



Farm to School NEBRASKA

Harvest of the Month

TASTE TEST GUIDE



Download and print items from the Harvest of the Month toolkit at:
www.education.ne.gov/ns/farm-to-school/harvest-of-the-month

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WHY OFFER TASTE TESTS?

- Promotes your Harvest of the Month and farm to school programs.
- May meet requirements for School Wellness Policies, especially guidelines for nutrition promotion. See details below on sample wellness policy language.
- Discover student taste and recipe preferences with less risk and less waste.
- Practice preparing featured products in creative ways.
- Provide opportunity for students and teachers to deliver positive feedback, increasing interest in the school lunch program.
- Provide education about seasonal and local foods
- Provides an opportunity to teach about culturally diverse foods, promoting community health, self-reliance, and sustainability
- Introduces culturally relevant food to diverse student body

Nebraska schools serve 232,941 students daily, offering many varieties of fruits and vegetables that help students to diversify their palates and eat nutritious meals. Students learn lifelong healthy eating habits in the school cafeteria, and often take these habits back home, positively influencing community and family members.

Harvest of the Month taste tests broaden student understanding of where food comes from and how it is grown. It provides hands-on experiences and the opportunity for students to give feedback and approval for food samples. Students can assist with growing the food, preparing the recipes, or simply learning about where it originated!



Photo Credit: USDA

WHAT IS A TASTE TEST?

A taste test is a small sample of food offered in the classroom or cafeteria that introduces flavor, texture and smell.

SAMPLE WELLNESS POLICY LANGUAGE FOR NUTRITION PROMOTION:

Nutrition promotion and education positively influence lifelong eating behaviors by using evidence-based techniques, nutrition messages, and food environments that encourage healthy nutrition choices and participation in school meal programs. This promotion will occur through:

- Implementing bi-monthly school sponsored taste test through the Nebraska Harvest of the Month program highlighting local foods.
- Providing linkages to the school meal programs, cafeteria nutrition promotion activities, school gardens, Farms, and nutrition-related community services.

More information on USDA school wellness policy requirements and what is required for nutrition promotion can be found on the NDE website at:

www.education.ne.gov/ns/forms-resources/national-school-lunch-program/wellness-policy



STEPS & TIPS FOR ORGANIZING CAFETERIA TASTE TESTS:

- Determine the Nebraska product you will feature.
- Select a recipe.
- Identify and order the local product from your distributor, a local food distributor, a farmers' market, directly from a farmer, your school garden, or another source.
- Assemble all needed sampling items (i.e., serving tools, utensils, sampling dishes, etc.)
- Promote the product and the recipe in advance in the cafeteria, classroom and community with PA announcements, posters, trivia questions, menus, all-staff emails and the media.
 - » Share the date for the taste test with families through school or cafeteria newsletters and on your website.
 - Inform families about the item to be tasted so they can be prepared to address any food allergy issues with their children (see page 6).
 - » After the taste test, provide families with the recipe and product preparation or storage tips. Share pictures!
- Invite school staff and administrators to participate in the taste test. They can model tasting new foods with the students!
- Organize volunteers to help prepare and hand out the taste test samples.
 - » For 500 students with staggered lunch periods, 2-3 people to prepare the taste test samples, pass out taste test samples, and clean up should be sufficient.
 - » Recruit parents, students, teachers, school staff, cafeteria staff, and community members as volunteers.
- Since some students bring their lunch and others purchase school lunch, you can either pass out the taste test samples to students at tables or set up a separate table in the lunchroom and have students come to you.

DID YOU KNOW?

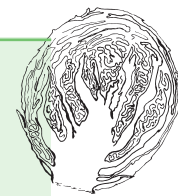
IT CAN TAKE 10 - 15 TIMES OF TASTING A NEW FOOD BEFORE A CHILD IS WILLING TO EAT IT.



IDEAS FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS

- Encourage students to use their senses when testing new foods and they will be more likely to taste and accept it.
- Provide a map that visually points to where the food is grown in our state.
- Tie the taste test to other subjects. Can students learn fractions by measuring length of turnips? Can younger children guess if the product is grown above or underground?
- Invite a farmer to bring in the local food and share about how that food is grown on the farm.
- Plan a contest for classrooms to compete in naming a new recipe.
- Younger students can add stickers to a bingo game or chart for each new food tasted in the school year.
- Consider pairing the taste test with a cooking demonstration. Have samples of the harvest of the month item available to touch and see, like a variety of whole squash.
- Secondary students can participate in taste testing too! Consider involving FFA, Family Consumer Science or youth in after-school programs.
- Have students share cultural meals they share with their families.

