

# SCHOOL NUTRITION

The Official  
Publication  
of the School  
Nutrition  
Association

JULY | AUGUST

2025

SNA President

## Stephanie Dillard

*Finding Purpose  
in the Unexpected*

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Compete for  
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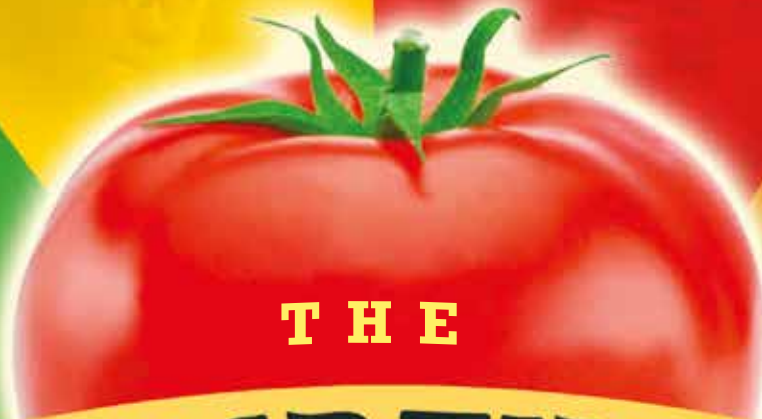


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Tell us what you think, ask questions or suggest ideas! Drop us a line at: [snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org](mailto:snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org)







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# GLOW-UP OR GO HOME

Dylan Lynch  
Editor



Maybe it's just my millennial brain talking, but is a "glow-up" still a thing? I'd like to think so, because that's exactly what this July/August issue is all about. With a brand-new look and feel, and after months of behind-the-scenes work, we're excited to finally show off a new *School Nutrition* magazine.

First, I'd like to take a step back. A little over a year ago, I joined SNA as the new editor of a publication that I know has meant a lot to many of you over the years. That's not something I take lightly. I want to express my appreciation to the editorial and creative teams who came before me and worked so hard to shape it into what it is today. To be honest, I've learned a lot in the past year. I didn't come into this role with a background in school nutrition, but I've been consistently inspired by the passion, creativity and dedication I've seen from SNA members. Your stories have made a lasting impression and continue to shape how we put words to paper (or screen) on these pages.

We set out to embrace brighter colors, bolder visuals and a style that better reflects who you are today as school nutrition professionals. We wanted the magazine to feel fresh and energized, while still keeping the heart of what's always made it special. So, think about the bustle of a busy school cafeteria, with just the right mix of fun and professionalism. You may ask: What's changed? Well, a lot—from fonts and graphics to how we use photos and display different forms of content. But these changes we-

ren't made just to look nice. We focused on improving readability and making it more enjoyable to flip through as you carry on with your busy day-to-day schedules. In the end, our goal was to create a magazine that feels as dynamic and forward-thinking as the people who read it. Yep, that's you.

You'll still find the same types of content you've come to count on—stories that inspire, tips you can use and updates that keep you in the know about SNA

been reading *School Nutrition* for a long time, you might be turning the pages thinking, "Whoa, this feels a little different." You're right, it is different. But it's still us and that's the point. The voice and the mission are all still here, but there may be a bit more personality coming off the pages.

This July/August issue is the first to feature the new design, but we're not calling it done by the slightest. We'll keep fine-tuning things along the way, and



In the end, our goal was to create a magazine that feels as dynamic and forward-thinking as the people who read it.



and the industry. But now it's all packaged in a way that's more aligned with SNA's overall vision and to match the momentum of school nutrition opportunities. As the industry moves forward, so will we.

With all that said, I know change can take a second to get used to. If you've

we'd love to hear what you think. Like it? Love it? Have ideas for what we could do better? Let us know by emailing [snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org](mailto:snmagazine@schoolnutrition.org). You're the reason we tell these stories in the first place. So, flip through, explore and enjoy the new vibe. We think you're going to like it.





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# OPPORTUNITY BEGINS WITH A YES

Stephanie Dillard, MS, SNS  
*SNA President*



I've always believed that purpose has a way of showing up: sometimes quietly, sometimes unexpectedly. But it often comes at the right time (if you let it). That's exactly how my career started for me. I didn't grow up dreaming of being in this field and, to be honest, I didn't even know what it really meant to work in school nutrition. I think many of us can relate to that uncertainty in the beginning. Maybe it chose us before we even knew we were saying yes. But here we are—still in it, still passionate, still pushing forward. Why? Because once you get a taste of the impact you can have, it's hard to continue doing anything different.

This field teaches you to lead in everyday moments. You're figuring out how to stretch a budget, feed hundreds (or thousands) of students and do it all with a smile. Plus, you have to do it all even when things change on a dime. You're solving problems, lifting others up and speaking up for what matters. That is leadership. Whether or not you ever planned for it, you're already doing it. I hope anyone working in this profession realizes that.

When I took a volunteer role in school nutrition all those years ago, I had no idea it would lead me to sitting in rooms where decisions about our programs are being made. And now, I carry that same sense of curiosity and responsibility. But I do want to stress that you don't need a title to influence change. You just need to say yes to the opportunities, even the ones that feel scary or unfamiliar.

Purpose doesn't live in a perfect plan. It shows up in the detours and in the work that others might not notice but that we know matters deeply.

We are entering a year with plenty of unknowns, but this is what we do best! We adapt, we support each other and we

excited!) to step into this role as your SNA President for the year ahead. I truly believe in the power of our community, and I can't wait to help more of us find purpose, take the lead and keep making an impact—one unexpected moment at a time.



You just need to say yes to the opportunities, even the ones that feel scary or unfamiliar. Purpose doesn't live in a perfect plan.



keep our eyes on the goal: making sure every child is nourished, supported and ready to learn in the classroom. So, if you ever feel unsure of your path, remember one thing: you are already living your purpose. And if you keep stepping into the unexpected, who knows what kind of influence you'll have next?

That's why I'm so honored (and SO

As ANC25 concludes, we'll return to our districts, our teams and routines—but we'll also return with renewed energy. And we'll have work to do. Important work. My hope is that each of us steps into that work with confidence and possibility. Because you have influence and you have purpose. And this year, I hope you'll see just how far that can take you.



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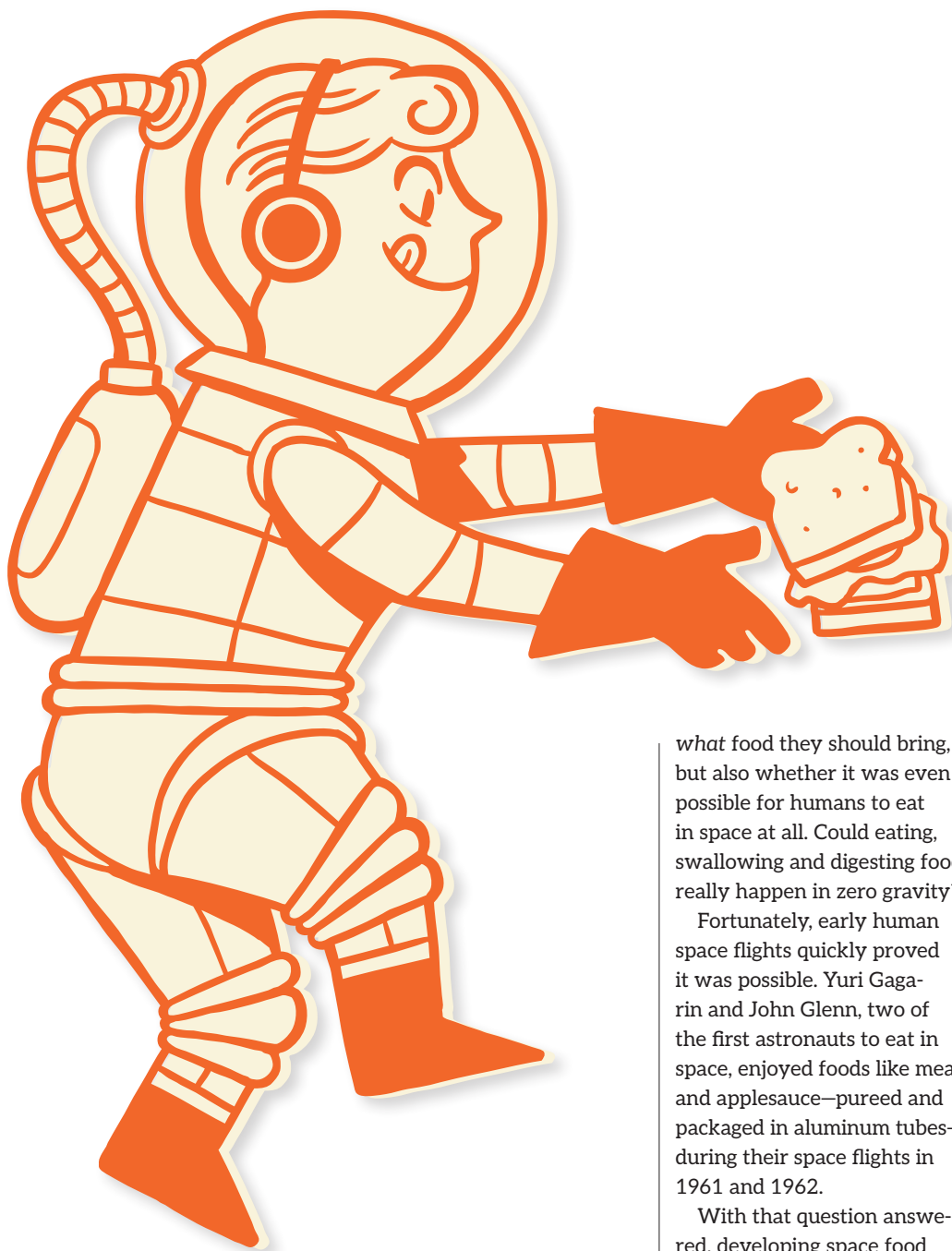
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# What's on the Menu in Space?



norm. Food options quickly expanded, and space menus included freeze-dried shrimp cocktail, chicken and vegetables, scrambled eggs, orange juice and, yes, ice cream.

Today, on the International Space Station (ISS), modern-day astronauts enjoy dehydrated or thermostabilized versions of many of the same foods that they do on earth—just with specific nutrition requirements (much like school meals). Astronauts can also bring some fresh fruits and vegetables with them from Earth, and there's even a small greenhouse on the ISS that grows fresh vegetables for them to eat. With an international crew, there's also an emphasis on global cuisine. Depending on who's on board, an ISS menu today could include sushi, beef bourguignon, cheeseburgers, apple crumble, samosas, pizza and chocolate chip cookies.

Space food is still evolving, with new dishes regularly appearing on astronauts' menus. NASA's annual HUNCH Culinary Challenge—a food science and cooking competition for high school student chefs—is one source of new dishes for the ISS meal rotation; turn to page 24 for our coverage of this year's event, where the student chefs presented space-ready pasta dishes ranging from pumpkin pasta to pad Thai.

