



**A national campaign  
to get REAL FOOD  
into schools**

ORGANIZER TOOLKIT

National Day of Action  
Labor Day – Sept. 7, 2009



Slow Food® USA



# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

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

A SLOW FOOD USA CAMPAIGN

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# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

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## WELCOME

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Dear Organizer,

This year, we have an opportunity to begin reclaiming our children's future. We know that the childhood obesity and diabetes epidemics are spiraling out of control. We know our public schools struggle to serve children anything but the junk food and fast food that endangers their health.

It's time for parents, teachers and every responsible citizen to tell our nation's leaders that **change can't wait**. It's time to get REAL FOOD in schools.

On **Labor Day, Sept. 7, 2009**, tens of thousands of people in communities across the nation will sit down to share a meal with their neighbors. This **National Eat-In** will send a clear message to legislators: getting real food in schools is a national priority, and it needs to happen now.

Getting our leader's attention is a big job, and **we can only do it with your help**. We need you to be a leader: organize an Eat-In in your community on Sept. 7, make sure your legislators know about it and get all your friends involved. The information in this toolkit will guide you, and you can always rely on us for support. Send your questions and ideas to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).

With your help, Sept. 7, 2009 will mark the day this country comes together to take the first step towards a future where no child is denied his or her right to good health and where every child enjoys real food.

Best regards,

### The *Time for Lunch* Campaign Team

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## CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

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The *Time for Lunch* campaign is a national grassroots effort to update the Child Nutrition Act in 2009 in order to provide our children with real food at school. To get involved, you can:

1. **Show your support** by signing up at <http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>
2. **Tell your legislators** to give schools the resources to serve real food for lunch
3. **Organize an Eat-In** in your community on Sept. 7. This National Day of Action will send a clear message to our nation's leaders: It's time to serve children REAL FOOD for lunch.

**This toolkit will help you do it.** Our campaign team will provide additional support via:

- Regular campaign updates
- Background information on the Child Nutrition Act's progress through Congress
- Additional toolkits and resources
- One-on-one advice. Whenever you have questions or need more help, please contact the campaign team by writing an email to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org) or calling Slow Food USA's National Office at 718-260-8000.

Please make sure to keep us informed about what you're organizing. Register your Eat-In on our web site and send us the names and contact information of the people on your planning committee. We'll only achieve our goals if we work together.



## BACKGROUND ON THE CHILD NUTRITION ACT

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The **Child Nutrition Act** is a federal law that comes up for reauthorization in Congress every four to five years. It governs the **National School Lunch Program**, which sets the standard for the food that more than **30 million children** eat every school day.

In the last few decades, as school budgets have been cut, our country's schools have struggled to serve children the real food they need. Schools receive reimbursements for each meal served, but they are woefully low. These conditions make it impossible for even the most resourceful, well-intentioned school food directors to consistently serve food that is healthy, delicious and locally sourced.

The Congressional deadline for reauthorizing the current Child Nutrition Act is September 2009. **Unless people like you speak up this summer**, "business as usual" on Capitol Hill will lead to a Child Nutrition Act that continues to fail our children.

Our policy platform and the campaign guidelines that follow will tell you what you should say and how you can say it, loud and clear. To learn more about the Child Nutrition Act and about school lunch in general, please refer to the Resources section at the end of this toolkit.



# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

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

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## OUR PLATFORM

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This platform represents the *Time for Lunch* campaign's policy position. These are the first steps Congress must take to ensure our schools can provide **REAL FOOD** for lunch.

### The *Time for Lunch* Platform

Every school day, we have an opportunity to build a strong foundation for our children's health by serving them real food at school. Children who grow up enjoying food that is both delicious and good for them learn healthy habits that last throughout their lives. Each year that we fail to satisfy our children's right to real food is another year we deny our children good health, we diminish their ability to learn and we close the door on their opportunity to succeed.

The need for real school food has never been greater. Today, one in four children is overweight or obese, and one in three will develop diabetes in his or her lifetime. In the face of this crisis, our schools are financially struggling to feed children anything but the overly processed fast food that endangers their health. For many children, school lunch is their only guaranteed meal of the day. Right now, those children are forced to choose between going hungry and being unhealthy.

We can do better.

