

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Legislative Hearing to Review S. 222, The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act,  
and Improving Children's Health

April 1, 2025

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar & Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to discuss child nutrition with you today. My name is Krista Byler, I am a professional chef with a varied background in food service, for the past 20 years I have been the Foodservice Director for Union City Area School District in Northwestern Pennsylvania. I am the mother of two student athletes and the wife and granddaughter of Pennsylvania farmers. My passion is feeding our future and advocating for school nutrition reform.

During the 2019-2020 school year our district ran a milk choice trial at our middle and high schools in order to gather data for the Pennsylvania Grassroots Dairy committee as well as to see if we could determine whether the ultra-restrictive policies regarding milk in the school meals programs are largely responsible for the loss of a generation of milk drinkers.

At the time of the trial, I had been in the school nutrition business for 14 years and had witnessed a significant decrease in the amount of milk taken with meals as well as a huge increase in milk wasted on a daily basis, beginning in about 2012.

I was interested in conducting this research for many reasons: I hated seeing such an exorbitant amount of milk wasted daily in our small district and was hearing stories of even bigger waste ratios in larger districts. I strongly disagree with the 2010 legislation that has, in effect, allowed a la carte sales of products containing chemicals or caffeine but does not allow nutrient dense 2% or whole milk. Lastly, as the wife and granddaughter of proud Pennsylvania dairymen, I knew how the decrease in milk we were ordering for schools would impact dairy farm families, who work hard every day to produce nutrient dense milk.

The facts from our middle school and high school trial are that we offered all levels of milk fat to our students, and this resulted in:

- 50% increase in milk consumption
- 95% reduction in milk waste
- 63.6% of the students who responded to our survey chose milk more often since they had the option to choose which milk fit their needs
- 84.7% of the students who responded to our survey drink whole milk at home (What about the students who fully rely on school meals as their best option for nutrition all day and are not getting this at home? Are we failing those students even more?)

The survey results show that something as simple as offering two additional milk fat options within school meals can significantly change the amount of milk chosen, consumed and not discarded. That's a win for students, schools, farmers, and the environment.

As a member of the School Nutrition Association and Pittsburgh Regional Food Service Directors' buying group I have the opportunity to network with school nutrition directors from all over Pennsylvania and the United States. The one thing that stands out to me is the passion that all of the directors have for feeding their students. Whether they feed 1,000 or 100,000 students, the goal is the same to prepare our students to learn and grow. I am seeing amazing things happening all across the country to change the landscape of what school food looks like. Farm-to-school, local purchasing, scratch cooking, school gardens, hydroponics labs and a variety of other initiatives are happening in school cafeterias all over the United States. I am so proud to see our school meals programs offering nutrient dense, wholesome food that is restaurant quality to our students.

With the Community Eligibility program uncertainty, the loss of Local Food for Schools funding and rising food costs, school food programs that are making this effort instead of relying on highly processed and prepacked foods may be forced to scale back or abandon scratch cooking, local procurement efforts and nutrition education outreach. This undermines years of progress toward improving the quality of school meals and bipartisan goals to improve children's health. These cuts will also hurt our farming communities where partnerships were formed with schools.

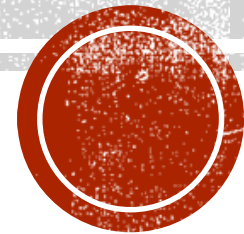
<https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/>

Please help our students have access to nourishing school food that fuels both body and mind. I believe access to good quality; nutrient dense food is a basic right of education. I will continue to advocate for school meals for all as I have seen the cascade of benefits and believe child nutrition can unite lawmakers across the aisle.

I want to impress upon you today that our youth need your help, they need you, our elected officials to take note and take action! We cannot afford to continue to watch and wait! Please be the change makers that our students need. Bring back our permission to offer milk fat choices in schools, including nutrient-dense whole milk, which, by the way, is just 3.25 to 3.5% fat!

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak, I welcome any questions you may have.