**For a much more extensive history of food in space, check out this article from *Astronaut Foods*: [bit.ly/SNMag-SpaceFood](https://bit.ly/SNMag-SpaceFood)**

what food they should bring, but also whether it was even possible for humans to eat in space at all. Could eating, swallowing and digesting food really happen in zero gravity?

Fortunately, early human space flights quickly proved it was possible. Yuri Gagarin and John Glenn, two of the first astronauts to eat in space, enjoyed foods like meat and applesauce—pureed and packaged in aluminum tubes—during their space flights in 1961 and 1962.

With that question answered, developing space food that was practical, nutritious and tasty became an important job for scientists back on Earth. Although the tubed foods Gagarin and Glenn enjoyed were easy to transport and eat, they weren't exactly appetizing. By 1965, freeze-dried foods that could be rehydrated with water were the

the mid 1970s. Of course, no one expects astronauts to survive on ice cream alone, but what do they really eat when they're in space?

Before the first astronauts made it to space, scientists weren't only concerned with

**W**hen you think of space food, freeze-dried astronaut ice cream is probably the first thing that comes to mind. It has, after all, been a staple in space center and museum gift shops since



# EATING WITH INTENTION, NOT RULES

In a world where mealtimes often double as meetings, commutes or scroll sessions, mindful eating invites us to slow down and actually *enjoy* our food. It's a simple yet powerful practice that is all about tuning in to your body's hunger cues and using your senses to savor each bite. Perhaps most importantly, it focuses on letting go of guilt or rigid "food rules."

Experts explain that mindful eating focuses less on dieting or weight loss (though it can support better health) and more on building a positive relationship with food and learning to trust your body. That means enjoying the ice cream without worry and understanding that one food choice doesn't define your entire health journey.

Starting small—like focusing on one mindful snack a day—can make this habit feel less intimidating. As with any skill, it gets easier with practice. Over time,

being present at meals can reduce stress and even help with digestive issues. But it's more than just what's on your plate. Your mindset is very important too. Being kind to yourself when the practice doesn't go perfectly is part of the process and keeping positive is a way to make sure that you can keep going on your intended health journey.

Planning ahead helps, and carving out time in your day for even a short, quiet meal can go a long way. And try not to let yourself get too hungry. When you're ravenous, it's much harder to eat intentionally.

In short: Mindful eating is a gentle, empowering way to reconnect with food one bite at a time.

To learn more about mindful eating, read this article from *Forbes*: [bit.ly/SNMag-Forbes-MindfulEating](https://bit.ly/SNMag-Forbes-MindfulEating)



## Understanding Americans' Relationship with Food Allergies and Sensitivities

The International Food Information Council (IFIC) conducted a national survey in the beginning of 2025 to better understand how U.S. consumers perceive and manage food allergies, intolerances and sensitivities. With growing concern and rising prevalence, this report offers insights into awareness and trust in labeling across American households. One thousand adults participated in the online survey, providing a snapshot of both personal and observed experiences with adverse food reactions.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Nearly one in four Americans (24%) report that they or someone in their household has a food allergy, intolerance or sensitivity. When including those who know someone outside their household who is affected, that number rises to 53%, which is more than half of the U.S. population.
- Nuts were the most commonly cited allergen, while dairy was the leading cause of food intolerances and sensitivities.
- Unclear labeling on packaged foods was the top concern for those affected, followed by the risk of accidental exposure in public settings and eating out at restaurants.
- Among those aware of allergen information on food packaging, 71% use it at least sometimes, with 16% saying they always rely on it. Awareness and frequent use are significantly higher among those living in households with a food allergy.
- Two-thirds of consumers (67%) trust allergen labeling, though one in four either don't trust it or feel neutral. Trust is highest in healthcare professionals, particularly primary care providers (68%), allergists (63%) and dietitians (56%).
- 16% of respondents said they or a household member had sought medical care due to a food-related reaction—most often from nuts.



**Download the full report:**  
[bit.ly/SNMag-IFIC-FoodAllergens](https://bit.ly/SNMag-IFIC-FoodAllergens)





## Ingredients for Health: Jalapeños



Native to Mexico and a staple ingredient in Mexican cuisine, jalapeño peppers have been cultivated by indigenous peoples living in the present-day Xalapa region since as early as 8000 BCE. Now, jalapeño peppers are eaten around the world and are valued for their versatility in the kitchen and nutritional benefits.

### HOW TO USE:

Jalapeños come in multiple varieties with different spice levels, and you can easily adjust how much you use based on your preferences, so they're a good choice for adding a flavorful heat to recipes even for those with lower spice tolerances. They can be eaten raw or cooked (or pickled) and are vital ingredients in many Mexican and Tex-Mex or American-Mexican recipes. Stuffed jalapeños and jalapeño poppers are common dishes where the peppers take center stage, and they're also used in many sauces, salsas, chilis, soups and even drinks, or as toppings on burgers, pizza, tacos, nachos and, really, anything you can think of.

### NUTRITION:

Jalapeños, like most fruits and vegetables, are low in calories and high in vitamins and nutrients. One raw

jalapeño has only 4 calories, and they are a good source of fiber and vitamins C, A, B6 and K. Plus, jalapeños contain capsaicin (the compound that makes peppers spicy), which has been linked to weight loss and a boosted metabolism, reduced inflammation and better blood sugar control.

### TRY THIS:

For the perfect summer refreshment, make spicy jalapeño lemonade! Just combine 2 quarts of lemonade, 2-3 sliced and seeded medium jalapeños and 2 to 3 sliced lemons in a pitcher and refrigerate for at least one hour before serving.

### FACT:

Jalapeños were the first peppers to travel to space on a NASA shuttle, brought on board by astronaut and jalapeño connoisseur William Lenoir.

## FUELED BY STUDENTS: Unlocking the Full Potential of School Meals

School meals are a lifeline for millions of students daily, providing critical nutrition to help them learn, grow and thrive. GENYOUth's latest Youth Insights survey reveals that student engagement can further enhance the school meal experience.

The survey asked over 1,000 students ages 13-18 about their school meal experiences. While school meals provide the healthiest meal of the day with 81% of food-insecure students saying school meals are as healthy as, or more healthy than, home meals, students shared opportunities for improvement:



### > Expanded Choices:

**61%** want more food variety, and **60%** desire different cultural options.



### > More Time to Eat:

**37%** of students have less than 20 minutes to eat lunch, leaving them rushed and dissatisfied.



### > Nutrition Education:

Just **58%** of teens know the recommended servings for major food groups.



### > A Voice in Decisions:

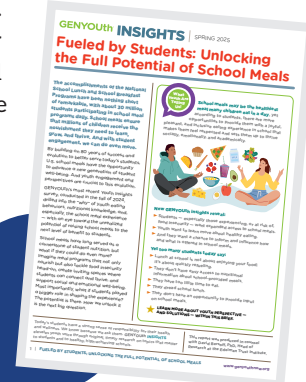
Only **17%** of students have an opportunity to provide input into menu planning and food choices.

The results found that involving students in decision-making significantly boosts satisfaction of the meal experience. Engaged students rate school meals higher in variety, taste, freshness and healthiness. Additionally, 90% of engaged students view lunch as a positive experience compared to just 73% of non-engaged peers.

Unlocking opportunities by listening to student voices and addressing their needs—such as expanding access to meals, offering appealing menu choices and creating inviting cafeteria spaces—schools can transform meal programs into joyful, inclusive experiences that support both nutrition and social-emotional well-being. GENYOUth aims to work with other school nutrition professionals to fuel students for success in and out of the classroom.

### Download the full report:

[bit.ly/GENYOUth-Insights-Spring-2025](https://bit.ly/GENYOUth-Insights-Spring-2025)



**READ MORE:** Discover 28 jalapeño recipes from Food Network: [foodnetwork.com/recipes/photos/jalapeño-recipes](https://foodnetwork.com/recipes/photos/jalapeño-recipes)



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# NEED FOOD STORAGE?

Seeking improved or expanded food storage solutions on a temporary or permanent basis? Combination walk-in units provide the flexibility to store both refrigerated and frozen items for a school kitchen or central facility. Boasting reliable performance and spacious design, Polar King combination walk-ins are a proven asset for school districts.



Big changes have been happening in the refrigeration world, and if you interact with the cold storage business, you might have heard about the American Innovation and Manufacturing Act (AIM Act). This legislation is designed to **reduce hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) emissions by 30% over the next three years**. The move addresses climate change concerns by regulating and decreasing the use of refrigerants with high global warming potential (GWP).

## WHAT'S THE AIM ACT ALL ABOUT?

The AIM Act's goal is to help the industry move toward more sustainable, environmentally friendly options. It focuses on three main things: cutting back on HFCs, encouraging the reclamation and reuse of refrigerants and guiding specific industries (like cold storage) to switch over to next-gen refrigerants and tech. So, what does this mean in practical terms? If you're using older refrigeration

systems, you're still able to service and maintain them. But if you're installing new equipment, you'll need to make sure everything's using compliant refrigerants and technologies. That means potentially saying goodbye to the older equipment and getting on board with the newer alternatives.

Some of the biggest changes will affect self-contained systems first, with larger remote systems following close behind. New refrigerants—like A2Ls—are already

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being introduced. These options have a much lower global warming potential, which is great for the planet, but they also come with some new safety considerations. That's where support and training come into play.

Companies like Polar King are stepping up to help with the transition. They're providing tools, training and hands-on support to make sure their customers aren't left figuring this out on their own. Whether it's leak detection, enhanced system controls or just understanding how to use the new refrigerants safely, you won't be going at it alone.

### WHAT TO PLAN FOR

For cold storage teams, especially those using self-contained systems, the impact of the AIM Act will show up in your daily operations—and in your budget. Companies are helping customers prepare, offering the tools and support needed to make the switch as smooth as possible.

### HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT:

- > **New refrigerants:** Lower GWP options are required for new systems.
- > **System upgrades:** Leak detection, enhanced controls and built-in safety features are part of the package.
- > **Training and support:** Safety training and real-time troubleshooting will be essential, especially when working with mildly flammable refrigerants like A2Ls.
- > **Increased reporting:** You'll need to track refrigerant use and system performance more closely.

At the end of the day, the AIM Act can be seen as a turning point to navigate. But with the right support, it can be a smooth shift. Embracing the change now means being better positioned for the future, both in terms of compliance and sustainability. The landscape is changing, but that's not always a bad thing. With a little planning and the right partners, navigating the AIM Act can be less about disruption and more about opportunity.



## LOOK TO POLAR KING FOR YOUR FOOD STORAGE SOLUTIONS

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# Thank You, Shannon Gleave

## 2024-25 SNA President

As we mark the close of another leadership year, we want to extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to Shannon Gleave, RDN, SNS, for her service as SNA President for the 2024-25 year.