The **National School Lunch Program** provides a meal to more than 30 million children every school day. By giving schools the resources to serve real food, we can grant 30 million children the freedom to be healthy. By teaching children to eat well, we can make a down payment on health care reform. By providing children with locally grown fruits and vegetables, we can support local farmers and create green jobs in our communities. By purchasing local food, we can stop wasting oil on transportation and start curbing global warming. By raising children who enjoy real food, we can start laying the foundation for America's future prosperity.

This fall, the **Child Nutrition Act**, which is the bill that governs the National School Lunch Program, is up for reauthorization in Congress. By passing a Child Nutrition Act that works for children, our nation can take the first step towards a future where no child is denied his or her right to be healthy and where every child enjoys real food.



That's why it's time for Congress and the Obama Administration to:

1. INVEST IN CHILDREN'S HEALTH.

**Give schools just one dollar more per day for each child's lunch.** Under the National School Lunch Program, the USDA reimburses schools for every meal served: \$2.57 for a free lunch, \$2.17 for a reduced-price lunch and 24 cents for a paid lunch. Since these reimbursements must also pay for labor, equipment and overhead costs, schools are left with only \$1.00 to spend on food. How can schools be expected to feed our children and protect their health with only a dollar a day? It's time to build a strong foundation for our children's health by raising the reimbursement rate to \$3.57.

2. 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.** At most schools, children can buy junk food in vending machines, at on-campus stores and in the cafeteria as "a la carte" items. These overly processed, high-calorie "fast" foods sneak under the radar of federal nutrition standards. They undermine the National School Lunch Program's investment in children's health and allow food companies to profit from selling obesity. It's time to take the first step towards making real food the standard by approving Rep. Woolsey's and Sen. Harkin's Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act of 2009.

3. TEACH CHILDREN HEALTHY HABITS THAT WILL LAST THROUGH LIFE.

**Fund grants for innovative Farm to School programs and school gardens.** This spring, 30 fifth-graders joined Michelle Obama in planting a vegetable garden on the White House lawn. "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," Mrs. Obama says. Every child deserves the opportunity to learn healthy eating habits at school. In 2004, a section was added to the Child Nutrition Act to provide schools with grants to cover one-time grants that enable them to purchase local foods and to teach lessons on healthy eating in kitchen and garden classrooms – but Congress never appro-



appropriated funds for it. This year, it's time for Congress to guarantee \$50 million of mandatory funding for Farm to School programs.

We also ask that Congress and the Obama Administration:

4. GIVE SCHOOLS THE INCENTIVE TO BUY LOCAL.

**Establish financial incentives that encourage schools to buy food from local farms for all child nutrition programs.** Buying fruits and vegetables from local farms is an economic engine for creating jobs in our communities, rebuilding rural economies, and supporting family farmers. By shortening the distance food travels – from farm to table – it also saves oil and ensures school foods are as fresh and healthy as possible.

5. CREATE GREEN JOBS WITH A SCHOOL LUNCH CORPS.

**Train underemployed Americans to be the teachers, farmers, cooks, and administrators our school cafeterias need.** We can't serve real food in schools without investing in school kitchens and the people who prepare and serve lunch. This spring, President Obama signed the Serve America Act, which expanded Americorps and reinforced his call for Americans to serve their country. Right now, our nation has an opportunity to train young and unemployed Americans to be the teachers, farmers, cooks and administrators we need to ensure the National School Lunch Program is protecting children's health. President Obama has called for an end to childhood hunger by 2015; let's answer that call by putting Americans to work building and working in school kitchens nationwide.



## THE CAMPAIGN

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As an organizer, you have three goals:

1. **Get all your friends to show their support** at <http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>.
2. **Tell your legislators** to give schools the resources to serve real food for lunch.
3. **Organize an Eat-In in your community on Sept. 7.** This National Day of Action will send a clear message to our nation's leaders: It's time to serve children REAL FOOD at school.

*Each action is essential to our success, because:*

- By **getting your friends to sign onto our platform**, you help them take the first step towards getting involved in the campaign and you build momentum for reaching our goals.
- By **contacting your legislator**, you participate, as a citizen, in the process of updating the Child Nutrition Act and you show your legislator that real food is a priority in your community.
- By **organizing an Eat-In on Sept. 7**, you get your community involved in the movement to provide our children with real food at school. With your help, Sept. 7 will mark the day that our country takes a stand and begins to build a strong foundation for our children's health.

