



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
FAO, Rome 7-9 December 2010

Food-based Approaches for Improving Diets and Raising Levels of Nutrition



THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS ON CHILDREN'S EATING HABITS IN ENGLAND

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Abstract

School food has been provided to pupils in England for many decades. From the mid-1970s, however, both the number of meals provided and the quality of food declined. Legislation was introduced in 2001 to ensure that school catering services provided healthy options, but surveys of consumption in 1997 and 2004-2005 showed that improved availability of healthy options in school had little or no impact on children's eating habits.

In February 2005, Jamie Oliver presented a series of television programmes highlighting the poor quality of school food. The Government responded by setting up the School Meals Review Panel to make recommendations on how to improve school food, and the School Food Trust (now the Children's Food Trust), a Non-Departmental Public Body to promote the education and health of children and young people by improving the quality of food supplied and consumed in schools.

Legislation was introduced in 2006-2008 that set out what caterers could and could not provide for children in schools. At the same time, the Trust worked with caterers, schools, pupils, parents, manufacturers, food distributors, institutions providing further education for catering staff, and others, in a coordinated programme of change.

This paper reports clear evidence of the improvements in provision, choice and consumption of food in schools following the introduction of legislation and a national programme of work to change catering practices and the attitudes of pupils, parents and others to healthier food provision in schools. It also provides objective evidence of the impact of healthier food on children's learning behaviour in the classroom, and overall costs and benefits.

Key words: healthy options; England; schools; learning behaviour; provision of meals; childrens' eating habits; school food; school catering services