From the very beginning, Shannon approached her presidency with a clear and heartfelt vision grounded in three powerful words: encouragement, empathy and persistence. Those are the principles that have guided her throughout her career and later became a source of inspiration for members as they navigated a year full of change and challenges.

Before making the decision to run for a national SNA leadership position, Shannon leaned on her peers—School Nutrition Association of Arizona members, SNA past presidents and other SNA board members—for support and encouragement, and she gives her mentors a lot of credit for inspiring her to take the next leap in her journey. As President, her goal has always been to ensure those same feelings of community and support extend to all SNA members.

The world of school nutrition has been a shifting landscape this past year, and Shannon has taken all that uncertainty in stride. Throughout her term, she continued to be a strong advocate for school meals, representing the Association at SNA meetings and key events, from the Association of School Business Officials conference to the National School Boards Association meeting. She spoke out on unpaid meal debt, took part in national media interviews and never stopped reminding others of the critical importance of school nutrition.

Shannon has not only served as a powerful advocate, but also as a compassionate mentor to all members, continuing to provide the same support and strong sense of community she relied on before (and during) her own leadership journey. And for that, SNA is deeply grateful.



I'd like to thank Shannon for her strong and steady leadership during these uncertain times. Her dedication to serving on the SNA Board and committees for the past eight plus years is truly inspiring. The SNA staff appreciates all the support and flexibility whenever we needed her to speak to the media, facilitate a session or review just one more document or PowerPoint slide deck. It's been a pleasure working with her, and we're grateful for everything she's done for SNA and its members.

—Patricia Montague, FASEA, CAE  
SNA Chief Executive Officer









# FINDING PURPOSE IN THE UNEXPECTED





2025-26 SNA President Stephanie Dillard didn't plan on a career in school nutrition—but every unexpected turn opened a new door to leadership, and now she is ready to help others grow, get involved and realize their own potential.

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**BY DYLAN ROCHE**







Stephanie Dillard  
2025-26 SNA President



I think what drives people in school nutrition is the love for children and to make sure they're nourished and healthy.

With all the time school nutrition teams spend in the kitchen, you probably know better than anyone that great things happen by circumstance. You've got all the ingredients on hand, but it's not until you figure out what to do with them that you create the dish that ends up being a surprise hit on the menu.

You might even say that's how Stephanie Dillard, Child Nutrition Director for Enterprise City Schools in Alabama and recently named SNA President, came to be part of school foodservice. She had the skills, the heart and the work ethic. And as a small-town girl growing up in the tight community of Samson, Alabama, she watched her father work as a salesman for U.S. Foodservice and her grandfather run a grocery store—though she never expected she'd follow a career path like that. "It wasn't a choice," she says. "It was just by chance."

Her original plan was to major in nursing at Auburn University, but she found that restrictions on transfer credits from Enterprise State Community College, where she got her associate's, made it nearly impossible. She transferred to nu-

trition simply because it was, as she puts it, "the closest thing." She didn't have any idea what she wanted to do with a nutrition degree, and even after she graduated in 1997 with her bachelor of science in nutrition and food science, she was lost for ideas as to what career she wanted to pursue. "One day, while I was visiting my old high school, I saw an advertisement on a door for a school nutrition secretary," she recalls. "So, I went in and tried to apply for the job."

She tried—but it wasn't meant to be. Instead, she was offered the opportunity to volunteer for the program, learning the ins and outs of what a school nutrition team does every day alongside Anita Motley, Child Nutrition Director of Geneva County Public Schools.

"All summer, I was just learning the ins and outs of the program and what it was all about," Dillard says. "And then one day, a salesman happened to mention there was a job for a director's position in Andalusia, which is in a neighboring county. I went and interviewed, and I got the job." Here she is, 28 years later, still thriving in this line of work. After starting at Andalusia, she went to Geneva County Schools for five years, where she learned from Motley in the school system where Dillard herself grew up. She then transferred to Enterprise City Schools, where she currently works and where her daughters go to school. "I'm all about giving back to the communities that have given me so much," she says.







It might be the fact that she *didn't* know about this type of work that has made her so enthusiastic about it. Growing up in a rural hometown of Samson, Alabama, with 2,300 people and only one traffic light and a smaller high school meant she wasn't exposed to many career path options. "You're not able to see all those opportunities presented to you the way you might in a larger district," she says. "You don't know you have those opportunities. I think it gives you a little bit more incentive to work harder."

And work harder she did. But just as important as her work ethic was her openness to learning. She was 21 years old and straight out of college when she became a program director, and she was now a supervisor for people significantly older than she was. "I had no real job experience besides, you know, high school job experience... but not what I would consider real professional experience," she says. "I was supervising all these ladies who had more experience, and they had to raise me and train me in the actual hands-on job... they taught me what they knew."

Still, there was one major hurdle as soon as she started: Dillard was inheriting a program that was about a million dollars in debt, and she had to quickly turn the program around. She recalls counting on Motley's continued guidance—she still considers Motley a mentor and a second mom to this day—who started taking her to LACs and ANCs. Dillard discovered a passion for the program, and she soon found herself pursuing her master's in business management at Faulkner





University. "I learned quickly you needed a management degree, because you're not just running a nutrition program—you're running a business," she says. "I felt like I needed the knowledge from both ends of the spectrum."

All things considered, Dillard says what she loves most about being in the school nutrition field is its ever-changing nature with new challenges always presenting themselves. Cooking methods have changed since she first joined the workforce, as have administrative processes, many of which have become digitized and computerized. But then there are the challenges like funding and guidelines. It's one of the reasons she became involved with SNA.

In fact, becoming involved with SNA was another step in her path toward growing as a professional and gaining the skills she needed to keep moving her program forward. It all started relatively early in her career, and her program was at risk of losing state funding. At a state meeting, she heard the state director, Perry Fulton, thank three of her peers for their work lobbying and speaking up about the importance of school lunch.

"He said, 'If you're not a member of the School Nutrition Association, you need to sign up and join now,'" she recalls. "And I had not heard of it until he spoke that day... but from that point forward, I started asking questions; I started volunteering; I started wanting to know more about this. And it just kind of snowballed from there and it became a passion. Once you have a passion for learning and gaining new knowledge, you have to put all the connections together because it helps your programs become better. I wanted my program to always be the best of the best, and I saw this as a way to grow as a leader and as a person, to network and to learn from others."

Dillard isn't someone who has ever held back from involvement. Over the years, she's steadily progressed through leadership roles in SNA, both in Alabama and nationally, now serving as president. She has done this all while serving on multiple committees, including the public policy and legislative committee and the Alabama SNA Conference committee.

Meanwhile, at home, she's a mom

I'm all about giving back to the communities that have given me so much.



to a 6-year-old and a 9-year-old who lead busy lives of their own, and she's chauffeuring them from volleyball games to dance competitions. "There's something every night of the week," she says. Because her 6-year-old has Down syndrome, Dillard has become an active participant with FRIENDS (Families Reaching, Influencing, Educating, and Networking for Down Syndrome) to the extent that she can. For fun, their family likes to travel—visiting the beach, taking

a cruise or going to Disney World—though Dillard and her husband haven't had the opportunity to visit Europe since the kids were born and hope they can get back there eventually.

If it all seems like a busy schedule for one person, Dillard doesn't feel fazed by it at all. In fact, she credits her upbringing in a small town for instilling in her the motivation to never turn down an opportunity. Being busy is just something she's done since she was a student, she



explains. “Anything I can get my hands on, I did when I was in high school,” she reflects. “I was extremely busy as a high school student by choice... That has helped me juggle multiple aspects of my life because I always did this growing up. I juggled sports. I juggled work. I was a full-time student in high school. So, when I got to college and then the professional world, I’m juggling volunteering, family, work and it’s not anything new because I’ve always had to multitask and manage schedules.”

This may be one of the reasons Dillard thrives as a leader. Just as she loves pushing herself to try new experiences, she wants to encourage the same in

other people. She sees getting out of the comfort zone as being crucial. “It makes you think outside the box,” she says. “If you can get outside your comfort zone, you can succeed at something small and you can succeed at something large.”

A prime example of this is when she was president-elect of Alabama SNA and it was part of her duties to plan the state conference. For the event’s wellness workout, which usually drew participation from about 20 or 30 conference attendees, she sought a partnership with the Montgomery Half Marathon & 5K; then she encouraged everyone to sign up.

“We had over 200 people sign up and run the 5K as part of our conference, and



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Once you have a passion for learning and gaining new knowledge, you have to put all the connections together because it helps your programs become better.

it was really cool to see everybody finish the race, whether they ran it or walked it. Some had never run before!" she recalls. Afterward, everyone was wearing their race medals at the conference later that evening, and there was a shared sense of pride. Dillard realized that many people had discovered an ability to do something they didn't know they could, and it brought them closer with others who had been equally as daring. "If you can have fun along the way, it means a lot as well," she says.

As she looks forward to her presidency with SNA, she wants to bring this same sense of motivation and encouragement. She believes in the association's power for networking and advocacy, so she hopes that by getting more people involved and making everyone feel included, she can help them meet their full potential—which is great not only for each member individually, both in a personal and professional capacity, but also for the overall mission of SNA. She emphasizes that, at the end of the day, it all comes back to feeding kids.

"I think what drives people in school nutrition is the love for children and to make sure they're nourished and healthy," she says. "Because if you're a hungry child, you cannot learn. We've all gone through school, and we all know that we can't sit there and learn if we're hungry. So, I personally have the passion to make sure all children are nourished and taught to eat healthy so they can be better athletes, they can be better students, they can be better at whatever their interest may be—and they can do better with the proper nutrition."



**Dylan Roche** is a Contributing Editor of *School Nutrition*.





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# CULINARY ST



# UDENTS

## PREPARE (*FOOD*) FOR **LIFTOFF**

*BY CHRISTINA UTICONE*

This year marked the 10th anniversary of NASA's HUNCH Culinary Challenge, a food science and culinary competition for high school students held at NASA's Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston, Texas. The stakes are higher than sky high in this annual contest, where the grand prize is the winning dish produced for astronauts aboard the International Space Station (ISS). Finalists from 10 schools—nine American, one from Luxembourg—gathered in April in Houston to face a panel of 24 (!) judges who would determine which signature dish was truly “out of this world.” This year's theme was pasta, and the recipes developed had to meet strict nutrition requirements, all while providing appealing flavor profiles and navigating the challenges unique to long-term food preservation in outer space.



If

you happened to visit the Food Lab Market & Eatery at NASA's Johnson Space Center on April 8, you might have—just for a moment—believed you'd wandered onto a Master

Chef tv set. That day visitors at the JSC Food Lab would find the food court transformed into a full-scale culinary competition space complete with 10 cooking and staging stations, and a judges' table set with an intimidating 24 place settings. In the center of each setting was an evaluation sheet which, once completed, would determine the winner of the 10th Annual NASA HUNCH Culinary Challenge.