The first goal – getting your friends involved – is easy. Send them an email, post an announcement to websites like Facebook and mention it the next time you see them.

This section of the toolkit will guide you through the second and third goals. Since organizing an Eat-In will take a little more time than contacting your legislators, let's start there.



## HOW TO ORGANIZE AN EAT-IN

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There are eight steps to organizing an Eat-In:

1. Form a planning committee.
2. Choose a location and a concept.
3. Register your Eat-In at <http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>.
4. Get your community involved.
5. Spread the word, and get the media's attention.
6. Run through your logistics checklist.
7. Eat-In! Make sure to take pictures and collect email addresses.
8. Tell us about it, and follow up with your supporters.

An Eat-In is a potluck. It's that simple. It's a group of people gathering in public to share a home-cooked meal. Because it takes place in public, and because it brings a community together to share real food, an Eat-In is also a political statement. It challenges the status quo, it reminds us of the pleasure of eating together and it shows everyone how easy and fun food activism can be.

The first Eat-In organized by Slow Food USA took place in San Francisco on Labor Day 2008 as part of Slow Food Nation. Since then, people have begun organizing their own Eat-Ins in communities across the country, and we've picked up some great tips and guidelines for what makes an Eat-In successful.

Every Eat-In that takes place on Monday, Sept. 7 will be unique, but following these steps will help you plan and execute an outstanding *Time for Lunch* Eat-In.

**Start with a planning potluck. Make it collaborative and inclusive.**

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Our tendency as organizers is to work with the friends we already have and with the communities we already know. It's a great place to start, but our campaign will be more effective – and will have more impact – if we reach out to people we don't already know and invite them to participate in planning.



We suggest you start off with a “planning potluck,” inviting anyone who wants to join your campaign to come together and talk through what you can accomplish as a group. Set a date, find someone who can volunteer their house (or find a community center to host it) and then spread the word to anyone and everyone to attend. Contact your local PTA, local principals and teachers, clergy, leaders in your community and representatives from other groups and non-profits that want to get involved in this campaign.

Have your planning potluck as quickly as possible, as you’ll need plenty of lead-time to organize your Eat-In. On the day of your planning potluck, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Backgrounds vary.** The people who attend will probably vary in their knowledge of Slow Food USA’s work and of the problems with the existing school food system. Keep your planning efforts focused on our campaign and our call to action to get real food in schools.
- **Our focus is national.** This year’s Child Nutrition Act is only one step towards our goal of providing real food in school. After the Eat-In, there will be opportunities to turn our attention to local work improving school food, but for this campaign, we’re focusing on change at the national level. Passing a better Child Nutrition Act will dramatically improve every school’s ability to source, prepare and serve real food.
- **Ask for help,** and assign “homework.” The people who attend your planning potluck are already committed to this issue, and they should all leave with a sense of what their role in the campaign will be and how they can contribute. If someone stands out as a leader, give that person a more prominent role. Let everyone contribute what he/she knows and does best.
- **Think local.** Brainstorm other groups in your community that can get involved. Think about where everyone in your community goes for information, and how you can reach them. When you’re planning your Eat-In, think about the most symbolic place you can have it—at a school, in a school garden, in the city center, etc. Plan to call on local groups and businesses for support.
- **Strengthen your network.** Recognize that the planning process is an opportunity to strengthen your local network. If you lead a Slow Food chapter, remember that people who take on leading roles in this campaign may join your chapter in the future—and may be interested in leading Slow Food in Schools projects after the campaign. Groups you reach out to for support may be partners on future projects. Take advantage of each interaction to explain what your chapter does



and how it might be of interest to your new contacts. And **then send us the names of the people on your planning committee**, so we know who's joined the campaign.

- **Have fun.** That should come easy. You're sharing a meal with neighbors who care about the same thing. Remember that what makes us unique is our commitment to the pleasure of sharing good, clean and fair food. "Making a difference" doesn't have to mean going to meetings and marching in the streets; it can mean cooking, sharing meals and building a community.
- **Take photos!** You definitely need to take photos at the Eat-In, but consider taking photos along the way and sending them to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org). It'll help us tell the story.

### Make your Eat-In fun, meaningful and compelling to the public.

With your planning group, discuss ideas for the kind of Eat-In you can organize. Spend some time thinking about your city or town, its values and what makes it unique, and then think about the audiences you want to attend (or at least to hear about) your Eat-In: parents, teachers, school board members, clergy, cafeteria workers, politicians, the press, etc. What will make them listen? Why should they come to your Eat-In? What will make your Eat-In accessible, meaningful—even irresistible?

