

School Lunch Programs Face Challenges

(KAIR)--There have been a lot of changes to school lunch programs over the past fifty years, and that many challenges, primarily financial, will be faced in the coming years.

That, according to Penny McConnell, Director of Food and Nutrition Services for Fairfax County Public Schools, and a recent guest speaker at Kansas State University's College of Human Ecology. She says that food education needs to extend beyond the students. However, she adds that "it has been a challenge though because we not only have to teach the students how to do it, we need to teach their parents... many schools across the nation are experiencing some financial difficulty if they are not high free/reduced because you get less reimbursement."

If children are encouraged to try new foods, they are more likely to try it the next time it is offered. McConnell says the school lunch program offers a setting that helps introduce children to a variety of new foods. "If they try things when they are younger, they will take it with them."

Food waste is a problem that all schools face. While steps have been taken to address food waste, McConnell says it will never be eliminated because not all food waste is a direct result of the food being served. She says that "if you go into an elementary lunch room, the noise level is high because they are visiting, they would rather visit than eat. And often I think the plate waste with little children is because they are preoccupied with visiting. They haven't been able to talk the whole morning, and now they can...in the high schools, our lunch lines are too long because they are not giving us enough lunch periods. So we have a lot of challenges that are not of our making."

More information on health and nutrition is available at county and district Extension offices or by going to ksre.ksu.edu

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