

School Meal Programs Can Transform the Food System



What we're learning from the Global Survey of School Meal Programs ©



School meal programs can transform food systems by prioritizing the nutritional needs of children and adolescents while increasing availability of nutritious, safe, sustainably produced, affordable foods.

GCNF conducted the 2019 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © to establish a comprehensive database of school meal programs. Responses were received from 103 countries, 85 of which had large-scale programs.



78%

OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION LIVE IN COUNTRIES THAT RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY.



\$45 BN

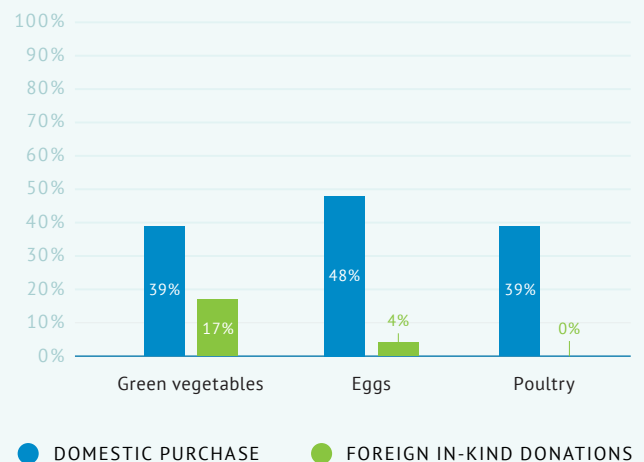
WAS THE TOTAL EXPENDITURE REPORTED FOR SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS.

HARNESSING THIS BUYING POWER COULD POWERFULLY IMPACT FOOD SYSTEMS.

LOCAL AND NUTRITIOUS SUPPLY CHAINS FOR HEALTHIER SCHOOL FEEDING

School feeding programs create demand for diverse, nutritious, locally sourced food while promoting local agricultural development and government ownership.

Programs that rely on domestic purchase more commonly report the following food items and more:



FORTIFICATION AND BIOFORTIFICATION

Where access to nutritious food is limited, these strategies address hidden hunger and build nutrition resilience into food systems.



68%

OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS SERVED FORTIFIED FOODS.

MOST COMMON ADDITIONS: IRON, IODINE, VITAMIN A, ZINC, AND FOLIC ACID



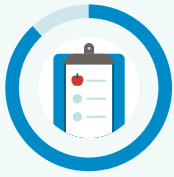
12%

OF PROGRAMS SERVED BIOFORTIFIED FOODS.

GAMBIA, MALAWI, MOZAMBIQUE, AND NIGERIA SERVED VITAMIN A-RICH SWEET POTATOES.

AN OPTIMAL DIET FOR CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

A lack of standard dietary guidance inhibits progress on global nutrition objectives. Applying evidence-based nutrition standards to school menus, procurement strategies, and nutrition and health initiatives can drive food systems to become more nutrition-focused.



87%

OF SURVEYED SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS CITED NUTRITION AS AN OBJECTIVE.

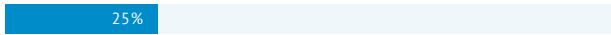


66%

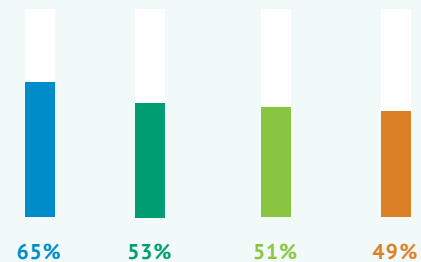
OF COUNTRIES HAD NUTRITION LAWS, POLICIES, AND/OR STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL FEEDING.

SCHOOLS ARE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

School food environments are foundational to lifelong healthy habits. Despite the alarming global rise in child and adolescent overweight and obesity across income groups, **less than 25%** of school feeding programs listed obesity reduction among their goals.



NUTRITION EDUCATION, HEALTH EDUCATION, FOOD EDUCATION, AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION WERE INCORPORATED IN **65%**, **53%**, **51%** AND **49%** OF PROGRAMS, RESPECTIVELY.¹



What's Next?

- Advocate with GCNF with governments and in global forums like the UN Food Systems Summit to prioritize school meal programs as catalysts in transforming food systems to be sustainable, safe, healthy, and affordable.
- Work with GCNF and partners to develop and apply evidence-based nutrition standards to school menus, relevant procurement strategies, and nutrition and health initiatives.
- Work with GCNF to show how school feeding programs help establish healthy diets and behaviors, supporting obesity mitigation and prevention for children and adolescents.
- Work with GCNF to show how school meal programs strengthen investments in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, improving dietary diversity and micronutrient adequacy.



Reach out to us at info@gcnf.org to discuss how we can advocate together!

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on school systems and deprived vulnerable children of a daily school meal. At the peak of school closures in April 2020, 1.5 billion children were out of school,² and 370 million were not receiving the school meals they depend on.³ The upcoming 2021 Global Survey of School Meal Programs © aims to capture the impact of the pandemic for at least one full school year.

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1. Food education is focused on facilitating the consumption of food that contributes to one's health and well-being.

Nutrition education is closely related but is focused on nutrition and nutrition-related behaviors.

2. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

3. <https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/>