

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 18, 2011

Dear Colleague:

As you may know, earlier this year the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued proposed federal regulations that will limit total servings of certain vegetables (potatoes, corn, green peas and lima beans) to one cup per week in the National School Lunch Program. School districts will be prohibited from serving these vegetables altogether in the School Breakfast Program. USDA has indicated that final rules will be issued later this year.

We are deeply concerned about the economic impact of these proposed rules, particularly on our nation's cash-strapped school districts. USDA has said that the changes in the proposed rule, including restricting certain vegetables from meals, would cost schools \$6.8 billion over five years; 34 percent (\$2.3 billion) of this cost increase can be attributed, in part, to limits on potatoes. The Agency has also recognized that small school districts will bear the brunt of the costs; since smaller districts serve about 80 percent of all meals, they will incur roughly 80 percent of estimated costs of these new rules.


These significant costs will be incurred by local and state agencies that control school food service accounts. At a time when school districts are struggling financially, now is not the time to increase serving costs without a demonstrated nutritional benefit.

Potatoes, corn, green peas, and lima beans provide cost-efficient delivery of nutrients to students. For example, one serving of oven-baked French fries provides more potassium than a banana and as much fiber as spinach, all while costing less than five cents. And since only 11 percent of all U.S. school districts even have fryers, eight out of 10 potatoes served in schools today are baked, broiled or mashed.

If we provide flexibility to schools, they can meet the nutrition goals set by USDA while managing costs and maintaining participation rates in both the lunch and breakfast programs. Delivering increased nutrition and managing costs are not mutually exclusive. The federal government should help provide local school food service directors the opportunity to make those sound choices.

These rules will increase the costs of school meals, reduce local flexibility, make it more difficult to deliver nutrients of concern for school age children, and significantly reduce access to vegetables that are popular with kids. As such, we urge you to support the attached amendment by Senators Collins and Udall that will prevent limits on popular vegetables and increase meal costs for schools.

Sincerely,


MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator


JAMES E. RISCH
United States Senator


RON JOHNSON
United States Senator