

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

Last year, the National School Lunch Program fed over 29.4 million children on a typical school day.<sup>1</sup> Despite this program's extensive reach, there are currently no national quality standards for the meat and seafood that make up the proteins of school lunches. That means any meat or seafood products—many of which were raised with routine antibiotic overuse and misuse—are able to be served to over 29 million American children each day.

The integrity of school meals is crucial given that children who eat more nutritious meals at school are proven to have improved academic performance, better attendance, and fewer behavioral issues.<sup>2</sup> Plus, higher-quality meat has increased nutrient density, which is essential to support brain and muscle growth, bone strength, and energy production.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps most crucially, higher-quality meat raised without antibiotics actually helps protect public health by reducing the risk of antibiotic resistance.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, most animals raised for meat are pumped with antibiotics—not to treat illness, but to compensate for overcrowded conditions.<sup>5</sup> This can lead to increased antibiotic resistance, or bacteria that are no longer responsive to antibiotics, not only in animals, but also in humans.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Lewis, I., & Plata-Nino, G. (2025, January 15). National school lunch program. *Food Research & Action Center*.

<https://frac.org/programs/national-school-lunch-program#:~:text=Just%20over%2028%20million%20children,the%202021-2022%20school%20year.>

2 Food Research & Action Center. (May, 2021). School meals are essential for student health and learning. *Food Research & Action Center*.

<https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

3 Aliouche, H. (2021, November 17). What are the positive health effects of eating meat? *News-Medical.net*.

<https://www.news-medical.net/health/What-Are-the-Positive-Health-Effects-of-Eating-Meat.aspx>.

4 World Health Organization. (2017, November 7). *Stop using antibiotics in healthy animals to prevent the spread of antibiotic resistance*.

<https://www.who.int/news/item/07-11-2017-stop-using-antibiotics-in-healthy-animals-to-prevent-the-spread-of-antibiotic-resistance>.

5 Wegener HC. Antibiotics in animal feed and their role in resistance development. *Current Opinion in Microbiology*. 2003;6(5):439-445.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mib.2003.09.009>.

6 Martin, M. J., Thottathil, S. E., & Newman, T. B. (2015). Antibiotics Overuse in Animal Agriculture: A Call to Action for Health Care Providers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(12), 2409–2410. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2015.302870>; Conceição, S., Maria Cristina Queiroga, & Laranjo, M. (2023). Antimicrobial Resistance in Bacteria from Meat and Meat Products: A One Health Perspective. *Microorganisms*, 11(10), 2581–2581. <https://doi.org/10.3390/microorganisms11102581>.

The results of this can include increased illness, mortality, inability to treat disease, and inability to perform routine surgeries in both children and adults.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the National School Lunch Program is feeding the future leaders of America—but it needs major changes.<sup>8</sup>

Over the past decade, school meals have seen some improvements in standards due to the tireless efforts of advocates, parents, and school meal providers.<sup>9</sup> Despite some progress, urgent and essential reforms are still needed to ensure our children receive the nutritious, high-quality food they deserve every single day. We know that we can and must do better than this in our children's meals.

**We, the undersigned nonprofit and industry partners, are calling on USDA to instate quality standards for meat and seafood in the National School Lunch Program.**<sup>10</sup> Specifically we request that these standards encourage sourcing from companies that never use antibiotics in their production.

In doing so, we can also prioritize high-quality meat that satisfies the Buy American provision, thus bolstering USDA's efforts to support local American farmers and boost the domestic agricultural economy by increasing market demand for proteins raised without antibiotics.<sup>11</sup>

We applaud the commitments your agency has made to improve school meals thus far, and we hope that this effort can function as an extension of the work you're championing. Millions of American children and their parents are trusting school meals to fuel their futures.

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7 Ahmed SK, Husein S, Qurbani K, et al. Antimicrobial resistance: Impacts, challenges, and future prospects. *Journal of Medicine Surgery and Public Health*. 2024;2(100081):100081-100081. doi :<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gjmedi.2024.100081>.

8 Food Research & Action Center. (May, 2021). *School meals are essential for student health and learning*. Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf>.

9 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2025, January 29). *Updates to the school nutrition standards*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/school-nutrition-standards-updates>.

10 Hardy, K. (2025, March 26). Federal cuts squeeze already-struggling food banks, school lunch programs. *Stateline*. <https://stateline.org/2025/03/26/federal-cuts-squeeze-already-struggling-food-banks-school-lunch-programs/#:~:text=The%20USDA%20recently%20mixed%20more,the%20programs%20as%20%E2%80%9Cnonessential,%E2%80%9D>.

11 U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (n.d.). *Buy American provisions*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/buy-american-provisions/#:~:text=The%20Buy%20American%20provision%20requires,the%2048%20contiguous%20United%20States>.

By instating quality standards that address antibiotic use for meat and seafood in federal school nutrition programs, we can secure better health outcomes for not just these students, but also for the generations that follow.

Sincerely,

**ButcherBox**

Watertown, MA

**Actual Veggies**

Denver, CO

**Ama**

Washington, D.C.

**Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, George Washington University**

Washington, D.C.

**Banza**

New York, NY

**Chef Ann Foundation**

Boulder, CO

**Compassion in World Farming**

New York, NY

**Crowd Cow**

Seattle, WA

**Diestel Family Turkey Ranch**

Sonora, CA

**Edacious**

Marlborough, MA

**Farm Forward**

Portland, OR

**Farmer Focus**  
Harrisonburg, VA

**Food Tank**  
Baltimore, MD

**Hickory Nut Gap Farms**  
Fairview, NC

**Lineage Provisions**  
Dripping Springs, TX

**Little Sesame**  
Washington D.C.

**Natural Grocers**  
Lakewood, CO

**Niman Ranch**  
Westminster, CO

**North Country Smokehouse**  
Claremont, NH

**Nutrient Density Initiative**  
Washington D.C.

**Organic Trade Association**  
Washington D.C.

**Perdue Foods**  
Salisbury, MD

**Planet FWD**  
San Francisco, CA

**Serenity Kids, Inc.**  
Austin, TX

**True Story Foods**

Fairfield, CA

**Urban School Food Alliance**

Washington D.C.

**US PIRG**

Chicago, IL

**White Oak Pastures**

Bluffton, GA