

1

Nutrition  
Menu Planning  
1140

2

Operations

3

Administration

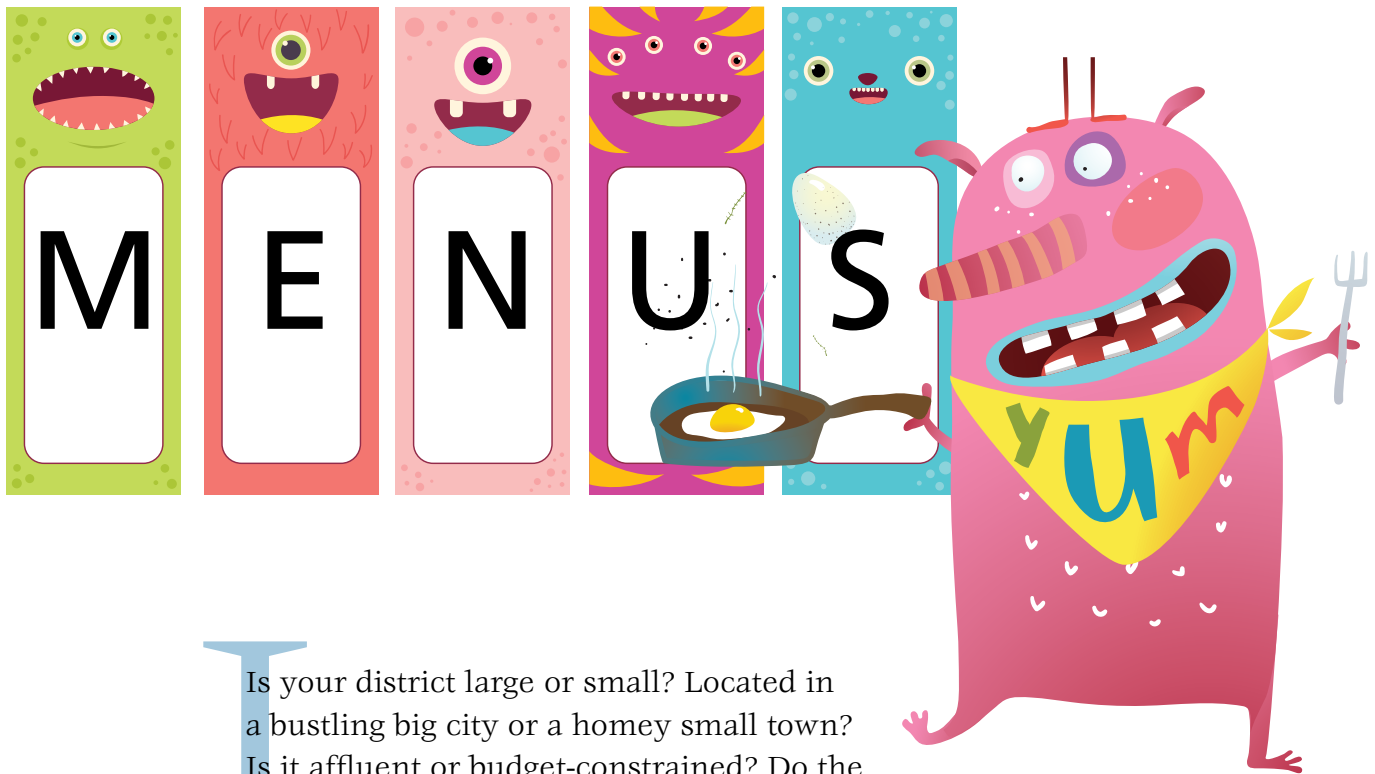
4

Communications &  
Marketing» to *your credit**Making the grade in your profession*