# SCHOOL MILK TRIAL



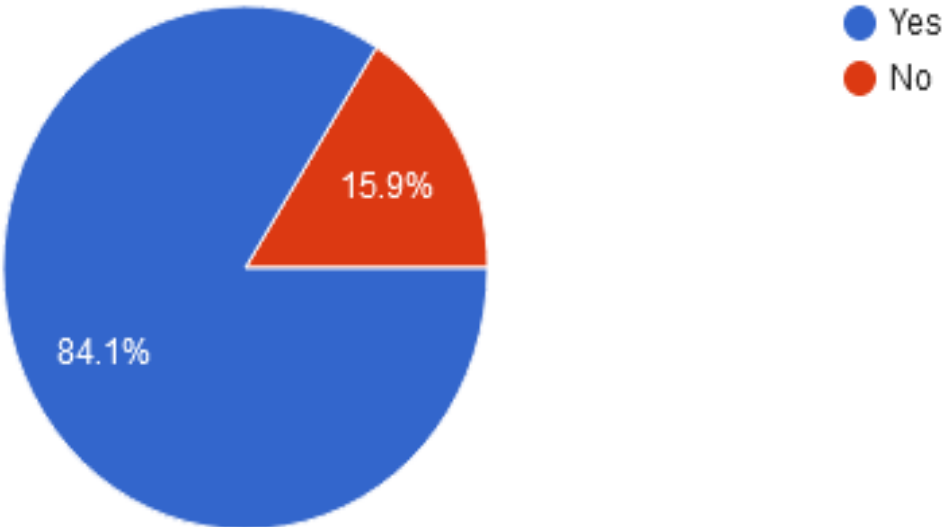
# SCHOOL MILK TRIAL

- In 2019-2020 All Milk Fat Varieties including Skim, 1%, 2%, and Whole Unflavored & Chocolate Milks were offered to all Middle & High School Students for the entire school year
- There was no marketing or promotion involved, we simply offered milk to students
- In the Spring of 2020 we sent out a survey to our Middle & High School Students, these are the results



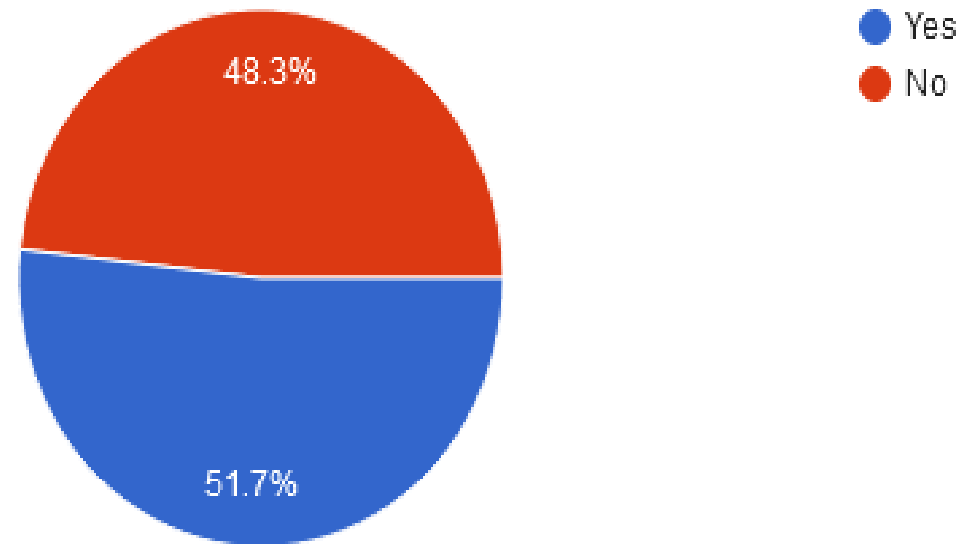
Did you realize that our MS/HS is offering 2% and Whole Milk during the 2019-2020 school year?

176 responses



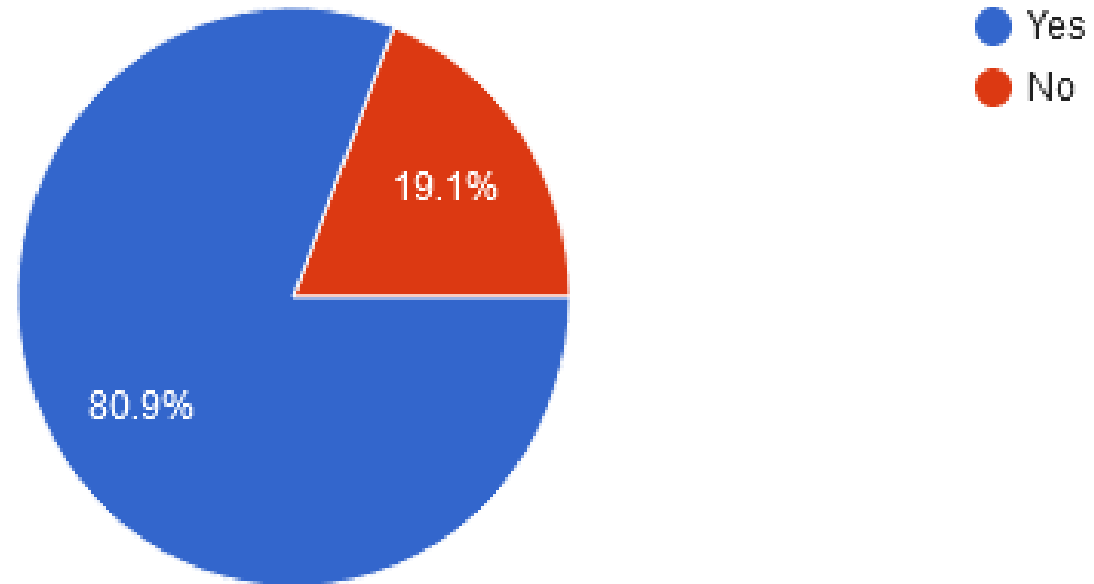
Did you know that there are restrictions on milk the schools are allowed to offer for school meals?