With judging set to start at noon on a sunny Tuesday in April, the 10 teams of finalists had just two hours to prepare their dishes. Students in chef's hats and jackets huddled at workstations with their faculty advisers as they reviewed checklists, kneaded pasta dough, sliced vegetables and prepped their meals for plating and service. You could hear the occasional chorus of "Yes, Chef!" as instructions were given and received, while the students' families and friends (and a few curious tourists) looked on.

The competition clock was ticking, and in no time at all it was time to determine "the next best dish in space" for ISS astronauts.

### WHAT'S A HUNCH?

HUNCH stands for High School Students United with NASA to Create Hardware. In addition to the culinary program, HUNCH has student programs in software, biomedical science, hardware and more. According to their website, "The HUNCH mission is to empower and inspire students through a project-based learning program where high school students learn 21st century skills and have the opportunity to launch their careers through participation in the design and fabrication of real-world valued products for NASA."

The 2025 HUNCH Culinary Challenge started with a field of 64 teams that initially competed in local contests. The top 10 scoring teams from these contests were then invited to Houston to cook and present their dish to the judges. The



▲ The finalists' pasta dishes on display together.



judging panel included food scientists from the NASA Johnson Space Center Food Lab, astronauts, guest chefs, NASA administrators and scholarship partners. Among the guest judges was Houston chef Emmanuel Chavez, whose restaurant Tatemó recently earned a Michelin star (among the first batch of Michelin stars awarded in the entire state of Texas); Chavez is also a 2025 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best New Chef and recently won Chef of the Year at the 2025 Tastemaker Awards. Bringing practical experience to the judging panel were astronauts Jacob LaSarge (US) and Luca Parmitano (Italy), both of whom have been to space and lived on the ISS.

▲ Left to right: William T. Harris, president and CEO of Space Center Houston, with judges Luca Parmitano and Emmanuel Chavez.



## ON DECK: THE CULINARY CREW

Nine American teams and one from Luxembourg ('The Astronauts') traveled to Houston to present their dishes for the 2025 HUNCH Culinary Challenge finals:

1. Venango Technology, Pennsylvania – Vegetarian Pad Thai
2. North Pointe High School, Maryland – Beef Stroganoff
3. Phoebus High School, Virginia – Rasta Pasta
4. Angleton High School, Texas – Chicken and Chickpea Pasta
5. Rochester Community and Technical College, Michigan – Spicy Cajun Fettuccini with Roasted Veggies
6. Wekiva High School, Florida – Spinach Linguini with Creamy Mushroom
7. Allen ISD STEAM Center, Texas – Pad Thai
8. Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School, Massachusetts – Pumpkin Pasta
9. Northeast Area Technical Institute of Vocational Education, Arizona – Zesty Spesto
10. Luxembourg – Luxembourg Ravioli Chicken

At noon, after two hours of intense cooking and painstaking plating, it was time to begin service and evaluation. Judges took their seats at long banquet tables and each team in turn served their dish along with a brief set of introductions and background on their recipe. After the tasting, judges were given an opportunity to ask students questions about themselves and the dishes.

## THE JUDGES' TABLE: CHEF EMMANUEL CHAVEZ



HUNCH Culinary Challenge guest judge, award-winning Houston Chef Emmanuel Chavez of Michelin-starred restaurant Tatemó, reflected on his participation in the HUNCH Culinary Challenge and shared what surprised him the most about 'space meals.'

### What appealed to you about participating as a guest judge?

It was a good opportunity to tap into the next generation of culinarians. We tend to forget that the sooner we guide the young generation, the better the path will be for them; they'll have more clarity on the opportunities in this industry. It doesn't have to be 17 hours behind the stove; it can be food science, a culinary teacher—there are so many other outlets. I would never have imagined being able to go NASA and get a private tour and then judge a cooking competition. It was an incredible experience from a personal perspective, just as I'm sure it was for the students to be a part of it.

### You told one of the teams that 90% of success in the food industry is energy, 10% is your recipes. Can you expand on that?

We get so stuck sometimes following recipes that we forget the people, that we're in the hospitality industry. You're probably going to make a bigger impact on your community and your career when you show up with the right energy, rather than focusing and getting really into detail on recipes. Anybody can cook, but how do you stand out? I tell my team all the time: show up with high energy, smile, say hi to everyone and treat them with respect because you never know who you are speaking to or the opportunities that might be in front of you.

### Did you learn anything that surprised you about space meals?

How very little salt or sodium can be used at all. That was a massive challenge. One of my biggest pet peeves is not seasoning, not salting as you cook, so tasting food that didn't have much salt—I was a little confused at first! Learning about why [NASA] keeps the sodium levels low, that gave me another perspective and a new respect for our astronauts. It also made me realize how lucky we are to be able to taste food at its fullest.

### Were there any stand-out moments for you during the competition?

I remember the team from Luxembourg, and how composed and professional they seemed. I don't think I got that polished until my late 20s! To see that generation being so passionate and confident. I can only imagine how incredible they are going to be—how all the contestants are going to be in the future.





## THE JUDGES' TABLE: LUCA PARMITANO

When Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano saw the HUNCH Culinary Challenge on his daily schedule, he wasn't sure what to expect, but once he sat down at the judges' table, he took his job seriously. Parmitano has completed two trips to the International Space Station (ISS) and made headlines in 2013 for almost "drowning in space" before recently adding culinary judge to his resume.

### How did you get involved with the HUNCH Challenge?

I saw this event on my schedule, and I had no idea or background [about it]. It was funny because this was a pasta event and I'm Italian. I thought maybe somebody at NASA thought, "Luca is Italian so he's automatically a pasta expert!" Or it's just [scheduling], and it just happened I was available.

### Are you a "pasta expert"?

I am absolutely not a pasta expert. I do cook pasta myself. I cook for my daughters.

I am not what you'd call a "gourmet." I have likes and dislikes, but I'm not a foodie. I grew up eating Italian meals and that means when you get up, you're happy you've eaten. It tasted good, it was made from scratch and that's what I know how to judge.

### Can you talk about a few moments of the HUNCH Culinary Challenge that stick out in your memory?

I thought that all of the presentations were amazing—all of them. I was so impressed, especially not being a cook myself and not having those skills, I thought those kids were simply outstanding in their approach, their enthusiasm, their abilities. These are ingenious kids that express their aptitudes in ways that are unconventional. We expect people in schools to do well in math, in science, in chemistry—and when I say we, I think about myself! I don't think about the applications of those skills into an art like cooking.

But they did! They demonstrated knowledge in microbiology, biology, in chemistry, because they were searching for ways to create a flavor or a texture [and] stay within the constraints of what they were assigned. I was simply blown away by that.

The dish I scored the highest, the team had created the flavor of Parmesan by using yeast instead. That way they could stay within the constraint of calories and salt. Their use of salt and pasta was simple, but it perfectly recreated the flavor they were aiming for. If they hadn't told me, I would never have known. I thought, "This is applied chemistry," and I was simply blown away.

I want to stress that these kids were very young. I hear too often [negativity] about "this generation." Honestly, these kids are the demonstration that there's no such thing as this generation being lazy; it all depends on what opportunities we give them—it really does. If we give them the opportunity to express themselves, they will do it and blow us out of the water in ways we have not imagined. I have a lot of respect and gratitude for what these kids teach me. My own daughters teach me something new every day in terms of compassion, capabilities, and the way of seeing the world in a different way.

\*[Ed. note: Second Place winners **Weki-va High School, Fla.**, used nutritional yeast to create the sauce for their Spicy Linguini with Creamy Mushrooms. Nutritional yeast is a popular substitute for Parmesan cheese because it mimics the nutty flavor of the cheese.]

### What can you share about the experience of eating in space?

Because I'm not a "gourmet" and because I value nutrition more than taste—let's take that with a pinch of salt, like everyone else I enjoy eating good food! But my main driver, day-to-day, is how the nutrition affects me on a performance level, on a health level for keeping me fit. It's a means to an end;

it's not an end unto itself.

When I'm in orbit, I like knowing that I can pick a meal from a variety of foods and adjust it to what I enjoy, knowing there isn't a high level of salt, the calorie content is taken into consideration, all those things that matter to me have been taken into consideration [for me]. What I like is that it's ready; I don't have to think about making it.

I also had some Italian food made specifically for space. I understand not everybody is like me, and that people do [put more] value on the quality of texture and taste. A meal is also an experience, and sharing a meal is the most multicultural, intercultural experience, everywhere in the world. Social activities revolve around food.

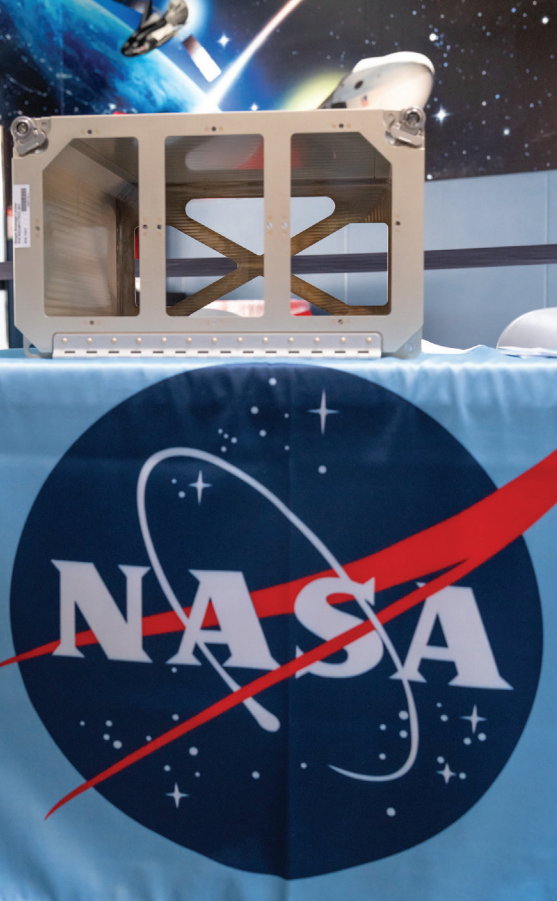
When I saw there was Italian food on the [ISS] menu, but it doesn't look or taste like Italian food that I know, I wanted to make that event something for my crewmates and show them what Italian food is supposed to look and taste like.

### When you get back from space what are the first foods you seek out?

It's all the things we take for granted—fresh fruit. Fruit that spoils easily, for example bananas. You cannot refrigerate bananas, they brown. I eat basically one banana a day, but we don't have bananas aboard, so I miss those.

I miss crunchy salad. Everything crunchy. Whether it's fresh vegetables with that crunchy texture or even just crunchy food that doesn't work in orbit because crunchy creates a lot of crumbs and crumbs tend to disperse in the atmosphere in orbit, so we don't have a lot of crunchy things.

And, finally, a really good coffee. A good Italian coffee; nice and strong, and almost syrupy. A real espresso. I might not do it every day, but every once in a while, it's so nice and in orbit you can't have it.