# Refresh Your Menus the Crazy-Easy Way

By Sally Spero, SNS

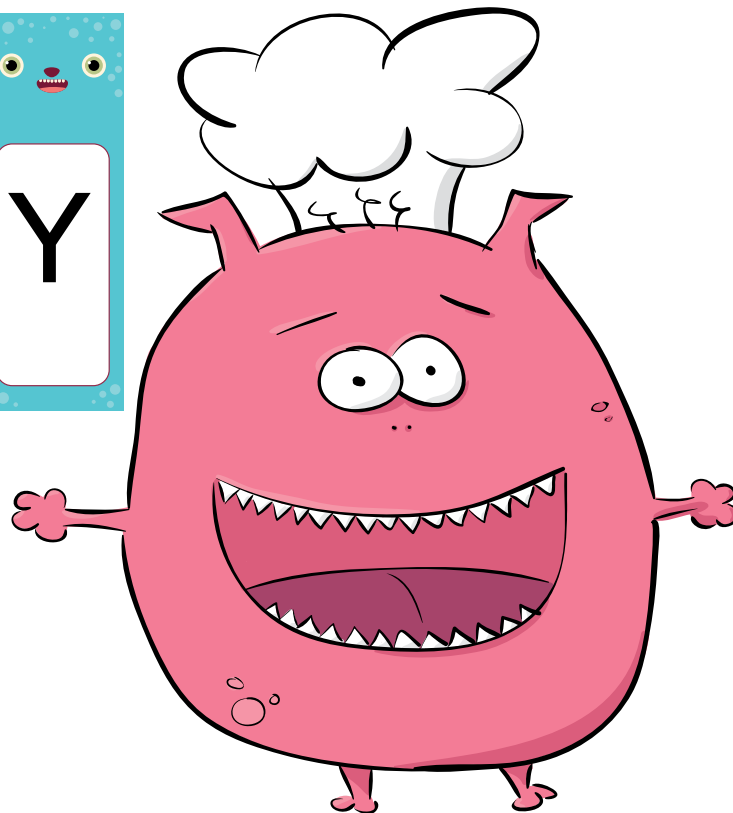
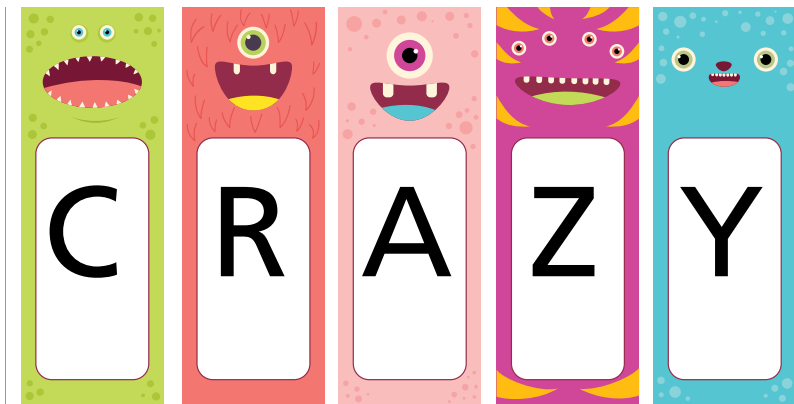
» Ready to reinvigorate your school menus without breaking the budget or losing your mind? All you need is some ingenuity and a crazy attitude.



Is your district large or small? Located in a bustling big city or a homey small town? Is it affluent or budget-constrained? Do the students arriving in the cafeteria represent countries from all over the world, or are their family trees firmly rooted in the community? No matter the answers, we *all* face the same challenges when we enter our school kitchens and offices every morning: How can we provide the highest-quality and most-attractive meals while doing it as efficiently and economically as possible?

Well, they say you must be little crazy to work in our field, right? So, let's use that attitude to our advantage by going *crazy easy*. What does this entail, exactly? "Crazy easy" involves making small changes to your procedures and your menus that will pay off big in program improvements.

**Earn 1 CEU  
in the  
designated  
Key area  
and Key  
Topic Code  
noted above**



### PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ

When making crazy-easy changes, start by considering simple ways to add pizzazz to reliable favorites. You already have success with items like ranch dressing, raw veggies and breakfast staples, so just imagine how you could *extend* their popularity with a few small tweaks.

For example, you know that just about every kid already loves ranch dressing, but did you realize you can easily pump up that flavor by adding different ingredients? To create new dressings or dips, start with your packaged ranch dressing and simply stir in barbeque sauce, chopped fresh herbs (cilantro, basil, chives, etc.), chopped jalapeño peppers or roasted garlic. Then, use these different dressings to amp up your sandwiches and chef salads. With one quick addition, you now can offer multiple on-trend menu items, like BBQ-Ranch Turkey Sub, BBQ-Ranch Pasta Salad and BBQ-Ranch Chicken Sliders.

You can also enhance your menu offerings by creating new varieties of classic side dishes. One crazy-easy thing to do is to roast the vegetables that you commonly serve raw, including carrots, cherry tomatoes, cauliflower, garbanzo beans and so on. Toss them with some oil, salt and white pepper, and then put them in the oven. There is no right or wrong way to do this—just roast them until you think they look good.