CHILDREN WHO HELP PREPARE FOOD FOR A TASTE TEST ARE MORE LIKELY TO TRY IT AND LIKE IT THAN CHILDREN WHO HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED.



EVALUATING YOUR TASTE TEST

1. Hang a large sheet of paper on the wall that is within students' reach. Attach an image of the product you are featuring and/or write the name of the product at the top of the paper. Draw three columns on this paper for students to cast their votes. At the top of the columns, list the following: Loved it! 😊; Liked it 😐; Maybe Next Time 😞. Students can mark on the paper with a pen, or use a sticker to make their vote. See Appendix 1 (Page 8).
2. Gather three jars. Adhere each jar with one of the following: Loved it! 😊; Liked it 😐; Maybe Next Time 😞. Students can use a tangible item like a scrap of paper or a dry bean, and drop their item into the appropriate jar to cast their vote. See Appendix 2 (Page 9).
3. Provide students with ballots for voting. Students would list the featured product, the date, and have three choices for votes: Loved it! 😊; Liked it 😐; Maybe Next Time 😞. Students can circle or color their vote on that slip of paper and drop it into a voting box! See Appendix 3 (Page 10).

FIGURE 1.

Harvest of the Month TASTE TEST EVALUATIONS		
Loved it! 😊	Liked It. 😐	Maybe Next Time. 😞

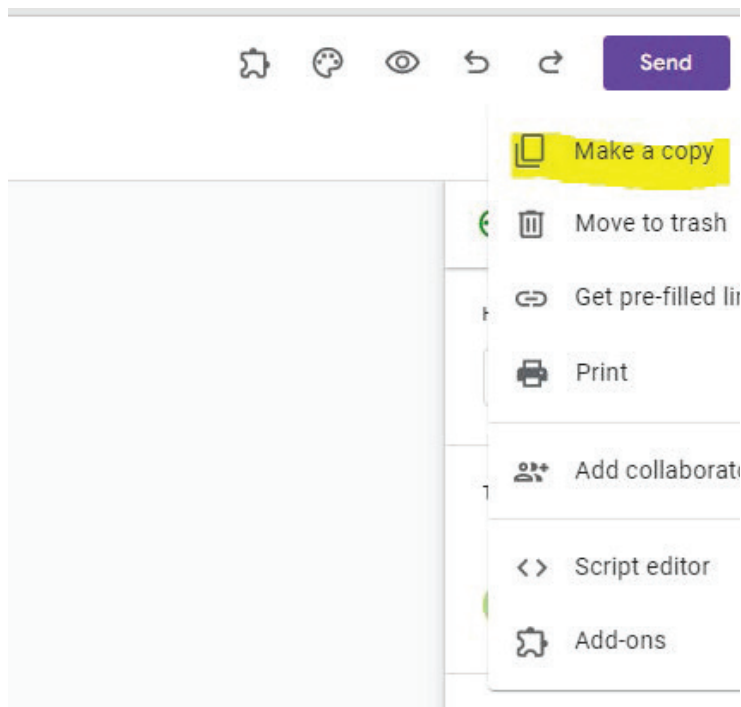
FIGURE 2.

Harvest of the Month TASTE TEST EVALUATIONS	
Loved it! 😊	
Liked It. 😐	Maybe Next Time. 😞

FIGURE 3.

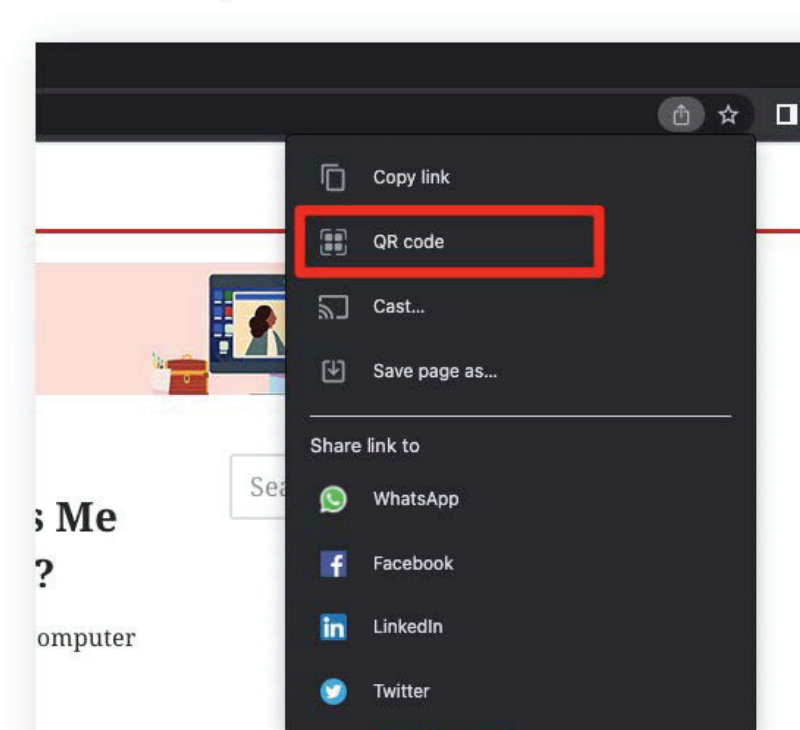
Harvest of the Month TASTE TEST EVALUATIONS		
Loved it! 😊	Liked It. 😐	Maybe Next Time. 😞