Whether you're aiming for a big or small Eat-In, you might consider adopting some of these ideas:

- **Have your Eat-In on the grounds of a public school.** Get parents and teachers and the school's PTA to help you plan it, and invite the students to cook a meal with their families and come together on Sept. 7 to show what real food can be.
- **Organize several Eat-Ins.** If you're unable to organize a large Eat-In, organize several smaller ones in neighborhoods or at schools throughout your town. Each Eat-In can be simple—like low-key block parties.
- **Choose a creative location.** If you're having trouble finding a location—or securing a permit—for your Eat-In, be creative. Have it on a farm or in a community center, make it a block party or decentralize it and have Eat-Ins on supporters' front lawns or in parking spaces downtown while you feed the meter.



- **Teamwork.** Get people cooking together by dividing them up into teams. You may find that local farms or groceries are happy to donate ingredients. Organizing cooking teams is a great way to get kids involved, too.
- **Honor Labor Day.** The National Eat-In is taking place on Labor Day because it's a day that's already set aside for sitting down to eat together. Contact teachers' unions and labor councils to find out if there's a way to collaborate, or think up a creative way to honor workers at your Eat-In.
- **Call your legislators.** During the Eat-In, ask everyone to take out his or her cell phone and call the office of your legislators in Congress. Keep calling until everyone who's there—kids, especially—has left a message telling your representative that real food is a priority in your district.
- **Sign the petition and get contact information.** Ask participants to sign the *Time for Lunch* petition, and hand out copies for them to take home and to their workplace. Get the name, email address and phone number of each person attending.
- **Speak to the crowd.** Invite parents, students, farmers, school board members or politicians to speak to the crowd before you start eating. Even better: have them sit down at the table and start conversations about the importance of real food in schools with the people sitting near them.
- **Tell the story.** At your Eat-In, tell the story of how this group of people came together for a meal in support of real food in schools. The media will pick up on it, and it will show people how easy and fun it is to get involved in the food movement.
- **For more ideas,** check out our campaign web site: <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>. And to see pictures of past Eat-Ins, check out <http://eat-ins.org>.

### Get your community involved.

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Everyone can get behind keeping kids healthy. Get your message out, and encourage everyone in your community to participate in your Eat-In:



- **Reach out to other groups** and organizations, particularly parents' groups and organizations that already work in child nutrition. Since the National Eat-In is taking place on Labor Day, you should consider reaching out to unions and labor councils, too.
- **Advertise** your Eat-In far and wide, not just to your regular mailing list.
- **Get the media** to highlight your Eat-In the week **before** Sept. 7.
- **Post your Eat-In** information to websites like **Facebook** or **MySpace**, and tell your friends to invite their friends.
- **Invite farmers, politicians, school board members** and anyone else who should hear you. Think carefully about the people who should be at your Eat-In and create a plan to get them to show up.

### Run through your checklist

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As you're organizing your Eat-In, you'll have to keep all the event's details in mind. Write out a checklist, and assign tasks to your fellow organizers. Here are some sample tasks:

- ✓ **Choose a location** and secure necessary permits.
- ✓ **Secure tables and chairs.** If your location does not have tables, ask local businesses or community centers to loan them to you for the day. If you have the resources to rent tables, do it. If you want to be more flexible to accommodate more people, make it a picnic and sit on blankets.
- ✓ **Provide directions.** Make sure people know how to find the Eat-In. Give them driving, public transit and parking directions (specific to the Labor Day holiday schedule).
- ✓ **Tell people what to bring.** Make sure people know that the Eat-In is a potluck and that they should bring home-cooked food they believe in.
- ✓ **Bring dishes and utensils.** Tell people to bring their own plate, cup and silverware in order to reduce waste.