### MISSION CRITICAL NUTRITION

The presentations as well as the subsequent Q&A revealed a fascinating process for recipe development. Once presented with the theme—pasta—students had other parameters to consider. Just like a school meal, a space meal must meet strict nutrition guidelines, with calorie limits as well as limits on sodium content, sugar and fat, plus increased fiber content. According to NASA, the Johnson Space Center Food Lab food scientists developed these guidelines based on specific changes to the human body that occur in outer space:

- Increased fiber: Human GI function slows down tremendously in space; fiber supports healthy GI function.
- Sodium limits: To prevent creating extra edema (swelling due to excess fluid).
- Sugar limits: Limit non-nutrient calories for optimal health.
- Fats/saturated fats: Important for heart health and blood flow; heart health can change during space flight.
- Caloric requirements/limits: Astronauts are required to work out two hours a day in space to maintain their bone and muscle health. Caloric requirements and limits are set to optimize and support the astronauts' physical health and wellness.



If you weren't hungry before these presentations, you were hungry by the end.

The Q&A was an opportunity for students to address how they handled the delicate balance of “nutrition vs. flavor” that school nutrition professionals know only too well. Every single team cited sodium limits as their main challenge. Several teams also spoke to the difficulty of calibrating spice levels; some spices can develop and get stronger over time, but the goal is to develop a flavor that stays consistent until the meal is ready to eat. You don't want a meal to get spicier the longer it sits on the shelf, especially if that meal is meant to be shelf stable for up to a year (or more). The team from Pennsylvania used ginger to spice up their Pad Thai, while Maryland's Beef Stroganoff incorporated arugula for a spicy kick (plus nutrients); the team from Massachusetts toasted the spices in their Pumpkin Pasta to help develop depth of flavor.

We also learned that some of the dishes were suitable to accommodate special diets. The Pennsylvania team's Pad Thai was gluten-free and vegetarian, while the Zesty Spesto pasta salad from Arkansas was both Kosher and vegetarian. While some health/dietary restrictions might disqualify a person from going to space (think severe allergy or Celiac disease), NASA can accommodate diets with mild intolerances and allergies as well as religious/philosophical dietary preferences of their astronauts.

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The teams fielded follow-up questions from the whole panel, but it was Chef Emmanuel Chavez and astronauts LaSarge and Parmitano who probed each team about the recipe development process as well as their approach to teamwork and leadership. For example:

- > How many versions of this recipe did you test before you landed on this one?
- > Why did you choose this pasta shape over another?
- > What was the division of duties on your team?
- > How did you delegate responsibility across team members?
- > How did you decide on one preservation method over another?

Finalists displayed sharp marketing instincts in their presentations as well. Using words like “homemade” and “comforting,” teams framed their recipe development and flavor choices as an effort to bring the familiar flavors of home to the astronauts aboard ISS:

- > Team Maryland described their Beef Stroganoff as “healthy and heartfelt.”
- > Luxembourg used words like “home” and “warmth.”
- > Florida described their linguine as “rustic” with “umami flavors.”
- > Massachusetts’ Pumpkin Pasta was described as “homey” and “warm,” and the team directly referenced the flavors of American Thanksgiving.

If you weren’t hungry before these presentations, you were hungry by the end.

### SPACE TASTE: PRESERVING FOOD FOR SPACE FLIGHT

There are two ways to preserve a meal going into space: thermostabilization or freeze-drying. As part of the recipe development process, each team had to decide how, and explain why, they wanted their dish preserved in a particular way for space.

“Thermostabilized” means that the food’s natural fluids remain in the bag—think soup or fruit cocktail. “Freeze-drying” involves removing all of a meal’s water content, which is then replaced once on-board ISS. The Massachusetts team envisioned their Pumpkin Pasta thermostabilized, for example, to better preserve the creaminess of the pumpkin sauce.

As it happens, a great deal of space food is produced in Texas—logical, given the proximity to NASA. Thermostabilized foods are processed at Texas A&M University in College Station by JSC Food Lab scientists at the NASA Space Food Research Facility (SFRF). Food science and technology undergraduate and graduate students at the university get hands-on learning at the facility, working with NASA and foodservice contractor KBR to prepare foods for astronauts on the International Space Station. Freeze-dried food items are processed for spaceflight at the JSC Food Lab in Houston, where the HUNCH Culinary Challenge took place.

### REMEMBER TANG?

In popular memory, Tang is an orange drink invented for NASA astronauts. In reality, Tang is a powdered drink mix invented by a food scientist (William A. Mitchell) and a chemist (William Bruce James) in 1959 and which gained notoriety after being used on the 1962 Mercury flight where John Glenn orbited the Earth three times. Tang is still sold in more than 30 countries worldwide!



### ASTRONOMICAL RESULTS: WE HAVE A WINNER

The finalists left the 10th Annual HUNCH Culinary Challenge still in the dark, as NASA would not announce the winner until early May. While it may have felt like light-years to the contestants it was just five weeks to wait. Congratulations to the 2024-25 HUNCH Culinary Challenge winners, whose bold flavors and nutritious meals sent the judges’ panel into orbit:

- > **First Place: Phoebus High School, VA** – Rasta Pasta
- > **Second Place: Wekiva High School, FL** – Spinach Linguini with Creamy Mushrooms
- > **Third Place: RCTC, MI** – Spicy Cajun Fettuccini with Roasted Veggies

If your school district has a culinary arts program and you want to learn more about the competition and how to enter, visit the HUNCH Culinary Challenge website ([nasahunch.com/programs/culinary](https://nasahunch.com/programs/culinary)) where you will also find links to information on food engineering and food science, important new research, scholarships and more.



**Christina Uticone** is a communications consultant for the School Nutrition Foundation and an SNA Contributing Editor.

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# WHAT'S THEIR WHY?

School nutrition professionals all share a common mission: making sure students are fed. But behind that shared purpose, each person has their own story and their own motivation.

SNA's 2024-25 membership award winners exemplify what it means to serve with heart, resilience and passion. But what keeps them going? What makes the long hours, the navigation of changes and the challenges all worth it? We may know what they do "on paper," but this year, we're asking a deeper question: What's their why?

Each of their reasons is probably familiar, at least in part, to all of you. But hearing their personal stories—from what initially made them choose this career to their favorite moments on the job to why they continue to advocate for school nutrition programs—is not only relatable, but also an inspirational reminder of why these careers are so important, regardless of your job title, role or experience.

**BY MARI BRAND**

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### **NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR**

**Jennifer Gordon, SNS**

*Child Nutrition Director,  
Laveen Elementary School  
District (Ariz.)*

Although she didn't learn nutrition science and policy until she began studying dietetics at Arizona State University, Jennifer Gordon, SNS, Child Nutrition Director at Laveen Elementary School District (Ariz.), has been passionate about school nutrition since she was a child herself.

"I'm a school lunch kid at heart. I grew up in a food insecure household and our family participated in WIC, food stamps (as it was called back then) and of course free school meals," she recalled. She has fond memories of her time as a student server in elementary school, especially due to her family's struggles at home. "One, I got to leave class early and eat a free 'hot lunch' before we served the other students, and two, we got to eat leftovers after meal service was over. I think the extra food was a comfort to me... little did I know that would be the start of my school nutrition journey."

During college, she solidified her passion for community nutrition and public health, especially for programs geared toward children like those she benefited from in her own childhood. From then on, a career in school nutrition seemed like a natural choice, and she started in the field as a School Nutrition Specialist at the Arizona Department of Education. Later, she transitioned to another school district to make an impact locally, not just statewide.

"As a nutrition practitioner, I can't think of a better way to have a positive impact on the health and daily lives of children around this country. I view school nutrition programs as a part of our community's public health safety net," she explained. "We get the opportunity to nourish students from as early as their preschool years, and multiple times a day at that. We can influence their eating habits and preferences from an early age, educate them on health and nutrition and encourage them to try new foods."

Now, in her current role as Child Nutrition Director, Gordon takes pride in leading her team and working to continually improve their school nutrition program. She has secured free school meals for all students in

their district through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), resulting in a 12% average increase in lunch participation, and implemented new programs such as their Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and clean label initiative to provide staff training, nutrition education for students and purchasing guidelines to ensure high standards for the food and ingredients they serve.

Recounting her career in school nutrition overall, Gordon said "It's been a true full-circle moment for me to come from being a school lunch kid to now leading a school lunch program... It's such a rewarding career and I am happy to play a small part in the lives of thousands of students each school day."



As a nutrition practitioner, I can't think of a better way to have a positive impact on the health and daily lives of children around this country. I view school nutrition programs as a part of our community's public health safety net.





## NATIONAL MANAGER OF THE YEAR

### Debbie Lehne

*Cafeteria Manager, Hanover  
Elementary School, Meriden  
Public Schools (Conn.)*

Not every school nutrition professional's journey to their current role began with a strong childhood connection to the field. After working as a manager for 25 years, her company closed, leaving Debbie Lehne, Cafeteria Manager at Hanover Elementary School in Meriden, Conn., with the opportunity to take a chance on a different path as a member of the school nutrition team at Meriden Public Schools—and she hasn't looked back since.



My favorite part is walking around and talking to the students, making sure they have what they need. I enjoy the time we have with students, making a difference in healthy eating habits. Seeing the innocence in these kids and knowing we all can have an impact at some point. Hoping they will say 'I remember my cafeteria lunch lady'.



Her passion shows through her dedication to meet unique needs without hesitation. She fills in to deliver food to the students in their autism program when teachers are short staffed. When vegetarian students approached her in hopes of more options, she worked closely with them and their families to ensure they had both hot and cold vegetarian-friendly meals every day. She ensures each of the students in their special education program can participate in the same cafeteria dining experience as their peers.

At the same time, Lehne is dedicated to leading her team as a hands-on manager, working alongside her staff, uplifting their ideas and encouraging them to embrace new opportunities. She ensures their nutrition program has a presence in their community even outside of school, participating in the annual holiday parade by distributing warm cinnamon buns to attendees (much to the excitement of her students), and collaborating with their district's Office of Food & Nutrition to film a commercial to highlight the school café, healthy menu items and promote their school foodservice program to the broader community.

Now, over 14 years into her school nutrition career, her efforts to build relationships with her students have paid off. "As the last days of school approach, the students will ask for all of us to sign their shirts or yearbooks. They say 'Ms. Debbie, I will miss you,'" Lehne recalled. "*The Five People You Meet in Heaven*" by Mitch Albom is a great book about leaving an effect on someone that you met. That's what I hope to do."





## NATIONAL EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

**Javonte Johnson**

*Café Assistant, Coffee High School,  
Coffee County Schools (Ga.)*

When asked what made him want to start working in school nutrition, Javonte Johnson, Café Assistant at Coffee High School (Ga.), said: “I watched a YouTube video on working in the lunchroom. I thought it looked like something I would enjoy, so I decided to try it!”

