



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

APR 22 2016

The Honorable Grace Meng  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1317 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Meng:

Thank you for your letter of December 4, 2015, seeking support for offering kosher and halal options in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). You requested data regarding the number of school districts offering kosher and halal options, as well as information about resources made available by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to support schools in your district and nationwide that are interested in offering these options. I apologize for the delayed response.

All meals offered under the NSLP and SBP must include the food components and quantities in the meal pattern specified in 7 CFR 210.10 in order to be reimbursable. School districts make food purchasing and menu planning decisions at the local level with the goal of serving meals that are appealing and acceptable to the student body. FNS has consistently encouraged school districts to consider the dietary preferences of the student population they serve. The NSLP regulations at 7 CFR 210.10(m)(3) allow schools to consider the ethnic and religious preferences of students when planning and preparing meals. Therefore, kosher and halal options are allowed at the discretion of the school district. Factors that influence a school district's purchasing and menu planning decisions include food cost, food supply and distribution, and kitchen preparation facilities.

Program operators are permitted to purchase halal meat from local sources provided that the established procurement process is followed. The FNS Instruction at <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/DEPS/Nutrition/FNSinstructions/783-13.pdf> provides guidance to Jewish schools on allowable variations in the meal service.

FNS does not collect or keep data on school districts' menus. Anecdotal information suggests that schools serving students with religious and ethnic identity, such as Hispanic, Muslim, or Jewish students, should provide foods that reflect the school population. FNS supports this practice, and the NSLP regulations at 7 CFR 210.12 require that school districts provide opportunities for student and parent involvement in the school meal programs. Activities can include menu planning input, enhancement of the eating environment, program promotion, and

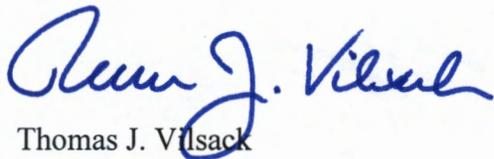
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similar student and community activities. We encourage your constituents to use this process to promote kosher and halal options in area schools.

School districts may access general procurement and menu planning resources at the FNS' Team Nutrition Web page at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition>. We also have a comprehensive resource titled "Procuring Local Foods for Child Nutrition Programs," which is available at [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S\\_Procuring\\_Local\\_Foods\\_Child\\_Nutrition\\_Prog\\_Guide\\_BW.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Procuring_Local_Foods_Child_Nutrition_Prog_Guide_BW.pdf). Our partner, the Institute for Child Nutrition, offers a wide range of technical assistance resources and may be available to provide targeted technical assistance and training for school food service operators interested in offering kosher and halal options. To learn more about the Institute's resources, please see <http://www.nfsmi.org/>.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your concerns. I appreciate New York City Public Schools' efforts to provide nutritious and appealing meals through the NSLP and SBP. If you have any questions, please have a member of your staff contact Todd Batta, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, at (202) 720-7095.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Vilsack" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary