Fuel *with* Color

A Guide to School Fruit & Vegetable Bars



SECTION 3

Building the Bar: Planning & Set-up Basics



Table of Contents

SECTION 3 OF 3 OF A GUIDE TO SCHOOL FRUIT & VEGETABLE BARS

Schoolwide Training & Support 56

Schoolwide Support
Student Training

Bar Layout, Set-up, & Tools 58

Bar Planning
Equipment Selection
Layout & Traffic Flow
Utensils & Serving Tools

Food Safety & Sanitation 61

Food Preparation Safety
Bar Set-up Safety
Service-Time Safety Practices
Post-Service Cleaning & Sanitation

Menu Planning 64

Menu Planning Basics
Production Records & Compliance
Meal Pattern Alignment
Planning Tips for Fruit & Vegetable Bars
Sample Bar Set-up
Fruit and Vegetable Bar Examples

Staff Training & Service 74

Staffing Basics
Service Roles & Responsibilities
Training Focus Areas

Prepared Salad Options 76

Salads-to-Go
Salad Shakers
Garden Salads

References 78

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Schoolwide Training & Support

Schoolwide Support

Successful fruit and vegetable bar service depends on clear communication with teachers and principals. Work together to reinforce expectations, manage traffic flow, and ensure students know how to use the bar safely.

Student Training

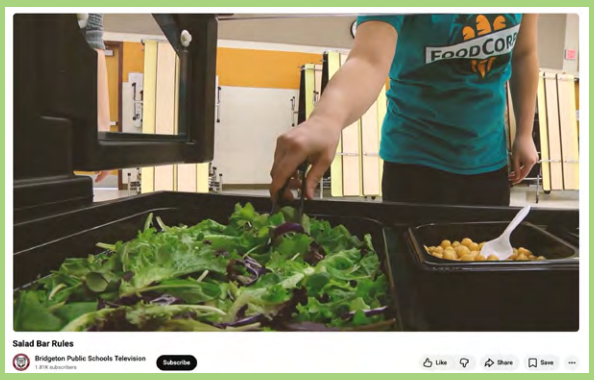
Students benefit from simple, clear guidance before using the bar. Food service staff can provide short classroom visits, quick demonstrations, or cafeteria walk-throughs to show proper use. Some schools also use skits or announcements to model safe and polite behavior. Include fruit and vegetable bar etiquette in student training and post it near the bar for daily reminders.



Teaching Salad Bar Rules

Scan the QR code to watch the the "Bridgeton Public Schools – Salad Bar Rules" video (beginning at 1:05) for an example of teaching fruit and vegetable bar etiquette.

youtube.com/watch?v=5SGqGg6F0hc





FRUIT & VEGETABLE BAR ETIQUETTE

- Wash hands before using the bar.
- Use utensils — never your fingers.
- Tell a cafeteria staff member or teacher if something spills or falls.
- Keep your head out from under the sneeze guard or food shield. Ask a friend or cafeteria staff member for help if you can't reach.
- Don't taste food at the bar.
- Take a small amount if you're trying something new.
- Take only what you will eat.
- Do not bring food back to the bar.
- Always use a clean tray or plate for seconds.
- Be polite and wait your turn in line.

Bar Layout, Set-up, & Tools

Planning the Bar

The layout of the fruit and vegetable bar should fit the available space, support smooth traffic flow, and make fruits and vegetables easy for students to see and reach. Placement should also help meet reimbursable meal requirements.



Key Considerations

- Space available and best location for visibility and traffic flow
- Access to power or refrigeration if needed
- Expected number of students
- Placement of the cashier and POS

Equipment Selection

Select equipment that fits your space and supports food safety. Portable or refrigerated models can offer flexibility. Ensure the bar height and sneeze guards work for the grade levels served. Use pans and configurations that keep items organized and easy to restock.

Layout & Traffic Flow

A consistent, easy-to-follow layout helps staff work efficiently and keeps service moving smoothly. Predetermined bar grids — such as 4-well or 5-well templates — support quick set-up and consistent presentation.