176 responses



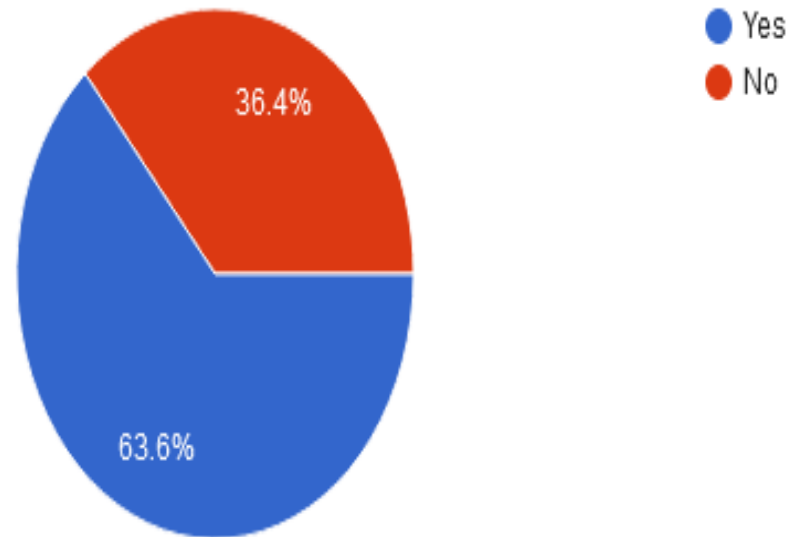
Are you choosing milk for lunch this school year?

173 responses



Since there are more milk options available at school do you find that you choose milk more often with your meal(s)?

