



The Kids Aren't Hungry Any More

Small children are often shy at first about eating in public. But this embarrassment is a happy contrast to the old spectacle of kids hiding away in lunch hour, too proud to face the rest with empty pails.

By MILLARD C. FAUGHT

How the school-lunch plan now feeds more than 6,000,000 youngsters, without regard to race, color, creed or means.

THE first semester that hot lunches were served in one Indiana school, the 113 pupils gained half a ton in weight; soaking up vitamins and body-building foods that kids seldom find in paper bags and lunch pails. In a Minnesota school, three weeks after a similar program assured identical, nourishing meals for every youngster, a student policeman assigned to the cafeteria turned in his badge. "More food, no fights," he told the principal.

Similar stories come from most of the 93,000 schools where 6,200,000 children in the past year have been getting the stuff bright eyes and pink cheeks are made of. They got it, just like their teaching, without regard to race, color, creed or means.

This mass feeding of youth—a nutritional venture that has spread its benefits to more than a fourth of the kids now in grade schools—is the joint work of local citizens and the Federal Government. Uncle Sam provides free groceries through the Agricultural Marketing Administration of the Department of Agriculture; WPA often supplies the labor, but a responsible community organization

must take the initiative in establishing and supporting the project. School boards and parent-teacher associations are the prime movers, though women's clubs, charitable organizations and all manner of sponsors appear. There's a Midwest town where the Junior League supports a lunch plan in one school and the Boilermakers' Union foots the bill for another.

The school-lunch plan, like much that is truly American, "just grew" at first—when depression was deepest. WPA make-work for the unemployed and the desperate hunger of many youngsters started the fires in school kitchens all across the nation. Prior to that time only the top layer of well-to-do schools had staffs of nutritionists and proper lunch facilities, plus scattered localities where charity feeding existed. There wasn't a draft, then, to wake the nation with alarming statistics on physical unfitness due to malnutrition; to back up the opinions of men who might say, like the Public Health Service's Surgeon General, Thomas Parran, "We are wasting money trying to educate children with half-starved bodies."

When schools were made eligible to receive free foods from the old Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation, in 1935, the outline of the plan that now exists became clear. The greatest growth has come in the past three years, and with it proof that school lunches not only fill empty stomachs but likewise improve national food habits. High schools where the lunch plan succeeds, for instance, usually are those where boys and girls have been educated with a year or two of proper diet in the grades.

Mothers reveal the impact on family menus when they ask how to make healthy dishes like Peter Rabbit salad and Rebecca pudding that their children learn to like in school.

We are catching up fast with the child-feeding programs long established in other parts of the world. England, for example, has steadily improved her facilities for thirty-five years, today relies on them to fight total war, feeding both evacuated children and adults in schools.

Succoring bombed-out *évacués* is, thankfully, more remote here, but school kitchens may have a job nearly as important if war work takes more

In an Illinois town the Junior League sponsors one program, the Boilermakers' Union another.



mothers away from home at mealtimes. Breakfasts have had a wide trial and turned up surprising results. Lawrence, Massachusetts, for instance, expanded a lunch program to include breakfasts in a couple of factory-district schools, mostly for a handful of underweight kids, but intermittently for all. Real estate in the district served by one of these schools enjoyed a boom all out of proportion to the shabbiness of the homes, inspired by mothers who had to get up early and punch a time clock.

The gratification to teachers where the lunch plan operates amounts almost to joy. To qualify to receive free commodities from the AMA, sponsoring community organizations have only to state the number of undernourished children in the school. This tabulation usually shocks the community, but not the teachers or physicians.

Up to three fourths of the youngsters in school after school are undernourished. Rich as well as poor. A diet of cakes and candy, favored by many with money to spend, is little better than a bread-and-lard sandwich brought to school in a paper sack. And it's a rare schoolma'am who hasn't encountered kids hiding away during lunch hour, too proud to face the rest with empty pails.

Bargains in Health

WHAT does the school-lunch plan cost? That depends on the community; success in obtaining WPA or other free labor; whether all or only part of the youngsters are fed. Feeding all is most desirable and most in vogue. Parents who can pay contribute the few cents each meal requires—from three to twelve, average six. The school usually collects a lump sum at intervals and issues tickets to all kids, so none know who pays and who does not. Up to 50 per cent of the food is bought locally to supplement the AMA's free commodities, and often is contributed by parents in farming communities. Sixty per cent of the lunch-program schools are rural. In one Arkansas town, after the parent-teacher association had raised money for kitchen equipment, a community garden produced 6000 cans of vegetables, and the pupils, on their own, fattened a bull calf for steak, roast and stew meat.

It cost a Massachusetts town \$216.93 to provide hot lunches through the year for a school of 453 pupils. The great majority of the youngsters paid for their meals, which cost six cents apiece, two of it for food purchased. The town spends \$110 per child per year for education. If only two borderline youngsters pass their grades, the school-board's lunch expenditure shows a profit.

The cost to the Government for school-lunch groceries in one month—February, 1942—was \$5,300,000. That represented 66,700,000 pounds of food. AMA usually has twenty to thirty kinds of fruit, vegetables and meat for distribution, bought in the open market and by contract. The buying for lunches, Federal law directs, is to support the prices of farm products. AMA also buys for Lend-Lease. Frequently, when ships cannot be found to move Lend-Lease perishables abroad, the food is shunted to school menus.

Summer lunch programs continue in camps and playgrounds—7500 last year, perhaps twice that number this season as the ranks of community sponsors grow. Camp programs are no different



The meals aren't always hot. Government groceries can easily be used outdoors, too, as in the case of the 7500 summer camps that will feature lunch programs this summer.

from those in school; they, too, need local initiative and support.

The problems that occur in establishing a lunch plan, and ingenuity in meeting them, were typical for the Bellewood-Antis School, located in a little Central Pennsylvania community supported by farm and mine. When the principal and his school board agreed on the venture, the board contributed tables, chairs and a sink. The local PTA found three oil stoves and miscellaneous containers, and the children brought their own bowls and spoons, then pitched in to help their elders salvage a huge refrigerator from a store demolished in a near-by town. Within a week, with WPA and NYA kitchen help, 250 youngsters were getting lunches that cost the board three cents apiece.

A year later 550 children were being fed and the school had \$600 worth of equipment, including two electric stoves. This past year the youngsters made six barrels of soap from fats left over from their kitchen, and put up an unexpected 1500 pounds of sauerkraut when someone misplaced a decimal in a food order and the school was deluged with cabbages. The students had to convert the bus garage into a cannery for the job.

The comment of Bellewood's principal, Paul Kurtz, will interest parents everywhere. "It is high time that schools became concerned with children, not merely children's higher nerve centers," he believes. "You may say it any way you want to, but it is still true that the large majority of children are poorly nourished and therefore subject to diseases, low in class performance, and probably even emotionally unsettled. They profit more from our lunch program than anything I know."



The community must pay operating expenses. Dances are popular fund raisers. A Georgia movie gives 25 per cent of Bank Night take.

Parents who can, pay for their kids' meals. But the school generally fixes things so that the children themselves don't know who pays and who doesn't.

In this tiny lunch program, an Indian woman cooks for 20 Nevada kids in a chuck wagon.



The same agency which provided 344 million pounds of food last year for U. S. schools also helps English ones.



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