LAYOUT OPTIONS

→ **Single-sided line:** Simple to use and fits small spaces; best for smaller selections.

⇉ **Two-sided line:** Allows faster service for larger groups; foods should be mirrored on both sides.

Tip: Positioning the bar near the start of the line or checkout encourages students to select fruits and vegetables.

TRAFFIC FLOW →

1/2 pan Spinach	Quarter inch long pan Carrots	1/4 pan Jicama	1/4 pan Cherry Tomatoes	1/4 pan Chickpeas	Quarter inch long pan Plums	Quarter inch long pan Watermelon
1/2 pan Spring Mix		1/4 pan Broccoli	1/4 pan Cucumber	1/4 pan Corn		

Figure 3-1. Sample 4-Well Fruit and Vegetable Bar Grid

TRAFFIC FLOW →

Quarter inch long pan Red Leaf Lettuce	Quarter inch long pan Arugula	1/4 pan Black Beans	Quarter inch long pan Cucumbers	Quarter inch long pan Cherry Tomatoes	Quarter inch long pan Roasted Eggplant	Quarter inch long pan Melon	Quarter inch long pan Peaches	1/4 pan Cran-berries	1/4 pan Dressing
		1/4 pan Red Pepper						1/4 pan Corn	1/4 pan Dressing

Figure 3-2. Sample 5-Well Fruit and Vegetable Bar Grid

Figures 3-1 and 3-2 are adapted from The Lunchbox, "Salad Bars – Operations."

Utensils & Serving Tools

The right utensil supports food safety, portion control, and efficient service. Each food item should have its own long-handled utensil to prevent it from slipping into the pan and to maintain food safety. Utensils should be easy to handle and sized correctly for each food item.

COMMON TOOLS



Tongs

Lettuce, sliced fruit, or other grab-and-serve items.



Perforated spoons

Foods in liquid (e.g., beans, corn, or beets).



Solid or measured spoons

Portioned items (e.g., chopped vegetables, or fruit mixes)



Spoons

Small toppings (e.g., dried fruit, or diced vegetables).

Resource tip:

For portion size and utensil standards, see the ICN "Basics at a Glance" utensil chart.

theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/basics-at-a-glance/

Food Safety & Sanitation

A clean, well-maintained fruit and vegetable bar encourages students to make healthy choices and keeps everyone safe. Food safety begins during prep and continues through service and clean-up.

Food Preparation Safety

- Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before handling food, or wear gloves.
- Rinse all produce under running clean water — never soak in standing water.
- Skip rewashing pre-washed packaged greens.
- Scrub firm-skin produce (e.g., carrots, potatoes) with a clean brush.
- Use separate knives and cutting boards for fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Cut items to age-appropriate sizes for younger students.
- Keep prepared ingredients refrigerated at 41 °F or below until serving.
- Prepare and label back-up pans in advance; fill containers only halfway to keep food cold and reduce waste.

Bar Set-up Safety

- Sanitize the bar and utensils before every meal period.
- Install sneeze guards or food shields at student height and keep them clean.
- Add ice or frozen chill packs to non-refrigerated units just before service.
- Set up the bar as close to meal service time as possible to keep foods safe and fresh.
- Follow your layout grid when placing pans to maintain safe flow and color balance.
- Clearly label each item to prevent confusion and discourage tasting.
- Record starting temperatures for all bar items, especially those requiring time and temperature control for safety (e.g., cut melons, lettuce).

Service-Time Safety Practices

- Assign a trained staff member to supervise the bar.
- Remind students to use a clean plate if they return for seconds.
- Watch for unsafe behaviors such as touching food or leaning under the sneeze guard.
- Replace pans when they run low or become contaminated — never top off with new food.
- Use separate, long-handled utensils for each item, and replace them every 4 hours or whenever food pans are changed.
- Check food temperatures at least every 30 minutes (keep cold ≤ 41 °F; hot ≥ 135 °F).
- Wipe spills with sanitizer solution and towels — avoid spray cleaners while food is out.