But, as a former student at Coffee County Schools, his decision to pursue a career in school nutrition was also motivated by a more personal reason. “When he was an elementary school student, he loved coming to the cafeteria to visit with the manager, Ms. Sheila Cooper, who, to this day, is still part of the team. He’ll still tell you that she is his favorite member of the school nutrition team,” recalled Dawn Lewis, School Nutrition Director at Coffee County Schools. “He still talks about the made-from-scratch cinnamon rolls we used to serve and frequently asks me when we’re putting them back on the menu,” she added.

Now, Johnson is making new memories with students and advocating



I love to help others. I love serving the kids and making them smile. I enjoy the adventure of my job! I know that many of these kids need to have good food and to see a happy person that loves them daily. I try to always smile and talk to them.

for improvements to their program from the other side of the serving line as a member of the team himself.

“I love to help others. I love serving the kids and making them smile. I enjoy the adventure of my job! I know that many of these kids need to have good food and to see a happy person that loves them daily. I try to always smile and talk to them,” Johnson explained. One of his top priorities is cultivating a positive, fun environment in the cafeteria and the kitchen, not just for the students, but for his fellow team members too. “I also love to help my coworkers... I try to make them smile by saying something silly or telling a joke, [and] I enjoy when [we] play music during serving time. The kids love it, and it gives us more chances to have dance parties when someone is having a bad day or just needs a good laugh.”

Alongside his commitment to spontaneous dance parties, themed dress-up days and creative cafeteria decorations, Johnson is also dedicated to advocating for stronger belonging. Building off his firsthand knowledge and experiences as an autistic individual himself, Johnson encouraged his manager to complete Autism Speaks’ Workplace Inclusion Now (WIN) training and together they led an initiative to develop further training for other staff members,



contributing to an increase in hiring of employees with disabilities.

As with many other school nutrition professionals, it’s the relationships built with the students that are one of the highlights of Johnson’s career, especially when the smallest moments can make a lasting impression on both sides. One moment Johnson shared recently stands out as an example. “I had one student that is so sweet. She told me... that it makes her morning better when she sees me. Now, every morning we smile and say ‘good morning and have a blessed day’ to each other. It makes my heart very happy.”

As someone on the industry side of the profession, Gayle Swain, Non Commercial Market Manager at Cambro Manufacturing Company, has a different perspective than those working in a school kitchen, but that doesn't lessen her passion for school nutrition. While she doesn't serve students directly, her role working with school nutrition professionals helps meet their needs and is vital to the success of school meal programs.

"Ever since I started working in the area of school nutrition, about 15 years [ago] now, I was struck by the caring and passion that I saw and felt from my customers who feed children every day," Swain recalled. "As I heard their stories and challenges, I just felt that I wanted to help them find solutions to make their jobs a bit easier. I also realized how important feeding children is to the success of our future... I want to continue to be part of that process which will help the next generation to be successful," she explained further.



### NATIONAL INDUSTRY MEMBER OF THE YEAR

**Gayle Swain**

*Non Commercial Market Manager,  
Cambro Manufacturing Company*

In her role, Swain has the opportunity to connect with school nutrition professionals from across the country, getting to know them and their needs to ensure the products her company designs meet them effectively. Much like everyone else in this field, her initial move into the K-12 segment had her researching child nutrition legislation and learning from her seasoned peers. Now, she advocates for school nutrition programs and professionals herself, securing Cambro Manufacturing as a sponsor for SNF Equipment Grants, lobbying for universal free school meals in her state of California and federally and working with others within her company to develop products and tools that meet the needs and challenges of school foodservice programs.

While being on the industry side, Swain has also had her own moments with students that have inspired her to stick with K-12 foodservice for so long. She remembers one moment with an elementary school student while

installing a brand-new salad bar to their school cafeteria: "The bar had beautiful and colorful choices including oranges, strawberries and various vegetable offerings. My sales rep and I asked one of the students what she thought of the new salad bar, to which she responded excitedly, 'This is the best day ever!' as she chose a huge strawberry to put on her tray. I still remember that conversation like it was yesterday."

Most of all, Swain values the partnership between the industry and operators for how they, together, can serve students in the best way possible. "I truly believe that every industry partner that works within the K-12 segment wants to be a helpful problem solver. We always say, 'We may not have what you are looking for, but we know someone who does!' We are all in this together," she explained. "Everyone [in school nutrition] has a purpose, and their main goal is to feed children, ALL children, so that they are nourished and ready to learn."

I truly believe that every industry partner that works within the K-12 segment wants to be a helpful problem solver.

### FEEDING OUR STUDENTS TOGETHER

Though each of their stories share similar themes, their individual whys show how unique experiences, motivations and goals come together to create a strong community. Some have felt connected to the school nutrition field since they were kids themselves, whereas others joined later in life. Some cook for and serve students directly while others manage school nutrition programs district-wide or develop new products and tools to meet the needs of the school nutrition professionals on the ground— but together, they form a network driven by the shared purpose of making sure every student has access to nourishing meals, no matter their role or how their journey began.



**Mari Brand** is Communications Specialist at SNA.



To view all of the 2024-25 SNA membership award winners, scan the QR code or visit [schoolnutrition.org/national-award-winners](https://schoolnutrition.org/national-award-winners).





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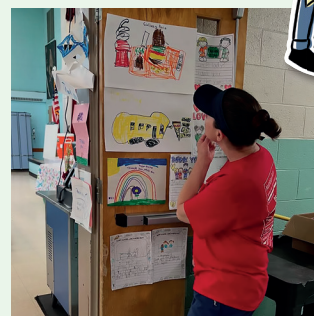
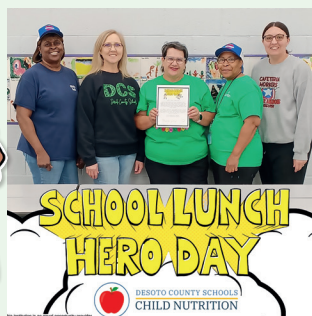




On May 2, 2025, school cafeterias across the country were filled with gratitude and celebration for **School Lunch Hero Day**. From cooks and cashiers to managers, drivers and central office staff, school nutrition teams were honored by students, teachers, parents and administrators alike.

Schools celebrated in all kinds of creative and heartfelt ways—from handwritten thank-you notes and colorful posters to special treats, shout-outs and surprise events. The appreciation was loud and well-deserved.

Check out the smiles, signs and snapshots from School Lunch Hero Day celebrations across Alabama, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Mississippi and North Carolina.







# ON A ROLL

## with Grab-and-Go Wraps

**BY DYLAN LYNCH**

At home, a lot of kids already know the magic behind a good wrap. Think about how many times you've found yourself rolling up some deli meat or spreading peanut butter on a flatbread for a quick snack. Wraps are one of the easiest things kids can make on their own. No stove? No oven? No problem! I know for myself, I used to come home from school and make the same thing almost every day: a tortilla with shredded cheddar cheese, rolled up and microwaved until melted perfection. It's something they literally serve on the Taco Bell menu these days. Don't ask if I know from experience... okay, I do know. I truly think I drove my mother crazy, as she couldn't keep cheese stocked in the fridge. I'm sure plenty of you—and maybe now your children—have done the same thing. Wraps aren't anything new. They've really become a classic staple for efficient prep and on-the-go eating. What's not to love? Wraps are simple, satisfying and endlessly customizable, so it's no surprise that they've found their place in school cafeterias too.





## A PERFECT FIT

In a school lunch setting, grab-and-go wraps check all the right boxes. There's the logical explanation: They're fast to prepare and easy to hold, which works well for all age groups. But they also offer a smart solution for today's school foodservice operation, especially as lunchtime becomes less about long cafeteria lines and more about flexibility and timing restraints. You know this more than anyone. Sometimes students have just 20 minutes, or even less, to get through the line, find a seat and eat. That leaves little room for anything complicated. Wraps make it easy to offer a complete, satisfying meal that can be eaten with minimal fuss. From boosting participation to easing production logistics, wraps are more than just a handheld trend. They're a practical and (mostly) student-approved way to serve up balanced meals.

## ON-THE-GO EATING THAT KEEPS UP WITH STUDENTS

Let's face it: Students are always on the move. Grab-and-go wraps offer a convenient alternative that fits neatly into a paper boat, box or clamshell container. Better yet, students don't need a knife or fork to enjoy them. They can just peel back the wrapper and dig in. This convenience is especially important in schools that offer multiple lunch points of service, like kiosks or vending-style fridges. And it's not just for lunch. Wraps like the **Egg Flatbread Wrap** are also ideal for giving students a warm, protein-rich option to kick off the school day.

Despite their fast-casual vibe, with smart planning, cafeteria teams can build wraps that check every meal component box: whole-grain-rich tortillas or flatbreads cover the grain requirement, while lean proteins like grilled chicken, beans, turkey or hummus serve as the meat/meat alternate. Hide in some colorful vegetables, add fruit on the side and pair it all with a carton of milk, and you've got a fully reimbursable, student-approved lunch. The same approach works for breakfast, too. A wrap filled with scrambled eggs, cheese and sautéed veggies can hit all the right notes.

## ENDLESS IDEAS, ENDLESS FLAVOR

One of the best parts about serving wraps? They're a canvas for creativity. I am talking more than just some shredded cheese in a tortilla. You can reinvent the same basic format over and over with different ingredients, bold flavors or cultural inspirations. That flexibility is key for keeping menus fresh. Popular combos like a chicken wrap with black beans, corn, cheddar and salsa, or a turkey club wrap with lettuce, tomato, and shredded cheese are always a hit. But don't stop there, add in a Mediterranean veggie wrap with hummus, cucumbers and feta, or try a BBQ chicken version with coleslaw and tangy sauce. Even breakfast gets a makeover with a burrito-style wrap full of eggs, potatoes, peppers and cheese. Or take it a step further with a fun twist like **PB&J Roll Ups**, which are really great for younger students.

They are also perfect for seasonal or themed tie-ins. For example, the **Just Peachy Korean BBQ Chicken Wrap** brings bold, globally inspired flavor into the mix with sweet heat and peaches. It's a fun way to break the routine and introdu-

## Egg Flatbread Wrap



**Serves:** 16  
(1 full sheet tray  
cut 4x4)



**Per Serving:** 178 cal.,  
22 g pro., 9 g fat, 3.5 g sat.  
fat, 4 g carb., .1 g fiber,  
59 mg sod., 3 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 3-oz.-eq.  
meat/meat alternate

### Ingredients:

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 16 eggs               | 1 Tbsp. onion powder     |
| 64 oz. cottage cheese | 2 tsp. Italian seasoning |
| 1 Tbsp. garlic powder | Pinch of salt            |
|                       | ¾ tsp. baking soda       |

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Lightly oil a rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
2. Add all ingredients except for the baking soda into a blender.
3. Blend until smooth. Scrape down the sides of the blender jar and blend once more. Stir in the baking soda and immediately pour the mixture onto the parchment-lined pan.
4. Bake for 25-35 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through baking, or until the top is golden brown and the flatbread is dry and firm to the touch.
5. Remove flatbread to a rack or other surface and allow to cool for 10-15 minutes.
6. Add your favorite sandwich toppings to one side of the flatbread and roll tightly.



