



NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

to get **REAL FOOD** in schools · Labor Day, Sept. 7, 2009

A SLOW FOOD USA CAMPAIGN

HOW TO BE AN ADVOCATE

Our children need real food at school, and our representatives in Congress can make it happen. But they'll only do it if we tell them how the Child Nutrition Act affects families in our communities.

Quick steps:

1. **Write a letter** to your legislators.
2. **Make a phone** call to tell them that change can't wait: it's time provide America's children with real food at school.
3. **Invite your legislators to your Eat-In** and/or setup a meeting to talk in person.
4. **Tell us how it went** by writing an email to timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org.

Contacting your legislators is surprisingly easy. Don't worry if you've never done it before—most of us haven't. That's why it's important: most people don't speak up, so each person who does can have an impact. When you do contact your legislator, his or her staff may be surprised to hear you're paying attention, which gives you an advantage.

As few as ten unexpected phone calls can be enough to sway a legislator's vote. Can you get ten people to make a phone call? How about 50?

Telling your legislators what's important to you is one of the most powerful ways you can participate in our democracy—and it's even more powerful if you get everyone you know to follow your lead. Here's how to be an advocate for giving schools the resources to serve real food:

1. Write a letter.

As soon as possible, write your legislator to let him or her know that real food is a priority in your district. To avoid security delays, **send your letter to the legislator's district office** (in your area). To find the office's address, go to <http://congress.org> and type in your zip code.

Keep your letter brief, clear and specific. **In your own words**, tell your legislator why you're writing ("I'm worried the food my daughter and her friends eat at school hurts their ability to succeed") and what you're asking them to do ("Increase the reimbursement rate by \$1.00 so that



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my daughter's school can start serving real food for lunch.") Tell them why child nutrition is important to you **personally**, and what the Child Nutrition Act means for your **local** community.

If you're a parent, consider including a letter from your child, too. The letter should be brief, hand-written and in your child's own words.

For **talking points** to use when writing your legislator see page 4.

NOTE: A great way to be a more effective advocate is to get your friends to write their own letters. Organize a house party or set aside time at your next Eat-In planning meeting. Bring pens and paper, envelopes, stamps, the legislator's mailing address and a list of talking points.

2. Make a phone call.

Calling your legislator's staff in D.C. is a quick way to tell him or her to vote for a specific bill or amendment. Before you call, take a few minutes to prepare. You won't have long to make your case, so you want to be **focused** and **compelling**. It will help if you have our **talking points** and the bill's name and number in front of you. Be ready to tell the staff person exactly what you want your legislator to do.

You can find your legislator's phone number on www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. When the receptionist answers,

- State your name, say that you are a **constituent** (i.e., you live in the legislator's district) and then ask to speak with the staff person working on the Child Nutrition Act.
- If you reach his or her voicemail, state your name, where you live and why you're calling (For example, "I'm calling to ask that Senator [NAME] support a \$1 increase in reimbursement rates in this year's Child Nutrition Act") and then ask that the staff person call you back.
- If you do talk to a staff person or if you get a call back, ask about the legislator's position on the issue. If it aligns with our platform, thank the staff member for legislators' support. If it does not, tell the staff member your personal story and explain how the Child Nutrition Act affects families in **your community**. Be succinct and clear about the action you'd like your legislator to take.



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You might find that the person you're talking to isn't familiar with the issue. Take the opportunity to educate him or her and to explain your position. You might also find that the staff person asks a question you can't answer off the top of your head. That's okay. Say, "I don't know, but I can look into it and send you information." Follow up promptly. Phone calls are a great way to **build a relationship** with the staff, which can make you an important advocate. In the future, the staff may rely on you for information.

There's **strength in numbers**. At a planning potluck or at your Eat-In, ask people to take out their cell phones and call your legislator. Have talking points, the bill number and your "ask" ready for everyone. Make the calls brief, and leave quick messages, but don't stop trying until every person has reached a staff person or left a voicemail.

3. Meet your legislator in person.

As you build a relationship with a legislator's staff, you may decide that you're ready to take your advocacy to the next level by arranging for an in-person meeting. **Legislators are home in their districts for the entire month of August, but their schedule fills up quickly, so act soon.**

To schedule a meeting or an appearance, call the legislator's district office and ask to speak with the **scheduler**. Ask that person for the information he or she needs and for the best way to send it, e.g. by sending an email, a fax, a letter, etc. If you are arranging for an in-person meeting at the district office, refer to the guidelines on page 14 of the [Community Food Security Coalition's Advocacy Handbook](#).

4. Invite your legislator to your Eat-In.

Following the same steps, reach out to your legislator's office to invite him/her to your Eat-In. If you're successful, he/she will want to give a speech, regardless of what you want him/her to say. At the Eat-In, introduce the legislator in such a way that he/she has to respond to your agenda. Put "It's time for lunch" or "One dollar for each child" on a big piece of paper and ask the legislator to sign it. (Then, get everyone to cheer.) For photos, get your legislator in front of a *Time for Lunch* banner.

Remember that politicians *work for you*.



KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS

Key messages

- We're calling for Congress to pass a Child Nutrition Act that **gives schools the resources to serve REAL FOOD for lunch.**
- On Labor Day, Sept. 7, people in communities all over the country are gathering for public potlucks to take part in the *Time for Lunch* National Eat-In. This day of action sends a clear message to Congress: **It's time to provide our children with REAL FOOD at school.**
- It's time to invest in children's health, protect against food that puts children at risk and teach children healthy habits that will last through life.

Talking points

- By giving schools the resources to serve real food, we can build a strong foundation for our children's health.
- By teaching children healthy eating habits, we can make a down payment on health care reform.
- School cafeterias that purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables are economic engines for developing small businesses, supporting family farmers and creating jobs in our communities.
- **Real food is good at every link in the chain.** It tastes good, it's good for us, it's good for the people who grow it, it's good for our country and it's good for the planet.
- Our schools lack the resources to serve children the real food they need. To solve this problem, Congress must:
 - Invest in children's health. Give schools just one more dollar per day for each child.



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- Protect against food that puts children at risk. Establish strong standards for all food sold at school, including food from vending machines and school fast food.
- Teach children healthy habits that will last through life. Fund grants to start innovative farm-to-school programs and school gardens.
- When children learn that real food is both delicious and good for them, they ask for at school and at home. Michelle Obama says, “What I found with my kids [is that] if they were involved in planting and picking it, they were much more curious to give it a try.”
- On Labor Day, Sept. 7, 2009, people in communities across America will sit down to share real food as part of **National Eat-In** by sitting down to share a meal with their neighbors. This day of action will send a clear message to Congress: It’s time to provide our children with real food at school.

Counter the anti-real food messages

- Bad message: “Real food is too expensive.”
Counter: “The costs of the status quo are obesity, a bad economy, more pollution and global warming. Real food is an investment in our nation’s future. Food that keeps kids healthy is a down payment on health care reform. \$1/child/day is a small price to pay now for the dividends real food will pay in the future.”
- Bad message: “We’ve got more important things to worry about than school food.”
Counter: “You can’t fix health care, the economy, energy or climate change without changing the way we grow food and get it to our plates. The best place to start is at school, where children can learn healthy habits that last through life. There is nothing more important to the health and security of our nation than our children’s wellbeing.”
- Bad message: “Kids like junk food and fast food, not real food.”
Counter: “When food is fresh and local and delicious, children will try it and enjoy it. Most children never get the chance to enjoy real food. Show them how to plant, pick and cook food in school gardens and kitchens, and they will start asking for it at school and at home.”