- ✓ **Prepare campaign materials.** Get all your materials together: sign-in sheets, pens, clipboards, signs or banners, copies of the petition, a microphone, a camera, video camera, etc.
- ✓ **Be ready to advocate.** If you're asking people to contact your legislators during the Eat-In, have phone numbers, mailing addresses, pens and paper and talking points ready.
- ✓ **Assign a press contact.** If reporters are coming, assign someone the task of greeting them, sharing press materials and introducing them to participants.
- ✓ **Assign speaker contact.** If speakers are coming, assign someone the task of introducing them to the crowd and making them feel welcome.
- ✓ **Assign a photographer and/or videographer.** Designate one person or a team of people to be the official photographer(s) and/or videographer(s) for your Eat-In. As soon as it is finished, contact us at [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org), so they can be posted on our site.
- ✓ **Assign a "sign-in" contact.** Be ready to gather attendees' names, email addresses and phone numbers during the Eat-In. Put someone in charge of the sign-in list. Building a list with which you can communicate after the event is critical to the success of the campaign.

### Make it last.

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The mark of a successful *Time for Lunch* Eat-In is its ability to bring a group of people together, collect signatures and contact information and then to turn those people into long-term advocates for real food. If they show up to your Eat-In, that's great; if they keep showing up to future events and start pitching in on projects, that's even better.

*To help turn them into long-term advocates, it's essential that you share their names and email addresses with the National Office, so we can keep them informed of ongoing campaigns and help them become lasting supporters of Slow Food. It's all about the list.*

Here are some ways to keep growing that momentum:



- **Communicate with your contacts.** Whenever someone comes to a planning potluck or meeting, get his or her name, email address and phone number. Send the information to the National Office. The same goes for the Eat-In: everyone should sign in AND sign the platform. Immediately after Sept. 7, write everyone who was involved to say thank you. Tell them what to do next: contact your representative, get five friends to do it too, organize the next Eat-In, come to your Slow Food USA chapter's next meeting, help start a Slow Food USA chapter, become a member of Slow Food USA, etc.
- **Send your list to the National Office.** We will continue to provide information about the campaign and the Child Nutrition Act after Sept. 7, and those who attend your Eat-In will want to keep receiving information and stay involved in the movement. As soon as you compile a mailing list, please send it to the National Office in an Excel document to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).
- **Join us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.** Become a fan of the Slow Food USA Facebook page and follow us on Twitter in order to keep tabs on the campaign and relevant issues for the Child Nutrition Act. Search for us on Facebook or click the link on the Slow Food USA web site, and follow us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/slowfoodusa>.
- **Follow-up.** Get in touch with the organizations you partnered with for this campaign, and let them know that you would like to be a resource for them in the future. The same goes for the politicians you contacted: let them know that they can contact and consult with you in the future. Send the names of your partner and legislative contacts to the National Office, so we can keep them informed of our campaign efforts.
- **Keep the momentum going.** After a little time to rest, the people on your planning committee and the people who came to your Eat-In will be hungry to continue working to get real food into schools. If you don't already have a Slow Food chapter in your area, consider starting one and creating a [Slow Food in Schools](#) project to support your local schools. Join your district's [Wellness Committee](#), and offer to help out with existing projects. If you have questions or want to share ideas, email us at [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).
- **Collaborate.** Consider keeping your "planning potlucks" going beyond the Eat-In to collaborate on future projects and to keep getting new people involved.



## HOW TO BE AN ADVOCATE

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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](mailto: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.

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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 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 18.

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 some 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.

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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](http://www.house.gov) or [www.senate.gov](http://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.

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.

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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.

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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*.



## COMMUNICATIONS

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Keeping the local media informed of your Eat-In will be important to our campaign. The National Office will also be keeping the national media abreast of what Slow Food USA is doing surrounding the overall campaign. We'll need to work together to be successful in our communications efforts.

Quick steps:

1. **Prepare a media alert** with details about your Eat-In.
2. **Call your local media** to follow-up and secure a placement.
3. **Send a letter to the editor** to your local newspaper.
4. **Invite the local media to attend** and cover your Eat-In.
5. Send media alerts, letters to the editor and any coverage you receive to the National Office.

What the National Office will provide:

- **Our news release:** Since this is a national campaign, the National Office will be taking the lead in developing a news release to announce our campaign (on June 23) and another news release announcing our Day of Action (just prior to Labor Day) describing the Eat-Ins across the country.
- **About:** an organizational backgrounder on Slow Food USA
- **FAQ:** a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document that you can use
- **Artwork:** To help promote your *Time for Lunch* Eat-In, the National Office will also create artwork for posters, buttons and banners that can be printed locally.
- **All of these are available on our web site** at <http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>.