Post-Service Cleaning & Sanitation

- Remove all food immediately after the last lunch period.
- Log food temperatures on the temperature sheet, and record leftover amounts on the production record after service.
- Discard any food left out more than two hours or held above 41 °F.
- Only save items from mechanically cooled units if:
  - Temperature stayed ≤ 41 °F,
  - Food was not mixed or touched, and
  - It is labeled, dated, and used within 7 days.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize pans, utensils, and surfaces after each use.
- Allow containers to dry completely.

Menu Planning

Menu planning should reflect student preferences, kitchen capacity, and USDA meal pattern requirements. Plan menus that are realistic for available space, manageable for staff, and appealing to students.

Menu Planning Basics

To Plan Effectively:

- Schedule time for weekly or cycle menu planning.
- Focus on the grade levels served and available equipment.
- Decide how many fruit and vegetable choices to offer each day.
- Invite students and staff to share feedback or suggest new items.
- Review menus for color, flavor, texture, and temperature variety.
- Use student feedback and waste records to evaluate what works best.

Production Records & Compliance

Accurate production records verify that fruit and vegetable bar offerings meet USDA meal pattern requirements. They also support menu planning, food safety monitoring, inventory control, and help reduce food waste.

What to Record

As shown in Figure 3-3, the "Multi-Day Food/Condiment Bar Production Record" (Nebraska Department of Education) provides an example of how to document fruit and vegetable bar items. Check with your state agency for required forms — some schools may also include items such as cheese or crackers on the fruit and vegetable bar.

Document:

- Food name and form (e.g., "romaine mix," "diced tomatoes")
- Recipe, brand, or commodity code
- Vegetable subgroup key (DG = dark green, RO = red/orange, BP = beans/peas, S = starchy, O = other, WG = whole grain)
- Planned portion size and unit of measure
- Starting and leftover quantities
- Time and temperature for potentially hazardous foods (e.g., cut melons, lettuce, cooked beans)

Figure 3-3. Example of the Multi-Day Production Record

Multi-Day Food/Condiment Bar Production Record **Site Name: Name of School**

This production record is designed for schools that have an ongoing fruit/vegetable bar. It can also be used to track condiments. Add items used routinely before copying the form. The "Starting Quantity" and "Leftover Quantity" columns must be completed for each item. Use the Vegetable Subgroup Key column to record the abbreviation for the following vegetable subgroups served: **RO**=Red Orange; **DG**=Dark Green; **BP**=Beans, Peas, and Lentils; **S**=Starchy; O=Other. Record **(WGR)** if an item is whole grain rich.

For each day, record the quantity of each food item placed on the bar. At the end of meal service, record the quantity of each food item left.
Please note: For Potentially Hazardous Foods (PHFs), record the Time/Temperature when set out. Examples include cut tomatoes, melon, lettuce/romaine, as well as protein type food items such as hummus. All PHF foods from a non-mechanically cooled bar and cold foods that have been out of the refrigerator for **four hours** must be discarded. Discard food that has been mixed with other foods or touched by bare hands. **YOU MUST MAINTAIN TIME AND TEMPERATURE LOGS FOR FOODS REUSED THE NEXT DAY.**