Want a new sweet treat? Toss apple

slices with cinnamon and sugar and roast the same way. They can be served either hot or cold, which has just doubled your variety. Now you have many more side dishes than you had before! You can also do a crazy-easy internet search for more roasting ideas for practically any fruit or vegetable by typing in its name followed by the words “board” or “commission.”

Breakfast is a crazy-easy—and highly popular—meal, so why serve it only in the early mornings? *Breakfast for lunch* is sure to get attention—and a breakfast sandwich is easy to make, whatever the hour. It can be open-face or inside a bun, biscuit, English muffin, croissant or any other whole-grain bread item. Cheese slices, sliced ham, egg patties, bacon slices and sausage patties can be used to make numerous combinations, from a Cheese and Egg Croissant to a Turkey Sausage Biscuit.

Serving regional specialties—especially those from *outside* your part of the world—is a crazy-easy way to attract more students to your cafeterias. While you might have to leave Maine lobster dinners for the weekend, Okla-

homa Onion Burgers, Alabama White BBQ Sauce and California Fish Tacos are examples of unique foods that are familiar in specific areas of our country. None of these would be difficult to reproduce in your kitchen with just a little experimentation. And now you've created a whole new class of recipes the crazy-easy way!

### CRAZY-EASY MONEY SAVERS

You would be crazy indeed to overlook all the ways that USDA Foods (commodities) can help you in your program, especially with cost control. Processing opportunities abound for yielding excellent products, but don't overlook the role that brown-box foods can play in your overall menu plan. Doing something as simple as making fresh quesadillas by placing commodity shredded cheese on half a tortilla, folding it over and heating it until the cheese melts will cost only a few cents, and let you put food budget dollars toward other ingredients.

Using commodity cheeses for sandwiches and salads are a no-brainer, but they can also be used to make sauces for pasta; to top nachos, chili and soups;

1

Nutrition  
Menu Planning  
1140» the *test*

and to fill in part of the meat/meat alternate requirement in many other hot entrées. USDA Foods offers frozen egg mixes, which are perfect for scrambled eggs, quiches and frittatas. And commodity diced chicken can be added to casseroles, salads and sandwiches.

You already know that the pickiest eater in school will reconsider their position on your lunches when a cookie is included on the tray. If you don't currently have a baking program, you may have not been keeping up with all the new flours, yeasts, doughs, batters and mixes that have been formulated specifically for school meal programs to help us meet whole-grain requirements. And you don't need to be an accomplished baker to prep banana bread or brownies—these can be made by anyone who can follow a simple recipe. But don't overlook opportunities to take these mixes to a new level! Plain yellow cake with frozen USDA Foods strawberry slices on top? Your students will go crazy for it!

## MEAT YOUR MATCH

You may think me crazy to bring up the topic of raw meat: After all, in numerous school districts, it has been years since anyone has used it—and some are restricted by local policy or regulation from doing so. But many school nutrition operations *do* find that working directly with raw meat works for them. Menuing entrée items using raw meat translates to fewer highly processed items in the menu rotation, an important goal for most of us today. Raw meat is an incredibly versatile ingredient, and very few allergens are present, which extends its use among your diverse customer base. And, of course, the taste, texture and aroma of freshly cooked meats can add a great deal of value to your program.

Don't be intimidated by raw meat. Believe it or not, with proper HACCP procedures in place for food safety, there are many crazy-easy ways by

Go to: [www.schoolnutrition.org/OnlinePDAs](http://www.schoolnutrition.org/OnlinePDAs)

“Refresh Your Menus the Crazy-Easy Way”

Completion of this test, with a passing score,  
will count as 1 Continuing Education Unit (CEU) in  
**Key Area 1, Nutrition, Code 1140**

(Please Print)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

SNA Member Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. To capitalize on the popularity of ranch dressing, add \_\_\_ to pump up the flavor.**

- barbecue sauce  
 fresh herbs  
 roasted garlic  
 all of the above

**2. You can roast vegetables, but never try roasting fruits.**

- True  False

**3. \_\_\_ is a regional favorite that could be adapted in any part of the country.**

- New Orleans Clam Chowder  
 Indiana Fish Tacos  
 Oklahoma Onion Burgers  
 All of the above