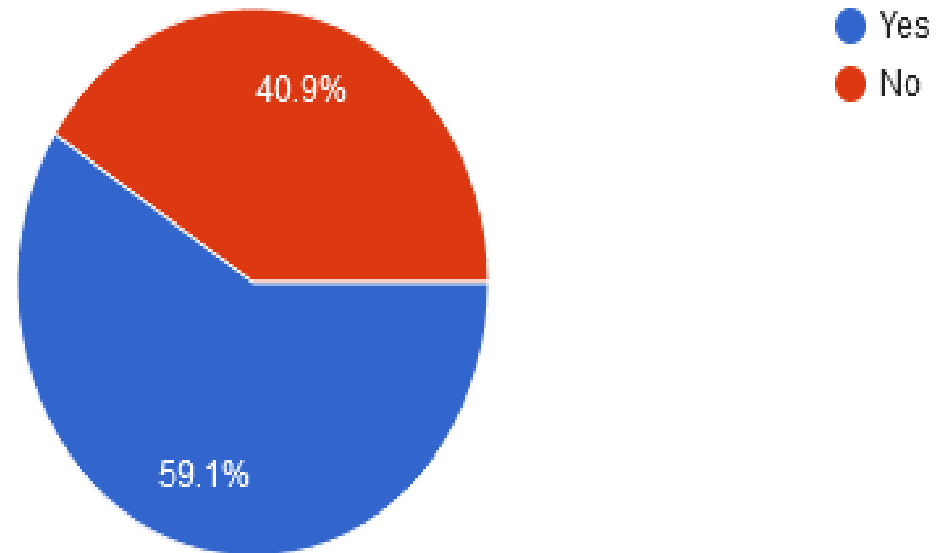
176 responses





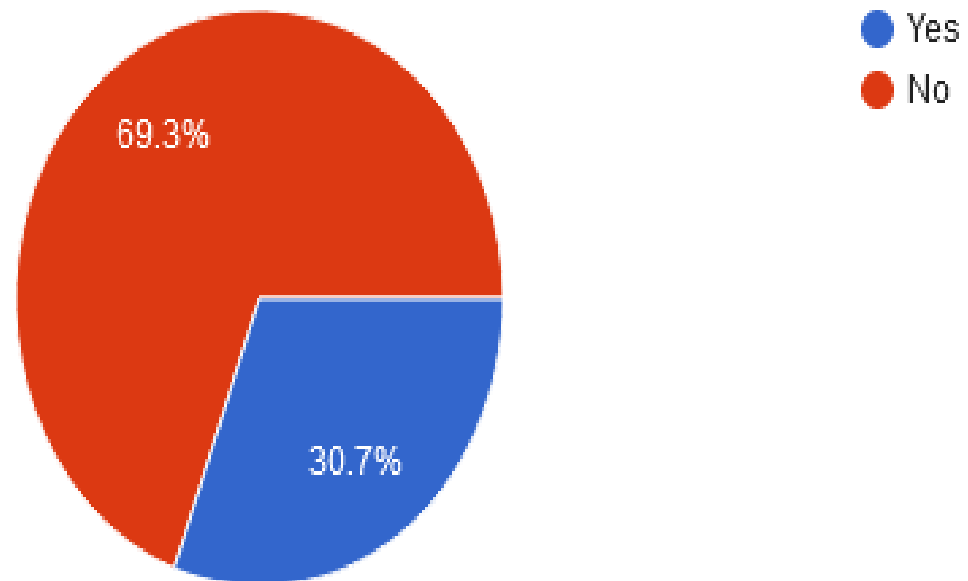
In the past have you thrown milk away at school?

176 responses



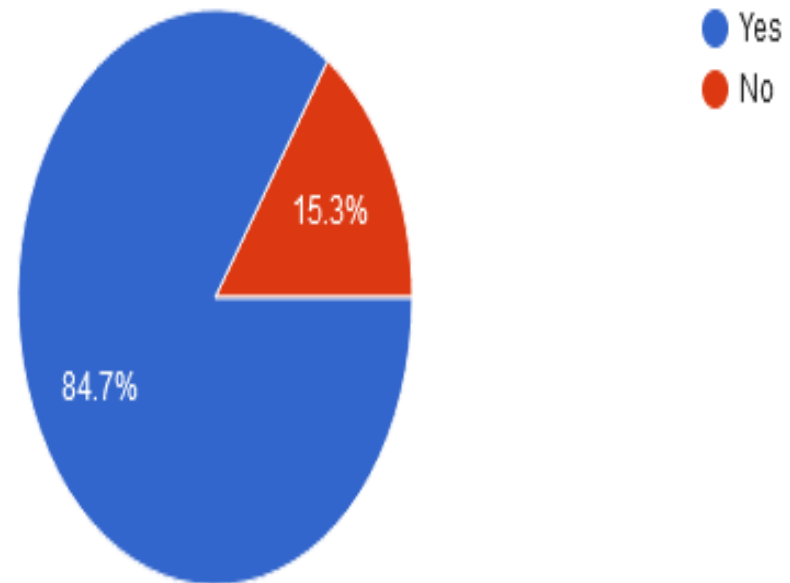
This year have you thrown milk away at school?

176 responses

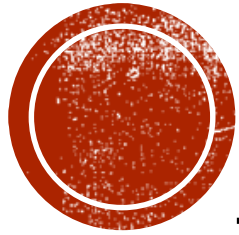


Do you drink whole milk at home?

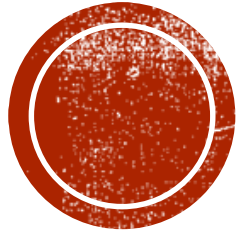
176 responses



# **ACTUAL WASTE WAS CALCULATED THROUGH COLLECTION OF UNUSED MILK VS. MILK TAKEN WITH MEALS IN 2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR COMPARED TO 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR**



Our Student Council participated in a Recycling Program which required all unconsumed milk to be poured into “milk buckets” so that the empty cartons could be sent to the recycling program. This allowed us to measure the amount of milk wasted daily.



**THE RESULTS WERE ASTOUNDING!  
MILK WASTE WAS REDUCED FROM  
3 GALLONS ON AVERAGE PER DAY  
IN 2018-2019 TO AN AVERAGE OF  
19 OUNCES IN THE 2019-2020  
SCHOOL YEAR.**