**Recipe and Photo:** The American Egg Board,  
[incredibleegg.org](http://incredibleegg.org)

**Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis:** Chef Rebecca  
Polson, CC, SNS, [schoolnutritionchef.com](http://schoolnutritionchef.com)

**Recipe tips:** Add sandwich toppings such as sliced ham or turkey; cheese; tomato; lettuce or other vegetables; and sauces such as mayonnaise or mustard. Or, use as a "pizza" crust by topping with pizza sauce, mozzarella cheese and other pizza toppings, then return to the oven for 5 minutes or until the cheese is melted.



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One of the best parts about serving wraps? They're a canvas for creativity.

ce students to something new while still keeping it handheld and approachable. One of the best parts about serving wraps? They're a canvas for creativity. You can reinvent the same basic format over and over with different ingredients, bold flavors or cultural inspirations.

### KITCHEN-FRIENDLY

From the back-of-house perspective, wraps are a dream. They're easy to prep in large batches, store well in refrigerated units and can be distributed across multiple service locations. Schools with tight labor resources often find that wraps streamline operations. Whether it's using an assembly line or speed rack to churn out dozens at a time or offering a build-your-own station for student engagement, the process is smooth and adaptable. Storage is simple too: Wraps are compact and don't require a lot of bulky packaging.

## Veggie Pizza Wrap



Serves: 68 (1 wrap)



Per Serving: 405 cal., 21 g pro., 19 g fat, 9 g sat. fat, 36 g carb., 5 g fiber, 880 mg sod., 5 g sugar



Meal Pattern: 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2-oz.-eq. grains, ¾ cup vegetables (¼ cup dark green, ½ cup red/orange)

### Ingredients:

68 oz. shredded mozzarella cheese\*  
106 oz. white cheese sauce\*  
52 oz. turkey pepperoni, chopped  
2 tsp. dried Italian seasoning  
½ tsp. garlic powder  
68 (10-in.) whole grain flour tortillas  
68 oz. marinara or pizza sauce  
30 oz. fresh spinach leaves  
136 oz. red and green bell peppers, sliced.

\*Notes: Land O Lakes® Shredded Mozzarella Cheese and Land O Lakes® Ultimate Creamy White™ Cheese Sauce can be used in this recipe.

### Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients except tortillas, marinara sauce, spinach and bell peppers. Cover.
2. Lay out tortillas on clean work surface in assembly-line fashion.
3. Portion one #12 scoop cheese and pepperoni mixture onto each tortilla. Use offset spatula or back of scoop to flatten and distribute over tortilla.
4. Top each tortilla with 2 Tbsp. marinara or pizza sauce, ½ cup spinach leaves and ½ cup bell pepper slices.
5. Wrap tortilla in burrito fashion.
6. Serve immediately or wrap in foil and hold cold until service. **CCP:** Maintain cold food at 41°F or below

### NUTRITIOUS AND BALANCED

Just because they're fast doesn't mean they're lacking in nutrition. Wraps can easily support a balanced, wholesome meal when they include fiber-rich veggies, lean protein and low-fat dairy. They're also a great way to experiment with global flavors, especially when trying to introduce new tastes to students in an approachable way. For example, a wrap with seasoned lentils, cucumber and a drizzle of tzatziki offers a gentle intro to Mediterranean flavors, while a Thai-style chicken wrap with shredded cabbage and a peanut-free satay-inspired sauce might excite adventurous eaters without alienating picky ones. For example, the **Veggie Pizza Wrap** offers a familiar favorite with a vegetable-forward twist, while still delivering on flavor and fun. As menu innovation tools, wraps also make it easier to incorporate more plant-based meals, reduce sodium through scratch-made sauces and accommodate dietary restrictions or preferences. With the right ingredients, they're flexible enough to meet the needs of many different eaters.

### SELLING IT WITH STYLE

Of course, it's not just about what's inside. Kids eat with their eyes, so how a wrap is presented can make all the difference. Colorful wrappers and clever names can transform a basic meal into something buzzworthy. Even better, get students involved in naming new wraps or testing out different combinations. Participation drives engagement, and when students feel ownership over what's being served, they're more likely to give it a try. Wraps might seem simple, but their impact is anything but. They offer school nutrition professionals an easy-to-prepare, student-friendly and completely customizable menu item that hits all the right notes for participation, nutrition and convenience. Whether your students are sitting down in the cafeteria or grabbing lunch on the run, wraps are a smart way to keep them fueled—and excited—for whatever comes next.



**Dylan Lynch** is Editor of *School Nutrition* and Editorial Content Manager for SNA.

➤ **Recipe, Photo and Nutrition Analysis:** Land O'Lakes Foodservice, [landolakesfoodservice.com](http://landolakesfoodservice.com)

**Meal Pattern Analysis:**  
Chef Rebecca Polson, CC, SNS, [schoolnutritionchef.com](http://schoolnutritionchef.com)



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## Thai Chicken & Brown Rice Lettuce Wraps



Serves: 50 (2 wraps)



**Per Serving:** 277 cal., 15.5 g pro., 10 g fat, 2.6 g sat. fat, 31 g carb., 3 g fiber, 513 mg sod., 10.6 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2-oz.-eq. grains, ¼ cup vegetables (⅓ cup red/orange, ⅓ other)

### Ingredients:

**6 lbs. 4 oz.** chicken fajita meat, cooked, frozen  
**4 lbs.** mango, fresh or frozen, peeled, diced  
**2 lbs.** red bell peppers, raw, cut into 2-in. by ½-in. strips  
**1 qt. 1 cup** peanut sauce, prepared\*  
**8 lbs.** brown rice, medium or long grain, cooked  
**3 oz.** (2 cups) cilantro, fresh, chopped  
**100 each** lettuce, iceberg or Boston, large whole leaves



**Recipe and Photo:**  
 USA Rice, [usarice.com](http://usarice.com)

**Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis:**  
 Chef Rebecca Polson, CC, SNS, [schoolnutritionchef.com](http://schoolnutritionchef.com)

### Directions:

1. Lightly coat 4-in. full size steam table pans with food release spray. Place 3 lbs. 2 oz. chicken into each pan. For 50 servings use 2 pans.
2. Add 2 lbs. diced mango or pineapple, 1 lb. red pepper strips and 1 qt. prepared peanut sauce to each pan.
3. Cover and cook in a preheated 350°F oven for 30 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 135°F or above. **CCP:** Heat to 135°F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
4. Stir 2 lbs. of hot, cooked brown rice into each pan. **CCP:** Hold for service at 135°F or higher.
5. Sprinkle ½ cup of chopped fresh cilantro over each pan just before service.
6. Place 1 cup of the Thai chicken and rice mixture in a serving container.
7. Serve 2 large, fresh lettuce leaves with each serving for students to make their own lettuce wrap.

*\*Notes: For a peanut free sauce whisk together 1 pt. 2 oz. prepared sweet chili sauce and 1 pt. 7 oz. pineapple juice.*



## Avocado Hummus Wrap



Serves: 50



**Per Serving:** 495 cal., 14 g pro., 16.5 g fat, 4 g sat. fat, 76 g carb., 12 g fiber, 457 mg sod., 3 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 3-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2.5-oz.-eq. grains, ¾ cup vegetable (¼ cup leafy green, ¼ cup red/orange, ¼ cup other)

### Avocado Hummus (50 servings)

**8 avocados**  
**4 #10 cans** garbanzo beans  
**1 cup** lemon juice  
**¾ cup** garlic, minced, raw  
**¾ cup + 2 Tbsp.** oil, olive  
 Salt, kosher

### Assembly

**50 10-in.** tortillas, flour  
**50 leaves** lettuce, green leaf  
**100 slices** cucumber  
**12 ½ cups** carrots, shredded  
**Avocado hummus** (see above)  
**100 slices** tomato, raw

### Avocado Hummus

1. Drain garbanzo beans and save the bean juice for a later step.
2. Add garlic and avocado to food processor and process until chopped.
3. Add olive oil, lemon juice, salt, garbanzo beans and 2 ¼ cups bean juice in a food processor and blend until smooth. **CCP:** Cover and hold at 41°F or below.

### Assembly (1 serving)

1. Place room temperature tortilla on workstation.
2. Spread a #6 scoop (4 oz.) of hummus onto the tortilla.
3. Top hummus with 1 leaf of lettuce.
4. Arrange a row each of cucumber (2 slices), tomato (2 slices) and shredded carrots (¼ cup).
5. Roll wrap up "burrito style" ending with the seam side down. Cut wrap in half on bias. **CCP:** Hold wraps at 40°F or below until ready to serve.



**Recipe and Photo:** Friends of the Earth Climate-Friendly Plant-Based Recipes for Schools recipe guide, [foe.org](http://foe.org)

**Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis:**  
 Chef Rebecca Polson, CC, SNS, [schoolnutritionchef.com](http://schoolnutritionchef.com)

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## PB&J Roll Ups



**Serves:** 100 (1 roll up)



**Per Serving:** 472 cal., 10 g pro., 20 g fat, 5 g sat. fat, 65 g carb., 7 g fiber, 396 mg sod., 31 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 1-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 1.5-oz.-eq. grains, ½ cup fruit

### Ingredients:

**100 8-in.** tortillas, whole grain

**7 lbs. 8 oz.** crunchy or smooth peanut butter

**5 lbs.** jelly, variety of flavors

**28 lbs. 4 oz.** strawberries, sliced, sweetened, frozen, thawed

*\*Notes: For dry fruit, sprinkle ¼ cup (#16 scoop) over jelly to credit as ½ cup fruit.*



### Recipe, Photo and Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis:

National Peanut Board,  
[nationalpeanutboard.org](http://nationalpeanutboard.org)

### Other fruit options (amounts are for 100 ½ cup servings each):

**3 gal. 2 cups** apples, canned, sliced, drained

**17 lbs. 7 oz.** blueberries, frozen, thawed

**7 lbs. 4 oz.** cherries, red tart, dried\*

**7 lbs. 4 oz.** cranberries, dried, sweetened\*

**10 lbs. 8 oz.** mixed fruit, dried\*

**3 gal. 2 cups** peaches, canned, diced, light syrup, drained

**3 gal. 2 cups** pears, canned, diced, light syrup, drained

### Directions:

1. Build roll ups: Place tortillas on sanitized preparation table. Place #30 scoop (2 Tbsp.) peanut butter in the center of each tortilla. Spread peanut butter to cover one side of each tortilla. Top with #60 scoop (3 ¼ tsp.) jelly. Spread jelly over the top of the peanut butter. Spread ½ cup (#8 scoop) fruit over the jelly. Fold each side in about 1-in. to prevent the fruit from falling out during rolling. Roll each tortilla up into a roll up.  
**CCP:** Hold at 41°F or lower.