**4. \_\_\_ is the current name for agriculture commodities available for school lunch programs.**

- USDA Foods  
 USA Foods  
 FDA Foods  
 None of the above

**5. Frozen egg mixes are perfect for \_\_\_.**

- scrambled eggs  
 quiches  
 frittatas  
 all of the above

**6. A school baking program is a waste of time and labor.**

- True  False

**7. Use of \_\_\_ is a crazy-easy way to work with raw meat instead of processed products.**

- filet mignon  
 mahi-mahi filets  
 chicken drumsticks  
 none of the above

**8. The School Nutrition Professionals group is a great resource on Instagram.**

- True  False

**9. A popular internet search reveals multiple links about \_\_\_ Schools Chili.**

- Richmond  
 Richland  
 Richfield  
 none of the above

**10. In 2019, SNA will offer its \_\_\_ annual Virtual Expo.**

- first  
 second  
 third  
 fourth

### TEST COMPLETION & SUBMISSION DETAILS

To earn 1 Continuing Education Credit (CEU) toward SNA's Certificate/Credentialing programs for this professional development article (PDA) test, you must achieve a passing score and the issue date (**September 2018**) must not be older than five (5) years from your Certificate/Credentialing period. A maximum of three (3) PDAs per year is allowable for SNA's Certificate in School Nutrition program. There is no maximum of passing PDAs for those with the SNS Credential, submitted within the three-year period.

**To pay by check:** Mail this completed form before your expiration date. Include \$11 (SNA Members) or \$17 (non-members) for processing to: SNA, Attn: PDA, PO Box 759297, Baltimore, MD 21275-9297. Do not send cash!

**To pay by credit card:** Pay for and take the test online at [www.schoolnutrition.org/OnlinePDAs](http://www.schoolnutrition.org/OnlinePDAs). Processing fees for tests completed online are \$9 (SNA Members) or \$15 (non-members).

*Due to administrative costs, refunds will not be made for any reason.*

to use it. A good place to begin is by using raw pieces of meat that can be prepared with just a few simple steps. Chicken pieces, such as drumsticks or leg quarters, merely need to be placed on a sheet pan and seasoned with salt and pepper. You can add other seasonings, such as granulated garlic, paprika and onion powder, if you

want to get “fancy.” Then, bake for 45 minutes in a 350° F oven. That’s it!

Boneless, skinless chicken breasts can be seasoned similarly and baked for about 15 minutes. Then, they can be sliced or diced and added to sandwiches, salads, soups, stews and more! How crazy-easy is that?

## MANY HANDS; DELICIOUS WORK

You don’t have to go crazy alone. Local, state and national SNA meetings are opportunities to share, ask questions and get ideas from your peers. On social media, the School Nutrition Professionals and TIPS for School Meals that Rock groups on Facebook have become two fantastic resources for sharing and receiving. Web searches are valid sources, too. Do an internet search for “Richland Schools Chili Recipe,” and you will discover a crazy-easy entrée (served with a cinnamon roll!) that has become so popular, you’ll find multiple links.

Your vendor partners can also provide a helping hand. Their staff have often gone crazy, too, developing numerous menu concepts that highlight their product in order to demonstrate its versatility in school meals. There are many ways to tap into that expertise: Ask your distributor or manufacturer’s rep for advice and recommendations, visit websites and attend food shows, especially at state and national conferences. This winter, SNA will host its third Virtual Expo, free to Association members and a great way to keep up with the latest products. (Visit [www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org) to learn more.)

Why don’t you start going crazy with a recipe or concept you are excited about? Find the people on your staff who are willing to be a little creative like you, and together you can start experimenting. You will probably have to run two or three test batches to get things just the way you want them, both in terms of taste and nutritional analysis. But, if you take that *first* step, you will be ready to take the next one and be on your way to being crazy...the easy way! **SN**

*Sally Spero, SNS, is child nutrition director, Lakeside Union (Calif.) School District, and the 2018 FAME Silver Special Achievement Award winner. This article is adapted from Spero’s 25 Crazy-Easy Scratch Recipe Ideas presentation at ANC18. The full presentation can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/crazy-easy-SNmag>.*



## TASTIER FOOD. HAPPIER KIDS.

Large school or small, Panasonic makes it easy to please with the perfect capacities of fresh, flavorful rice, grains and other nutritious foods with the ideal choice of rice cookers and steamers. See for yourself and you’ll agree. It’s the recipe for happiness. Yours. And the kids’.



Panasonic thanks SNA schools for visiting our booth and Culinary Demo at ANC!

Learn more about Panasonic Commercial Food Services at [panasonic.com/cmo](http://panasonic.com/cmo) or call **(815) 341-4639** for your local Panasonic Food Service distributor.