pattern, and is considering the feasibility of the "nutrient standard approach" to menu planning. Under this approach, menus are planned to meet a predetermined nutrient level instead of a food pattern of specific types and quantities of food. He said that the Department is especially interested in comments on this issue.

The public, including students and parents, is invited to comment on both the proposed lunch patterns and the nutrients standard approach to meal planning. Written comments, suggestions, or objections should be sent to William G. Boling, Manager, Child Nutrition Programs, Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 20250.



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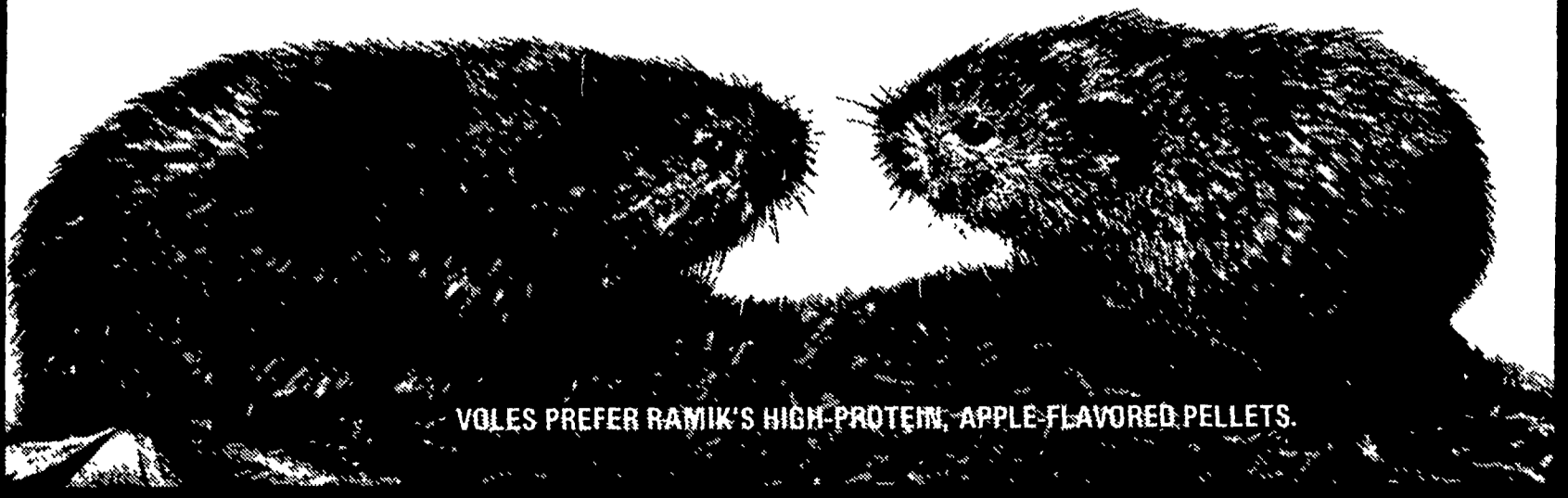
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