



## **Fact Sheet: Trends in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)**

### **Meeting lower sodium targets:**

- As of May 1, 2017, the USDA requested that schools maintain Target 1 sodium levels for reimbursable school lunches. Target 1 levels specify meals with no more than 540 milligrams for grades kindergarten through 5, no more than 600 milligrams for grades 6 through 8 and no more than 640 milligrams for grades 9 through 12.
- According to the April 2017 issue of the School Nutrition Association magazine, Generation Z is invested in eating tasty food that improves their quality of life, which is one reason why Generation Z is expected to end the trend of increasing obesity rates.

### **Meeting new healthier eating requirements:**

- NSLP has seen some changes in the last few years. In 2010, the federal government enacted the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which put in place new school meal pattern requirements and other regulations. In addition to reducing fat and adding whole grains, one major change was a reduction in sodium content of school lunches.

### **Offering students the ability to customize:**

- Generation Z has already started putting its signature on the food and restaurant industry. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Millennials and Generation Z make up more than half (51 percent) of the population, so their tastes will have a defining impact on the foodservice business.
- Although this demographic loves simple foods (think pizza, sandwiches, chicken), it also has notable interest in customization and a fairly sophisticated palate. According to the April 2017 issue of the School Nutrition Association magazine, an effective way to please students is introducing familiar foods that they can request made-to-order or jazz up on their own with a variety of condiments.

### **Reducing plate waste and increasing consumption:**

- In a national study, School Food Authorities in 48 states reported plate waste as the No. 1 challenge of implementing the new nutrition standards.
- Schools have the unique challenge of minimizing food waste, which currently adds up to about 133 billion pounds of food annually, according to USDA estimates reported in the School Nutrition Association's 2017 Big Little Fact Book.

### **Increasing participation:**

- The School Nutrition Association states that 70 percent of school meal programs have taken a significant financial hit since the new mandates went into effect. According to USDA figures, school food requirements cost school districts and states an additional \$1.22 billion in 2015.
- The new federal standards for school lunches have had a negative impact on the popularity of the programs with students. Students who have “choice” (don’t qualify for free or reduced meals) are opting for other options.
- More than one million fewer students are participating in the program compared to five years ago, according to the USDA FNS Key Program Data Report. As schools lose revenues from full paid meals, they are becoming increasingly price sensitive when it comes to purchasing raw materials.