## PREPARE A MEDIA ALERT

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A media alert is easy to write. Focus on the 5 Ws: Who, What, Where, When, Why. To make it effective, use each of the Ws as a key component and write a few brief sentences to describe each. It should fit on one page. If not, it's too long. Here are some examples:

Who: Slow Food USA's [Insert Chapter Name or Your City/Town's Name] *Time for Lunch* Eat-In.

Join [insert list of dignitaries to your event] in sending a message to Congress that real food for school lunches is a necessity to make our children healthy.

What: Slow Food USA's [Insert Chapter Name or City/Town] is planning a public potluck to draw attention to the need for Congress to pass a better Child Nutrition Act that brings real food to schools. Our Eat-In is part of a National Day of Action when thousands of people across the country will share a meal to demonstrate our commitment to getting real food in school lunches.

Where: [Insert location and directions.]

When: [Insert date and times.]

Why: In a time of escalating obesity and diabetes epidemics, our schools are serving children precisely the fast food and junk food that endangers their health. This year, Congress can give schools the resources to serve real food by:

1. Increasing school lunch reimbursements by \$1/child/day in this year's Child Nutrition Act. Providing real food at school is a down payment on health care reform.
2. Protect against food that threatens children's health.
3. Teach children healthy habits that will last through life.

[Insert additional details surrounding the unique Eat-In you've planned.]

Note: Include the National Office's news release with your media alert as background.



## WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Guidelines for letters-to-the-editor vary, so do your homework. Go to the web site of your local newspaper to find out the exact word count and any guidelines they provide. However, below are some of the basics to remember:

**Step 1** Focus on your personal experience or passion for getting real food in school lunch programs

**Step 2** Think of new ways to discuss the topic and present unique solutions to the challenge.

**Step 3** Write clearly and concisely, following the limitations usually given on the editorial page or letters-to-the-editor page.

**Step 4** Include your major points within the first few paragraphs. Use statistics and facts to support your argument.

**Step 5** Type your letter and double space between lines.

**Step 6** Use your spell check and then proofread. Use correct grammar and punctuation.

**Step 7** Sign your name and include your phone number and email, as newspapers/magazines will verify you are whom you say.

**Step 8** Mail, fax or e-mail your letter to the address listed for the publication.

**Step 9** Call the editor to verify receipt and ask when they will be able to run your letter.

**Remember:** The National Office will be sending letters to the editor for all national and major metropolitan newspapers and magazines (e.g., USA Today, The New York Times, The Washington Post, etc.) Focus your efforts on your local newspapers and magazines, so we can secure the most coverage possible. Send us a copy of your letter to the editor and the names of the newspapers or magazines where you sent it by emailing us at [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).



## KEY MESSAGES AND TALKING POINTS

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### 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 pot-lucks 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.
  - 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 will ask for it in school cafeterias 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 all over the country will participate in a **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 in the cafeteria and at home.”



## HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR EAT-IN

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By definition, a good promotional strategy will use many different avenues to inform your audience about your Eat-In. Use fliers *and* email *and* your local newspaper *and* word-of-mouth. Here are some ideas:

- **Register** your *Time for Lunch* Eat-In at <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>.
- **Post it online.** Put your Eat-In details on the **Slow Food USA Facebook page** and/or your own personal or chapter Facebook page. If there are other web sites your audience goes to for information (e.g. Craigslist, Yelp, local blogs, etc.), post the information there too.
- **Help your supporters.** Write up a **draft email** that any of your supporters and partner organizations can personalize and send to their own mailing lists. You can use the media alert you prepared for this task.
- **Create a flier.** Using the graphics provided by Slow Food USA, post it in the places your audience will see it: schools, community centers, the library, the farmers' market, grocery stores, etc.
- **Share it.** Turn your flier into a PDF and send it to your mailing list, asking everyone to print it out and post it at his or her workplace, school, gym, etc.
- **Be creative.** Involve your kids, your neighbors and the people you see everyday. Give everyone an "assignment" in promoting your Eat-In. For example, if you know someone who's a summer camp volunteer, give him/her the assignment of telling parents about your Eat-In and campaign.
- **Get the media's attention.** If an announcement about your Eat-In appears in the newspaper or on the radio before Sept. 7, people will hear about it with enough time to cook food and show up.
- **Point people to the *Time for Lunch* campaign site**, where they can get more information, or have them contact the National Office.