4. For older students (grades 6-12) consider utilizing a QR code for youth to use their cell phones to vote during the taste test. If you have incentives available to encourage voting that can be a fun addition as well.
- » To use the QR codes to vote in your school, visit: bit.ly/3QdT5AB. You will need to make a copy of this survey if you want to see the results for your school.



- » Once you have made a copy then you will be able to view the results of your student vote. From your NEW survey link you will be able to create a QR code, have youth assist with the QR code creation OR follow these instructions being certain to use Chrome as your internet browser:

Click on the **Share**  option in the URL bar.



FOOD ALLERGIES

Because food allergies are common in children, it is important to be aware of the ingredients in all recipes before serving or conducting a taste test with a new recipe.

The Eight Most Common Allergens Are:

Milk / Dairy	Eggs	Peanuts	Tree Nuts
Fish	Shellfish	Soy	Wheat

- Consult with your school nurse to determine foods to avoid during taste testing based on student allergies or intolerances. Or if it is not possible to avoid all foods children have allergies to, ensure that the nurse and students are aware that they will need to avoid the taste test or have an alternate snack during a planned taste test to keep the child safe.
- Notify parents one week in advance of the taste test to ensure a child can try the taste testing food selected. When in doubt, leave it out.




Food Safety First

- After you are confident students with food allergies are being managed, be sure that all volunteer use safe food handling practices.
- Be sure students and volunteers wash their hands properly before handling any food. Follow good handwashing practices using the CDC handwashing recommendation:
 - » 20 seconds of lathering after children have applied soap, equal to singing happy birthday or the alphabet. Students may do the lathering while waiting in line to rinse their hands.

Harvest of the Month

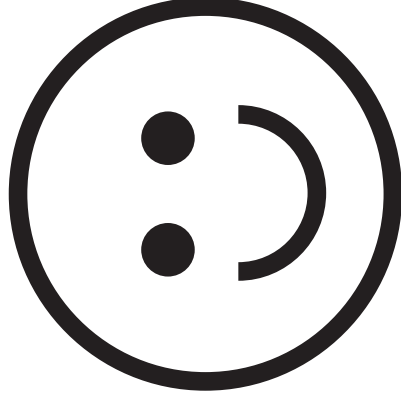
TASTE TEST EVALUATIONS

Item _____

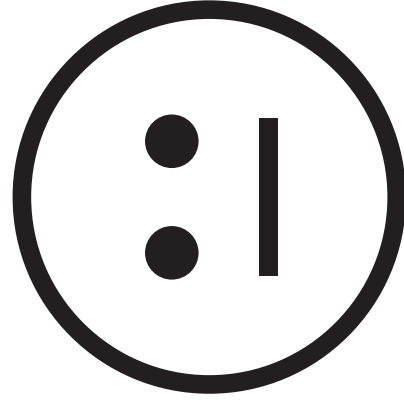
Loved it! 	Liked It. 	Maybe Next Time. 

Harvest of the Month
TASTE TEST EVALUATIONS

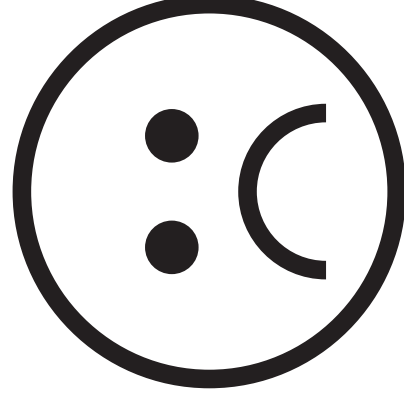
Loved it!



Liked It.



Maybe Next Time.



TASTE TEST

Item _____

Circle One:

Loved it!



Liked it.



Maybe Next Time.



TASTE TEST

Item _____

Circle One:

Loved it!



Liked it.



Maybe Next Time.



TASTE TEST

Item _____

Circle One:

Loved it!



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Maybe Next Time.



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