

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 5, 2023

The Honorable Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean
Food and Nutrition Service
Braddock Metro Center II
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Under Secretary Dean:

Thank you for your continued leadership in ensuring those served by the Food and Nutrition Service's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) receive healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate meals. We write regarding the status of information requested by Congress in the report accompanying the FY2023 House Agriculture Appropriations Bill (House Report 117-392), regarding alternate protein meal options for the NSLP and SBP.

As you may recall, this language directed FNS:

“...to collect, analyze, and publish research relating to the availability of plant-based and alternate protein meal options under USDA programs in schools and other congregate settings, and the impact of plant-based and alternate protein meal options on population health outcomes. The committee further directs the Department to provide guidance on the implementation of daily plant-based and alternate protein meal options under the NSLP and SBP for consideration by state agencies and local program operators.”

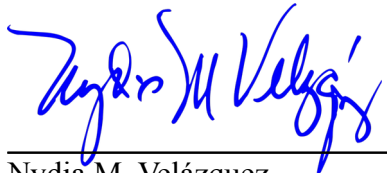
More than 8 months have passed since the passage of the FY2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act, and as more schools across the country are seeking to expand plant-based meal options, this information is greatly needed by state and local school meal administrators to ensure compliance with FNS's meal pattern requirements.

Leading public health organizations all encourage fiber-rich, plant-forward diets. Implementing more plant-based proteins will foster greater alignment of school meals with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommend increasing the consumption of beans, peas, and lentils, increasing dietary fiber, and replacing processed meats.

Additionally, providing guidance on plant-based and alternate protein options aligns with USDA's core values of respect, dignity, equity, and inclusion. There are a range of cultural, ethnic, religious, and physiological needs for plant-based options. Most Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) are lactose intolerant, and BIPOC are three times as likely to follow a plant-based diet than white people. Doing so will also allow schools to meet a growing demand from students – who are the ultimate beneficiaries of Child Nutrition Programs – for plant-based options. The K-12 student population has become increasingly racially and culturally diverse, as well as environmentally conscious and concerned for animal welfare. Right now, there is a clear need to prioritize the adoption of plant-based food in schools, but it is critical to have the data and research to guide school meal administrators in this implementation.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue and we look forward to your prompt response on this matter.

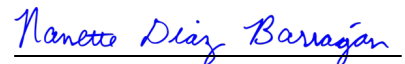
Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



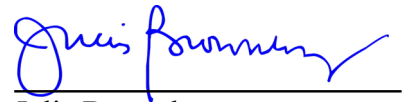
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Bonnie Watson Coleman
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