## HOW TO GET THE MEDIA'S ATTENTION

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In addition to submitting letters-to-the-editor, it is important to invite the media to cover your Eat-In.

As soon as possible:

- **Compile media contacts** – names, phone and fax numbers and email addresses for local news outlets (newspaper, TV and radio)
- **Reach out to potential media spokespeople** for your event and confirm their availability on Sept. 7. Provide them with our key messages and talking points.
- Prepare your Eat-In media alert as previously outlined.

One week prior to your Eat-In:

- E-mail or fax your media advisory to your media contacts.
- **Call your media contacts to follow-up** – ask if they received your advisory and whether they will send someone to cover your event. Be sure to reinforce why your Eat-In is important and what makes it newsworthy, especially the fact that it is part of a larger National Day of Action consisting of hundreds of Eat-Ins across the country.

The day of your Eat-In:

- **Remind people.** A day or two prior to your Eat-In, make reminder calls to all of your media contacts. Be sure to position the person you've assigned as the point person and provide his/her cell phone number.
- **Have a working cell phone.** Make sure the media point person has a cell phone that is charged and that your location gets good reception.
- **Meet the press.** Arrive at your Eat-In site an hour early to set up an area for members of the press to sign-in. As they arrive thank them for coming, ask what their deadlines are, and give them copies of the National Office's news release(s) and any other relevant materials.



After the Eat-In:

- **Say thank you.** Call all media contacts that attended your event and thank them for coming. Ask them when they will run a story about your event.
- **Follow up.** Send them additional event photos or video as requested.
- **Reach out.** Send all media contacts that didn't attend your event a copy of the latest Slow Food USA news release. Call them to follow-up and ask if they can run a story about your event.
- **Keep track of coverage.** Scan local newspapers and tape local TV/radio broadcasts to track coverage of your event. Keep copies of all media coverage you receive for your records and send the National Office details about your successes to [timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org](mailto:timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org).



## EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE

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Everyone wants children to be healthy and to thrive, but not everyone realizes they can do something about it. As you're organizing your Eat-In and advocating for real food in school lunches, don't be shy about asking other people for help—and don't be discouraged when they don't readily offer it. Most people assume that getting involved in a campaign means going to a lot of meetings and marches, and generally not having a lot of fun.

It's your job to show them that's not true. An Eat-In is a potluck, and sitting down to eat together is almost always fun. The *Time for Lunch* campaign is about making friends and building community, not pointing fingers.

Still, some people are going to tell you that they simply don't have any time to spare. That's okay, because **there's a place for everyone in this campaign.**

If you can only spare **five minutes**, you can still be an advocate. Here's how:

- Add your name to the *Time for Lunch* petition
- Tell five friends to add their names.
- Send an email to your legislators.
- Post a flier at work, forward an online video or post a link on Facebook.
- DONATE.

If you have **an hour or two**, you can do all of the above, and:

- Write a letter or make a phone call to your legislator.
- Find an Eat-In in your area, and show up on Labor Day with your favorite home-cooked food!
- Get your friends, your coworkers, your church or a local organizations involved.



- DONATE, and invite others to donate with you.

If you have a **week**, you can do all of the above, and:

- Organize a letter-writing or phone-calling party.
- Help out with an Eat-In taking place near you.
- Write a letter-to-the-editor.
- Talk about the campaign at a community meeting or at your local farmers' markets.
- DONATE, and invite others to donate with you.

If you have a month, you can do all of the above, and:

- Organize an Eat-In on Sept. 7.
- Arrange for an in-person meeting with your legislators.
- Get your friends to organize house parties (or potlucks) that introduce the campaign and gather names for the *Time for Lunch* petition.
- DONATE, and invite others to donate with you.



