

## Students face two options for lunch - pack or buy

### When viewed as a challenge, packing lunches can be fun

BY SALLY BAIR  
Staff Correspondent

**MOUNT JOY** — With September comes more than the first day of school - it is also the beginning of 180 days of packing school lunches in some households. While this often becomes a drudgery, it can be viewed as a challenge.

Good nutrition and food safety should be of paramount importance in planning the school lunch, but sparking the child's interest will help to get all that good nutritious food eaten.

Children at Kraybill's Mennonite School, Mount Joy, pack lunches daily because there is no cafeteria. For Linda Heisey, R2 Mount Joy, that means three lunches every day for her children: Lynnea, 10; Naomi, 8; and Megan, 7.

Linda has solved the problem of what to pack by allowing her daughters to pack their own lunches with supervision. She said food was coming home uneaten, so she decided to have them pack their own.

She adds, "I feel it's important for children to be independent. Then, if mother has a crisis, they can handle it." Lynnea, a sixth grader, said that's exactly what they did when their mother was in the hospital and grandmother was caring for them.

Linda has solved another problem facing perennial packers - that of dented, rusting lunch boxes. She said, "I had bought so many lunch kettles. Now they all have Tupperware lunch boxes." These

plastic boxes feature individual containers for sandwiches and other items, as well as handles. They are completely washable, and parts can be replaced.

The girls seem enthusiastic about their packing which they do in the morning. Megan says, "It's something to do in the morning while we wait for the bus." Also, since Linda is frequently taking calls for the family business, Heisey's Farm Service, the process can continue without her.

Furthermore, Linda says, "They like to pack it themselves and then look forward to it." Lynnea agrees, "I think lunch time is never going to come."

The girls can purchase milk and juice at school, but often prefer to take water, orange juice or milk from home. Once a month in the winter Linda says, the mothers provide a hot lunch for the children. Another treat is the day each week when they can trade something with a friend. But Naomi says, "You can't trade sandwiches." The trading adds an extra dimension when packing - Lynnea pointed out, "You think harder about what to trade." Linda approves of the idea, saying, "It takes away the monotony. A lot of mothers are very conscientious about what they pack."

For her part, Linda says she always thinks about lunches when she goes grocery shopping. Each child has a preference, so she likes to have chicken, bologna and ham on hand for sandwiches, and both



Linda Heisey supervises the packing of school lunches by her three daughters, Lynnea, Megan and Naomi. The children attend Kraybill's Mennonite School and pack lunches daily.

bread and rolls. She often will have something like Fritos which have no additives and no preservatives. She adds, "I try to get fruit in the lunch."

She said the girls prefer carrot sticks kept in water so they are fresher, and she sometimes cooks hot dogs, sending them in the thermos with a bun wrapped separately. Leftovers are frequently offered, and spaghetti or casseroles heat nicely in the microwave, Linda states.

Another favorite of the girls is

finger jello, and for a change raw vegetables and chunks of cheese and crackers are welcomed.

Linda says the success of her method lies in having a choice. She points out, "I say, 'Here are the things I have this week.'"

Speaking honestly, Linda says, "It's pull and tug at the end of 180 days of packing lunches, but now it's interesting."

Linda not only packs lunches for the three children. In the spring, her husband sets off doing custom applying of fertilizer, and then she

must pack two meals daily for him. Fortunately, the period only lasts about two months, she says.

LilliAnn Kopp is another Kraybill's school mother who packs daily. She packs for her three sons, Ryan, 10; Sean, 7½; and Mitchell, 5½. She admits to using plastic Tupperware containers extensively, and says she frequently sends a dip to go with raw vegetables. "It's a treat and a nice change." In the tiny containers she may also send

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**ROHRERSTOWN** — Ask my child what the highlight of his school day is, and it could well be lunch (with recess as a close second). Stella Hess is one of the people who works hard to keep making lunch the best part of the day.

Stella, the well-known sewing leader the Mountville Community 4-H Club, is the cafeteria manager at Rohrerstown Elementary School in the Hempfield School District, and it is her job to prepare and serve food to several hundred students each school day.

It's a job she likes, and one she believes is important. She began working as a substitute in the kitchen 12 years ago and says, "It's one way of working and being home with the family. I always thought my place was in the home, and this way I got home before the children did and left after they did." Her youngest, Christine, is a senior at Hempfield High School.

At a time when many districts have changed to a satellite food program and prepared foods are almost a way of life, the Hempfield School District prepares food in the cafeterias of each of its eight schools.

Stella is the first to admit that it takes organization to feed several hundred students, but she says having the appropriate equipment makes it easy. She can rely on steamers and convection ovens to speed up the process.

Menus are prepared by June B. Witman, food services director and the only dietitian in the county in that capacity, Stella orders baked goods and dairy products are ordered directly, but Mrs. Witman orders the other groceries. Menus are distributed to the students once a month, and Stella says, "I try to stick to the menu if at all possible." Even snow days usually don't require a change unless too much food has been prepared in advance.

Stella prepares a worksheet for the week, so that each day, preparation goes forth not only for that day but for meals which will be served later in the week.

In addition to thinking ahead for the work, Stella must keep very extensive records of what she prepares and what she serves. Food that is not used is weighed, and recorded, and most of it is used in some other way. "We don't have much waste. We can find a use for almost anything," she says.

Stella notes that some children

are afraid to go through the line, and some become confused. "We try to have a choice, but not too many choices because it confuses them." Leftover fruit from one day may be served as a choice several days later.

School lunches have changed in that students do not have to pick up every item offered in the line, but must choose three of five nutritional items. Stella said that the cafeteria offers different portions to different age groups, according to "patterns" established by the government. The four food groups - milk, bread, protein, and fruits and vegetables - are represented in every menu.

How does she feel when someone comes through the line and says, "Ugh!?" Stella says with a smile, "We tell them they should pack. To me it's important that they eat something." Nevertheless some children do buy every day.

Without hesitation, Stella says that pizza is the most popular item offered through the cafeteria, followed by hog dogs, hamburgers and grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup.

She adds, "All cakes and cookies are made from scratch. We make all our dressings from scratch." So is barbecue, macaroni and cheese, and vegetable soup. This varies somewhat from school to school.

For instance Stella always makes sure there are chopped onions and relish on hot dog days. She will also make salads for teachers if they request it.

Food safety is extremely important to cafeteria personnel, and Stella carries a thermometer with her to assure that hot foods are hot and cold foods are cold.

In the Hempfield District between 2,800 and 3,000 platters are served daily out of 5,000 students enrolled. June Witman's dream is to see 100 percent participation. "Children need the amount of food offered." She also believes they get a more balanced lunch in the

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Stella adds the french fries to the platters as Food Service Manager June Witman explains to a first grader how to go through a cafeteria line.

# Homestead Notes