



# SCHOOL FOODSERVICE

Beef is an important part of a healthy diet for kids and an essential component of healthy school meals.

Meat/meat alternates have always been integral to the school lunch program but in the 2012-2013 school year a new National School Lunch Program<sup>1</sup> required what USDA refers to as a “weekly range” for meat/meat alternates. This is intended to help schools offer age-appropriate meals within the required calorie range. Under these guidelines and depending on grade level, kids may be offered more ounces of meat/meat alternates than under the previous guidelines.<sup>2</sup>

- As background, meat and meat alternates include meat, poultry, fish, cheese, yogurt, dry beans and peas, whole eggs, alternate protein products, peanut butter or other nut or seed butters, and nuts and seeds.
- For students in grades 9-12, schools are required to provide 2 oz. eq. of meat/meat alternates daily and provide a total of 10-12 oz. each week.
- For students below grade 9, schools are required to provide 1 oz. eq. of meat/meat alternates daily and between 8-10 oz. eq. weekly. This is similar to the 7.5-10 oz provision per week that was required prior to the 2012-2013 school year.

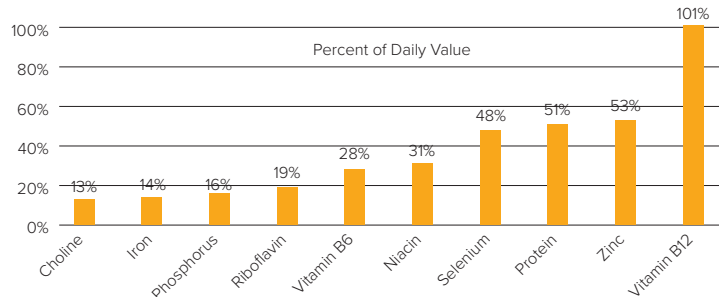
High-quality protein, like lean beef, is especially important for children because it supports the growth, repair and maintenance of all body tissues, makes red blood cells and boosts the immune system.<sup>3</sup> Sufficient protein is essential for children to perform their best both physically and mentally.<sup>4,5</sup>

- Many studies show a direct link between nutrient intake and academic performance. Zinc, iron and other nutrients in beef are critical for brain development and function.<sup>4,5,6,7,8,9</sup>
- Beef is an excellent source of zinc; a 3-oz serving of cooked beef provides about 53% of the daily value for zinc.<sup>10,11</sup> Beef is the top food source of zinc among U.S. children aged 2 to 18 years.<sup>12</sup>
- A 3 oz. serving of cooked beef provides 14% of the daily value for iron and 32% of the iron recommendations for 9 to 13-year-old boys and girls.<sup>10,11,13</sup>

Schools can feel good about continuing to include high-quality protein, like beef, on the menu to help growing kids get many of the essential nutrients they need for optimal health while still meeting the requirements for healthy school meal patterns. Pairing fruits and vegetables with favorite foods like beef can help make it easier to enjoy more produce in a balanced diet. Once people have anchored their plate with protein, then fill at least half of the plate with colorful vegetables and fruits.<sup>14</sup> By pairing produce and other whole foods with beef, kids will receive a nutrient-packed mid-day meal that provides the fuel they need for success in school.

## Beef Makes the Grade

A 3-oz serving of cooked beef on average provides 175 calories and 10 essential nutrients



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