Food Items Used *Examples: Romaine Lettuce, Baby Carrots, Diced Tomatoes, Apple (Whole), Ketchup, Low-fat Ranch Dressing*	**Product Brand or School Recipe (SR) *or* Commodity (C)**	**Vegetable Subgroup Key or if item is WGR**	**Record the Unit of Weight or Volume *or* # of Servings with portion size for placement on the bar**	Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday		
				Time and Temperature	Starting Quantity	Leftover Quantity	Time and Temperature	Starting Quantity	Leftover Quantity	Time and Temperature	Starting Quantity	Leftover Quantity	Time and Temperature	Starting Quantity	Leftover Quantity	Time and Temperature	Starting Quantity	Leftover Quantity
Romaine/Iceberg Lettuce Mix	Dole	DG	lbs.	39°F	10	1/2	38°F	7	.	39°F	7	.	40°F	8	.	37°F	5	1/2
Tomatoes, diced	Dole	RO	lbs.	38°F	5	.	38°F	3	.				40°F	4	.			
WG Saltines Crackers	Nabisco 2/pk	WG	lbs.	N/A	3	.	N/A	2	.	N/A	2	.	N/A	3	.	N/A	1	.
Ranch Dressing, reg.	C		qt.	40°F	2	.	38°F	2	.	40°F	1	.	41°F	2	.	39°F	2	1
Carrots, shredded	Dole	RO	lbs.	38°F	2	1/2				37°F	1	1/2				37°F	2	.
Cheese, American, shredded	C		lbs.	41°F	3	.	40°F	1	.	40°F	1	.	40°F	2	.			
Orange quarters	Dole		lbs.	39°F	8	.				39°F	3	.				39°F	2	.
Red Kidney Bean Salad	SR	B	gal.	40°F	5	.							39°F	3	.			
Cabbage Salad	SR	O	qt.	40°F	3	.												
WG Bread Sticks, 1oz each	SR	WG	Each				N/A	175	.									
Vegetarian Beans	C	B	#10 can				40°F	1	.									
Watermelon Chunks	Dole		lbs.				37°F	20	.	38°F	15	.						
Broccoli Salad	SR	DG	qt.							38°F	1	.						
Pineapple Tidbits, lgt syrup	C		#10 can							40°F	1	1/2				39°F	1	.

Meal Pattern Alignment

A fruit and vegetable bar can help meet daily fruit and vegetable requirements for reimbursable meals, as well as weekly vegetable sub-group requirements. The NDE Meal Pattern Check Form (see resource tip below) can be used alongside production records to verify offerings and ensure that portion sizes align with USDA minimums.

Minimum Daily Fruit & Vegetable Requirements (NSLP)

Fruits (cups):
½ cup (K-8) | 1 cup (9-12)

Vegetables (cups):
¾ cup (K-8) | 1 cup (9-12)

Weekly Vegetable Subgroup Requirements

Dark green: ½ cup

Red/orange:
¾ cup (K-8) | 1¼ cup (9-12)

Beans/peas/lentils: ½ cup

Starchy: ½ cup

Other: ½ cup (K-8) | ¾ cup (9-12)

Additional vegetables from any subgroup to reach total:
1 cup (K-8) | 1 ½ cup (9-12)

At least one fruit and one vegetable must be offered to students daily to meet the USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern requirements.

Combination salads — such as chef salads, taco salads, or fruit-and-yogurt plates — can count toward multiple meal components when portion sizes meet USDA standards for fruits, vegetables, and meat/meat alternates.

Staff should use standardized recipes and portioning utensils to ensure all serving sizes align with reimbursable meal requirements.

Best Practices for Compliance

- Use standardized portion utensils (e.g., ½-cup scoops, tongs) to ensure consistency.
- Pre-portion or pre-package foods when feasible for accuracy and sanitation.
- Display sample portions near the bar to help cashiers and students identify reimbursable meal amounts.
- Record temperatures when foods are set out and at least every 30 minutes during service.
- Retain production records, temperature logs, and back-up documentation for audit review.



Resource tips:

Multi-Day Food/Condiment Bar Production Record Form (Nebraska Department of Education)

education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Final-fillable-v4-Multi-day-Bar-Record-6.2024.pdf

Meal Pattern Check Form (Nebraska Department of Education)

education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Meal-Pattern-Check.pdf

NDE Meal Pattern and Production Records webpage

education.ne.gov/ns/forms-resources/national-school-lunch-program/meal-pattern-requirements/



Planning Tips for Fruit & Vegetable Bars

A fruit and vegetable bar works best when it is colorful, appealing, and easy for students to navigate.

Consider:

- Highlighting variety to keep students engaged
- Combining different colors, textures, shapes, and temperatures to make the bar visually appealing
- Using fresh, colorful produce to attract attention
- Including a mix of vegetable subgroups — dark green, red/orange, starchy, beans/peas, and "other" — across the week for balanced nutrition

Fruit and Vegetable Options by Color Group

Use a variety of colors to create an attractive and nutritionally diverse bar.