## OTHER WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

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Being a real food advocate doesn't end with signing a petition, writing a letter or even organizing an Eat-In. Here are some other things you can do right now or after September 7, especially if you're a parent:

- **Cook with your family and friends.** Get your kids involved. Test recipes. Learn from each other. Eat dinner together whenever you can.
- **Go to farmers' markets.** Shake the hands that feed you. Bring your kids. Meet other people in your community who support and enjoy real food.
- **Grow your own food.** Plant a garden. Again, get kids involved. Go to or host gardening and cooking classes.
- **Build your food IQ.** Learn which foods you like, where they come from, which are easiest to cook and which are healthiest for you and your kids. Talk about it with friends. Read books.
- **Have lunch in your child's school cafeteria.** Learn what your kids are eating. Ask to see ingredient lists. [Before you go, download Better School Food's lunchroom checklist.](#)
- [Become a member of Slow Food](#), if you aren't already. Get involved in your local chapter. Support the movement.
- **Start a Slow Food chapter in your area.** Slow Food chapters organize communities to share and support good food. Many also start school gardens through the "Slow Food in Schools" programs. Learn more at [slowfoodusa.org](http://slowfoodusa.org).
- **Join a parent group** like your school's PTA. Tell them that real food is a priority, and help out with projects.
- **Stay informed.** [Better School Food](#), [Lunch Lessons](#), [School Lunch Talk](#) and [The Farm to School Network](#) are good places to start. Check out the resource list in the next section.



# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

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

A SLOW FOOD USA CAMPAIGN

## RESOURCES

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To learn more about school food, check out:

**Better School Food**, <http://betterschoolfood.com>. A group of parents, educators and health professionals who work to improve school food. The website offers [organizing kits](#) to help you transform your local school food policy. The founder, Susan Rubin, is also one of the mothers behind the school food documentary [Two Angry Moms](#).

**The Center for Ecoliteracy**, <http://ecoliteracy.org/programs/rsi-guide.html>. An organization that offers practical resources for teaching sustainable living in K-12 education. Their [Rethinking School Lunch Guide](#) is a comprehensive guide to improving your community's school food.

**Chef Ann**, <http://chefann.com>. Ann Cooper is a self-titled “renegade lunch lady” who works to transform school cafeterias into culinary classrooms – one lunch at a time.

**The Edible Schoolyard**, <http://edibleschoolyard.org>. A one-acre garden and kitchen classroom at a public middle school in Berkeley, CA. They publish useful guides to creating edible education programs.

**School Lunch Talk**, <http://www.schoolfoodpolicy.com>. A blog that takes an in-depth look into what kids are learning about food in school – and why.

**The National Farm to School Network**, <http://farmtoschool.org>. A collaborative network of organizations that sustain and build momentum for programs that connect school cafeterias with local farms and create garden and kitchen classrooms. In particular, check out “Nourishing the Nation One Tray at a Time: Farm to School Initiatives in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization” at <http://www.farmtoschool.org/policies.php> (under “Resources”).

To learn more about organizing and advocacy, check out:

***Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate***. George Lakoff's essential guide to communicating effectively about progressive issues. [Buy it online](#).



The Community Food Security Coalition's [Federal Policy Advocacy Handbook](#). A guide to the policy process and how people like you can advocate for better food policy.

***Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community***. Lessons that Bill McKibben and the organizers from Step It Up learned from their very successful day of action in 2007. [Buy the book online](#).

***Organizing for Social Change***. The comprehensive manual on community organizing, published by the Midwest Academy. [Buy the book online](#).

To organize your Eat-In, consider taking advantage of:

**Facebook**, <http://facebook.com>, and **MySpace**, <http://myspace.com>. Social networking sites that you can use to promote your event to friends and to friends' networks.

**Google Groups**, <http://groups.google.com>. Create a listerv or mailing list to keep your organizers in touch by email and to easily share documents and other files.

**PBWorks**, <http://pbworks.com> and **Wikispaces**, <http://wikispaces.com>. A wiki is a collaborative website that a group of people can edit collectively. They're useful for sharing documents that everyone can edit all at once, e.g. a logistics checklist for your Eat-In where everyone can add items and check-off those that are finished.

**Evite**, <http://evite.com>. Send online invitations and track RSVPs to your event.

**MeetUp**, <http://meetup.com>. A website that makes it easy to organize face-to-face meetings offline. Consider using MeetUp to get people involved in your campaign.

**Wordpress**, <http://wordpress.com>, and **Blogspot**, <http://blogspot.com>. Websites that help you create your own blog, for free. Use a blog to keep your community informed of your campaign's progress, upcoming events, actions, etc.

**Digg**, <http://digg.com>, **Reddit**, <http://reddit.com>, and **Stumble Upon**, <http://www.stumbleupon.com/>. Social news sites that you can use to help promote your campaign and events. To learn more about social news sites, watch the webinar "[Creating Social Buzz](#)."



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