2. Cut each roll up into 4 pieces (about 1 ½" each) and serve.  
**CCP:** Hold at 41°F or lower.



## Just Peachy Korean BBQ Chicken Wrap



**Serves:** 12



**Per Serving:** 480 cal., 19 g pro., 12 g fat, 3.5 g sat. fat, 72.5 g carb., 5 g fiber, 480 mg sod., 12.5 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 1.75-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2.5-oz.-eq. grains, ¼ cup vegetables (⅓ dark green, ⅓ additional)

### Ingredients:

**30 oz.** Peach Korean BBQ Chicken, recipe follows

**22 oz.** pulled chicken breast, cooked

**1 ½ cups** sliced peaches, frozen, thawed, diced

**¾ cup** Korean BBQ sauce

**12 each** 10-in. tortillas, warm\*

**3 cups** baby spinach

**1 ½ cups** carrots, julienned

**1 ½ cups** purple cabbage, shredded

**¾ cup** yum yum sauce

**6 cups** brown rice, cooked, warm

### Directions:

1. To make Peach Korean BBQ Chicken: combine chicken, diced peaches (with juice) and BBQ sauce in a large sauté pan. Toss well to coat and let simmer over medium-low heat for 10 minutes. Reserve warm.
2. To prepare single serving: place a 10-in. tortilla on work surface, and layer in the center ¼ cup baby spinach, 2 Tbsp. each julienned carrots and shredded cabbage, 1 Tbsp. yum yum sauce, ½ cup brown rice and 2.5 oz warm Peach Korean BBQ Chicken. Roll into a burrito and serve immediately.



**Recipe and Photo:**  
Mission Foodservice,  
[missionfoodservice.com](http://missionfoodservice.com)

**Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis:**  
Chef Rebecca Polson, CC,  
SNS, [schoolnutritionchef.com](http://schoolnutritionchef.com)

*\*Notes: Mission Foodservice 10" Smart Hearty Grains™ Tortillas (47088) can be used in this recipe.*



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**969**





## LOOK AT THAT

### Crave Competition Finalists

J.T.M. FOOD GROUP

Congratulations to the 20 top contenders in the annual K-12 Crave Collection recipe contest from J.T.M. Food Group. Among these, four mouthwatering recipes submitted by school districts have moved on to the final round of competition. These include the voted fan favorite, Cheesesteak Spudquake, from **Pickens County (S.C.) Schools**, and three other finalists: Asian Beef Stir-Fry from **Northwest Allen County (Ind.) Schools**; Spicy Taco Mac from **Roane County (Tenn.) Schools**; and Cheese Tortellini & Meatballs in Blush Sauce from **Amsterdam City School (N.Y.) District**. At press time, the grand-prize winner was expected to be announced at ANC25 in mid-July. Visit [jtmcravecompetition.com](http://jtmcravecompetition.com) view a list of all 20 finalists, which will also be featured in the 2025 Crave Collection Cookbook released during ANC25.



## Check That Out

### Cheezy Cheddar Pops

HIPPEAS

Most puffed snacks are chock full of artificial cheese, but alternatives from Hippeas are made from **chickpea flour and yellow pea flour for protein and fiber**. These new "Pops" have an intense cheddar flavor and beg to be eaten by the handful. [hippeas.com](http://hippeas.com)



## CHECK THAT OUT

### Prebiotic Plant-Based Smoothie Pouches

gutzy Organic

These convenient squeezable pouches make it possible to enjoy a smoothie any time of day, whether at breakfast or for a satisfying snack. They're made with **organic fruits and vegetables**, plus **plant-based protein**, but the real star is the **acacia fiber**, a type of prebiotic for great digestive health.

[gutzyorganic.com](http://gutzyorganic.com)

## CHECK THAT OUT

### Culture Cup

Alec's Ice Cream

These individual ice cream cups come in a variety of favorite flavors, but unlike traditional ice cream, they're **made with probiotics** for a healthier digestive tract and immune system—not to mention only 10 grams of sugar. [alecsicecream.com](http://alecsicecream.com)



## CHECK THAT OUT

### Prodigi 7-20 Pro

Alto-Shaam

This countertop combination oven doesn't take up a lot of space, but it's still able to meet the demands of a busy kitchen, with a **one-touch control panel** that gets rid of the guesswork plus **boilerless steam generation** that uses **80% less water**. [alto-shaam.com](http://alto-shaam.com)



## CHECK THAT OUT

### Everything Bagel-Flavored Avocado Spread

Simplot

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### Meditation App

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## CHECK THAT OUT

### Mini-Mini Graham Crackers

*Chortles*

You'll be chortling about these adorably **small mini graham crackers** that taste like a sweet treat for your young customers while meeting all Smart Snack compliance guidelines. They're made with **whole grains** and have **no high-fructose corn syrup or hydrogenated oils**, and they come in individual pouches for grab-and-go ease. [chortles.com](https://chortles.com)



## READ THIS

### Lead Engaging Meetings

*Jeff Shannon*

Nobody wants to sit through the kind of meeting that has them thinking, "This could've been an email." This to-the-point practical guide shows you how you can **turn your meeting format into one that encourages engagement and productivity** for everyone involved, so you can make the most of your team's time. Available at major retailers.

## Enter This

### Salad Bar Grant

*Whole Kids Foundation*

Give kids good choices, and they'll make good choices! This grant from the **Whole Kids Foundation, in partnership with Salad Bars to Schools**, helps schools set up self-serve salad bars, giving students daily access to fresh fruits and vegetables. According to the CDC, kids with salad bar access eat 36% more fruits and veggies—proof that when healthy options are available, students dig in. [saladbars2schools.org](https://saladbars2schools.org)



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# MEET

## Katy Munna

National Sales Representative,  
*Heartland School Solutions*



**Q: Why are you passionate about working in school nutrition?**

**A:** I grew up on free and reduced lunch in Little Rock Public Schools. When I joined this industry 14 years ago, I had no idea of the complexities that go into running a school nutrition department. Being on the software side of school nutrition, I get to meet with districts of all sizes, all over the country and listen to each of their different needs. No two school districts are ever the same, so it's my job to ensure that we can provide them with tools to make their jobs more efficient and constantly improve our features to keep up with the needs of their (and our) true customers: the children.

**Q: What was your favorite school meal from your childhood?**

**A:** I can still remember in detail what the cafeteria line looked like, the color of the trays and Mrs. Pearl (my favorite lunch lady) smiling from behind the counter. I loved the rectangle pizza, corn and steamed carrots (the only place I'd eat them!).

**Q: What is the best vacation you've ever been on?**

**A:** Florence, Italy. I love art and music, and it has it all. Street dancing, street artists, cobblestone roads—can't beat it!

**Q: If you could spend a day with any fictional character, who would it be?**

**A:** Baymax from the movie "Big Hero 6"! He's the sweetest, cuddliest superhero who helps people with needs that he doesn't even face himself.

**Q: What past fashion trend would you bring back in style?**

**A:** I have always loved the 1940s trends, especially the iconic "flapper girl hair." I'd totally rock that.

**Q: What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?**

**A:** "It takes all kinds of people to make this world go round. The trash collectors are as necessary as a CEO. As you grow in your career and graduate college, never forget that everyone's job in this world is as important as yours and stay humble. This will always keep you ahead." - My mom

**Q: What new skill would you pick up instantly if you could?**

**A:** Playing acoustic guitar and singing/writing folk music (I have strong Arkansas roots and grew up listening to John Prine and Patsy Cline). I'd want to go to the city and play in the town

center while enjoying the beautiful nature outdoors and bringing people joy through music.

**Q: If you could read one book again for the first time, what would it be?**

**A:** The book "Educated" by Tara Westover is the most powerful book I've ever read. It's an autobiography that she wrote in her late 20s about growing up sheltered in rural Idaho with no real schooling or housing and an abusive family that was deeply immersed in religion. She lived in a bubble and found a way out of that life by going to college and then Cambridge University in England for graduate studies.

The beauty of this book is that she wrote it to work through a lot of her childhood struggles and adult PTSD and was finally able to start her healing journey.

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Visit the NSLW Shop at [schoolnutrition.org/shop](https://schoolnutrition.org/shop)  
and bring your school lunch celebration to life.



## CELEBRATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOOL CAFETERIAS



## AUGUST 2025

- > International Pirate Month
- > National Peach Month
- > International Cat Day (Aug. 8)
- > National Dog Day (Aug. 26)
- > National Cherry Turnover Day (Aug. 28)



## SEPTEMBER 2025

- > Better Breakfast Month
- > **National Rice Month**
- > National Waffle Week (Sept. 7-13)
- > National Cheeseburger Day (Sept. 18)
- > National Dumpling Day (Sept. 26)



## OCTOBER 2025

- > National Apple Month
- > National Pizza Month
- > World Space Week (Oct. 4-10)
- > International Music Day (Oct. 1)
- > National Pasta Day (Oct. 17)

## Get Ready: September is National Rice Month

### Buffalo Chicken Rice Dip



**Serves:** 50 (  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup dip, carrots, celery, chips)



**Per Serving:** 450 cal., 21 g pro., 21 g fat, 8 g sat. fat, 46 g carb., 3 g fiber, 550 mg sod., .5 g sugar



**Meal Pattern:** 2-oz.-eq. meat/meat alternate, 2-oz.-eq. grains,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup vegetable



- 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. brown parboiled rice
- 2 Tbsp. dried dill
- 2 Tbsp. granulated onion
- 2 Tbsp. granulated garlic
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 3 lbs. 2 oz. cooked chicken, diced
- 3 lbs. 2 oz. shredded cheddar cheese, low-sodium
- 3 qt. + 1 cup water
- 2 cups Buffalo sauce
- 1 qt. + 1 cup plain yogurt
- 1 lb. green onions, diced
- 50 (1-oz.-eq.) whole-grain tortilla chips or whole-grain flatbread
- 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. 4-in. celery sticks
- 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. 4-in. carrot sticks

1. Add rice and seasonings to a full-size 4-in. steam table pan. Mix to combine.
2. Add chicken and about  $\frac{3}{4}$  the amount of cheese (about 2  $\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. for 50 portions).
3. In a large container, mix water, Buffalo sauce and yogurt to make a smooth mixture. Pour over rice and chicken.
4. Cover tightly and bake at 350°F for 90 minutes.
5. Remove from the oven. Top with remaining cheese and garnish with green onions. **CCP:** Heat to 165°F for 15 seconds. **CCP:** Hold for hot service at 135°F or higher.
6. Serve  $\frac{2}{3}$  with 1-oz.-eq. whole-grain rich tortilla chips or flatbread, three carrot sticks and three celery sticks.

Recipe, Photo and Nutrition and Meal Pattern Analysis: USA Rice, [usarice.com](http://usarice.com)

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