	VEGETABLES		FRUITS	
Red	• Beets • Red cabbage • Red peppers • Red potatoes (skin on)	• Radishes • Tomatoes • Kidney beans • Pickled beets	• Cherries • Cranberries • Pomegranates • Raspberries • Red apples	• Red grapefruit • Red grapes • Red plums • Strawberries • Watermelon
Yellow/Orange	• Butternut squash • Carrots • Corn • Orange bell peppers • Sweet potatoes • Yellow beets	• Yellow peppers • Yellow summer squash • Yellow tomatoes	• Apricots • Cantaloupe • Mangoes • Mandarin oranges • Nectarines • Oranges	• Papaya • Peaches • Persimmons • Pineapple • Tangerines • Yellow watermelon

	VEGETABLES	FRUITS
Green	• Asparagus • Broccoli • Brussels sprouts • Celery • Collard greens • Cucumbers • Edamame • Endive • Escarole • Green beans • Green cabbage • Green peppers • Kale • Lettuce/leafy greens • Okra • Peas • Scallions • Spinach • Watercress • Zucchini	• Avocados • Green apples • Green grapes • Green pears • Honeydew melon • Kiwi • Limes • Starfruit
White	• Cauliflower • Celery • Garlic • Jicama • Kohlrabi • Mushrooms • Onions • Parsnips • Potatoes (white flesh) • Turnips • Water chestnuts • White corn	• Applesauce • Bananas • Pears • White apples • White grapes • White nectarines • White peaches
Blue/Purple	• Eggplant • Purple cabbage • Purple carrots • Purple cauliflower • Purple potatoes • Red-purple beets	• Acai (frozen purée or blend) • Blackberries • Blueberries • Purple figs • Purple grapes • Purple plums • Prunes • Raisins
Tan/Brown	• Chickpeas (garbanzo beans) • Lentils • Mushrooms	• Dates • Dried fruits (raisins, cranberries, apricots, figs)



Sample Bar Set-up

Start with a core group of daily staples — such as leafy greens, carrots, broccoli, and tomatoes — and rotate seasonal or featured items throughout the week. Use one flexible slot for specials, such as:

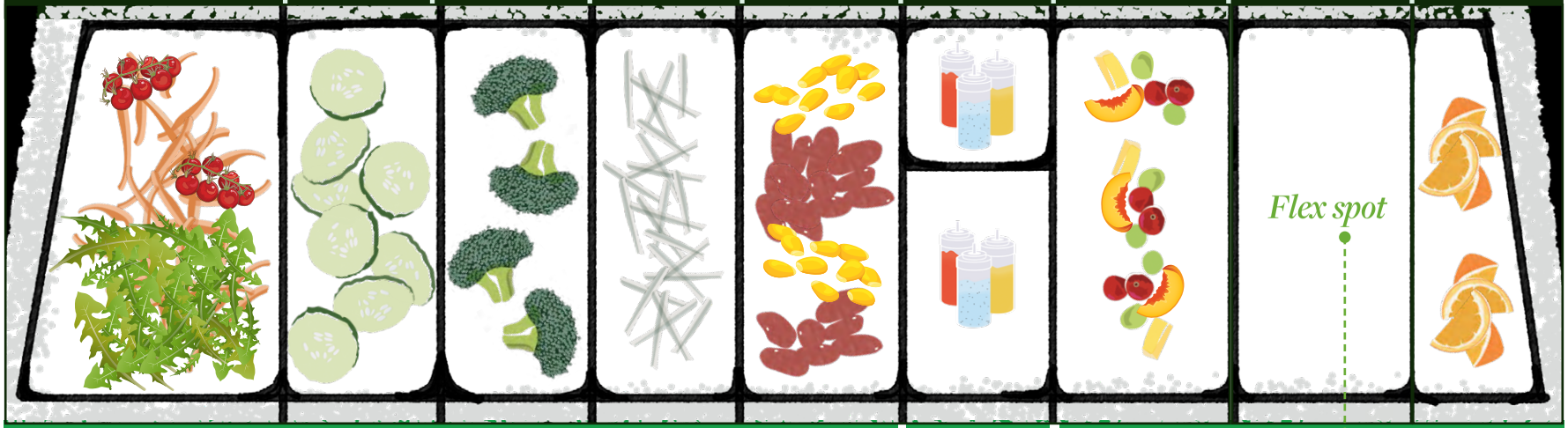
- Local produce
- Student favorites
- "Try Something New Thursday" items

Encourage students to "Mix and Match" fruits and vegetables to create colorful, balanced plates.

Same items every day

Items change monthly, weekly, or daily

Romaine, Grape Tomatoes, Shredded Carrot Mix	Cucumber Coins	Broccoli Florets	Jicama Strips	Pinto Bean & Corn Salad	Ranch & Honey Mustard	Changes Monthly	Flex Spot HOM slot on Thursday Can Change Daily	Seasonal Fruit (Cut) Cut Fresh Fruit Changes Monthly
Dark Green & Red/Orange	**Other**	**Dark Green**	**Starchy**	**Legumes & Starchy**	Dressings	Canned Fruit		



Vegetables | **Dressings** | **Fruits & Flex Spot**



Manager's choice but must be a fruit or vegetable - NO juice



Pickles



Jalapenos



Harvest of the Month item served every Thursday. Each month a different item from a different local farm in Nebraska.



Left over B|C apple slices

This bar layout is adapted from A Field Guide to Salad Bars in Schools (MDH)

Fruit & Vegetable Bar Examples

Pairing the fruit and vegetable bar with popular entrées keeps menus interesting and helps students customize their meals. The themed examples below show how to coordinate fresh fruits and vegetables with common entrées.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Burger F/V	Taco F/V	Pizza F/V	Potato F/V	Pasta F/V

TIP:

Many toppings repeat across entrées (e.g., lettuce, tomatoes, onions, peppers). Highlight these as "daily staples," then rotate two to three special items for variety.

Example 1: Hamburger Fruit and Vegetable Bar



Provide a burger base for students to add fresh toppings.

Shredded lettuce	Sliced cucumber Shredded carrots	Sliced tomatoes	Sliced onions Sliced green peppers	Pickles Sliced mushrooms	Dressings	Mixed fruit	Watermelon cubes	Apple slices

Example 2: Taco Fruit and Vegetable Bar

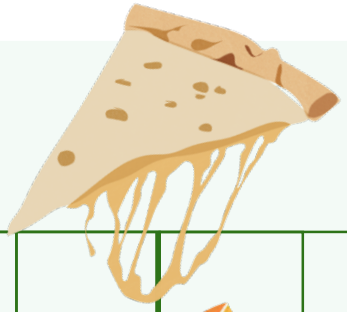


Provide a filled taco shell as the base for students to add fresh toppings.

Shredded lettuce	Chopped tomatoes	Salsa Guacamole	Corn Sliced green peppers	Sliced mushrooms Baby carrots	Dressings	Canned peaches	Melon cubes	Orange wedges

Example 3: Pizza Fruit and Vegetable Bar

Provide a slice of cheese pizza as the base for students to add fresh toppings.



Shredded lettuce	Chopped tomatoes	Chopped onions	Corn relish	Sliced mushrooms	Dressings	Pineapple tidbits	Mandarin slices	Green apples
		Chopped green peppers	Coleslaw	Baby carrots				

Example 4: Potato Fruit and Vegetable Bar

Provide a baked potato as the base for students to add fresh toppings.



Shredded lettuce	Chopped tomatoes	Chopped onions	Broccoli	Sliced mushroom	Dress-ings	Canned pears	Cantaloupe	Grapes
		Chopped green peppers	Kidney beans	Baby carrots or celery sticks				

Example 5: Pasta Fruit and Vegetable Bar

Provide a bowl of pasta as the base for students to add fresh toppings.



Shredded lettuce	Sliced cucumber	Sliced Tomatoes	Sliced onions	Pickles	Dressings	Mixed fruit	Watermelon cubes	Apple slices
	Shredded carrots		Sliced green peppers	Sliced mushroom				

Staff Training & Service

Training is essential for a safe, smooth, and appealing fruit and vegetable bar program. Well-trained staff help maintain food safety, support efficient service, and create a positive experience for students. Schedule short, hands-on training before launching the bar and refresh them throughout the year. Training should focus on key areas such as food safety, set-up, portion control, and student engagement.

Staffing Basics

Staffing needs depend on participation levels, menu complexity, facility layout, and available equipment.

- Small schools (≤350 students): One trained staff member may manage preparation, monitoring, and replenishing.
- Larger schools: Plan for at least two staff members for prep and two for service. These may be the same individuals rotating roles.

Tips for success:

- Review bar procedures during pre-service meetings and at regular intervals.
- Post quick-reference guides (set-up diagrams, utensil charts, etiquette reminders) near prep and service areas.
- Rotate staff among roles to strengthen teamwork, flexibility, and confidence.

Service Roles & Responsibilities



Preparer: Washes, chops, and portions fruits and vegetables; arranges items in the bar; and maintains proper cold holding temperatures



Monitor or replenisher: Keeps the bar clean and stocked, replaces utensils as needed, checks food temperatures, and encourages students to take only what they will eat



Cashier or POS staff: Verifies reimbursable meals and helps students identify items they may need to meet meal pattern requirements



Volunteers or non-food service staff (if permitted): Support younger students, help organize the line, and inform staff when supplies run low

Training Focus Areas

Food safety: Proper washing methods, glove use, temperature control, and awareness of common allergens

Service flow: Smooth traffic patterns, efficient restocking, and clear communication among staff working the line

Customer service: Encourage students to try new foods, model proper utensil use, offer friendly reminders about etiquette, and maintain a welcoming attitude

Garnishing and presentation: Keep the bar colorful and attractive, use simple garnishes (e.g., kale, parsley, or cabbage leaves) only when appropriate, and avoid over-decorating

Prepared Salad Options

Prepared salads are a practical solution for schools that cannot offer a self-serve fruit and vegetable bar. They allow students to enjoy colorful, nutrient-rich produce in a ready-to-eat format that is safe, efficient, and compliant with USDA meal pattern requirements. Prepared salads may be served as grab-and-go entrées or side dishes, depending on their meal components.

Salads-to-Go

Prepackaged "salads-to-go" provide students with a fresh and balanced choice, especially when time or space is limited. When paired with milk and a grain item, these salads can count as reimbursable meals.



Tips for Salads-to-Go:

- Use clear bowls or trays with lids for freshness and visibility.
- Keep salads single-layered in refrigerated display units; avoid stacking.
- Include a variety of fruits and vegetables such as lettuce, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, and seasonal produce.
- Offer dressings in sealed packets or small cups.
- For entrée salads, include at least two fruit or vegetable components and a meat/meat alternate (1-2 oz). Add a grain item (e.g., a roll, crackers) to complete a reimbursable meal.
- Discard wilted greens or browned items promptly to maintain quality.

Examples:

- Chef's salad-to-go
- Chicken topper salad
- Spinach salad
- Tuna salad
- Chicken taco salad
- Turkey garden salad

Salad Shakers

Salad shakers are a portable, student-friendly option where ingredients and dressing can be mixed by shaking. They align with popular restaurant-style offerings and work well in grab-and-go service.



Tips for Salad Shakers:

- Use clear 12–16 oz. cups with domed lids.
- Keep upright in refrigerated units for visibility.
- Wash and chill all ingredients before assembling.
- Offer dressing packets separately.
- Combine two fruit or vegetable components with 1–2 oz. eq M/MA to build a salad shaker that can be completed as a reimbursable meal when offered with a grain item and milk.

Examples:

- Chicken caesar shaker
- Greek salad shaker
- Southwest chicken shaker

Garden Salads

Simple garden salads without added protein offer a fresh daily option that can be served as a side or included as part of a reimbursable meal.



Tips for garden salads:

- Use chilled pans or nest over ice to maintain temperature.
- Offer two or three dressing options in portioned cups or packets.
- Include fresh greens plus colorful items such as carrots, cucumbers, and tomatoes.

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