NOURISH TO FLOURISH

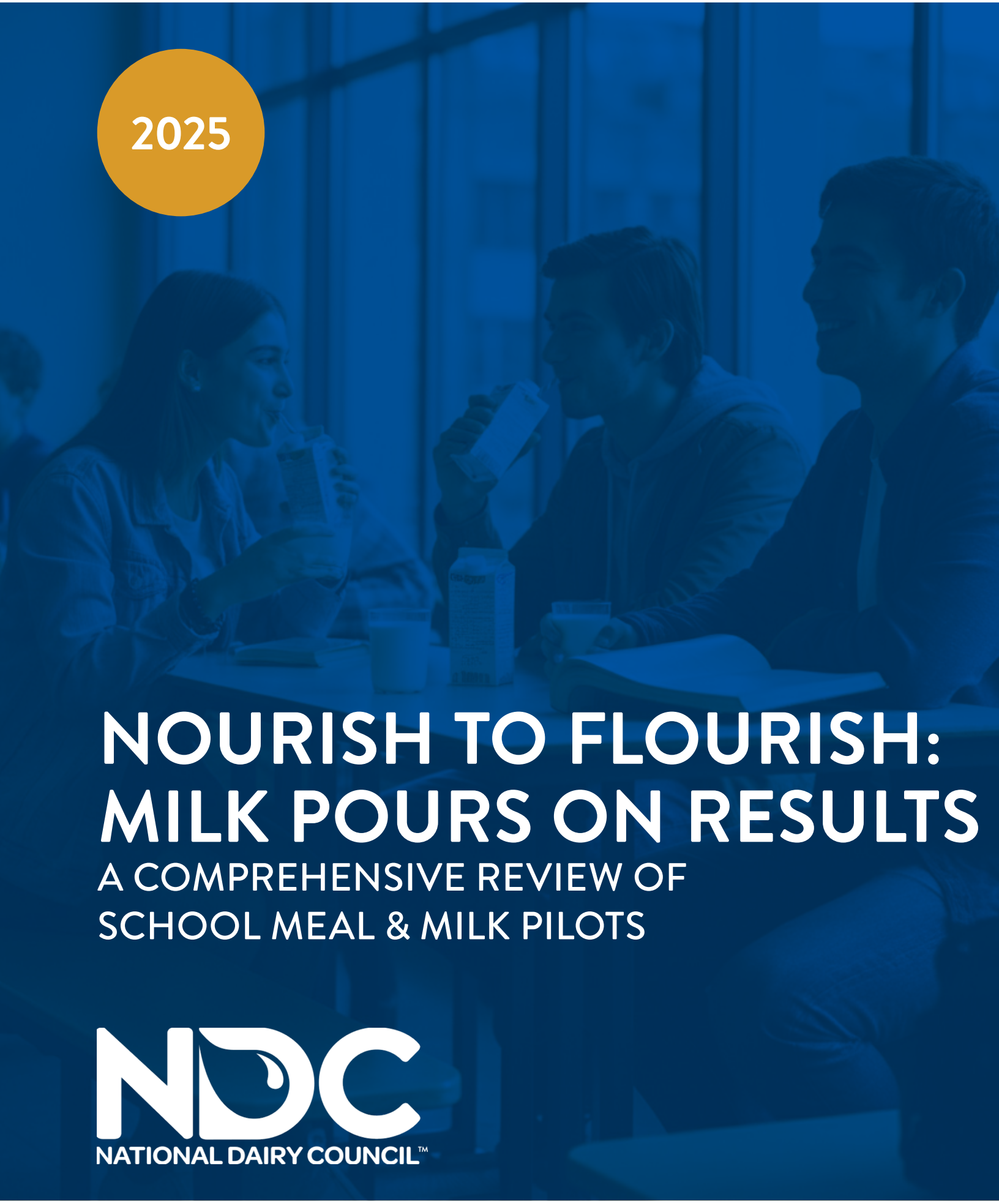
MILK POURS ON RESULTS

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SCHOOL MEAL & MILK PILOTS

NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL™

2025

2025



NOURISH TO FLOURISH: MILK POURS ON RESULTS

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SCHOOL MEAL & MILK PILOTS

NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL™

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BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW: PILOT PROJECTS & INNOVATIONS

This document explores the current challenges and innovative solutions surrounding school milk programs. It shares learnings from various pilot projects by the National Dairy Council (NDC), in partnership with regional dairy councils, industry partners, and influential school districts. These projects have introduced a portfolio of options, including different forms, flavors, and packaging of milk, to address specific issues in schools. These targeted interventions have shown promising results in increasing milk consumption and participation in school meal programs. The report also addresses operational challenges and highlights the financial benefits of these initiatives, such as higher federal meal reimbursements. By the end, readers will gain insights into effective strategies for enhancing the school milk experience, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not apply, ensuring children receive essential nutritional benefits, and improving the overall efficiency and financial health of school meal programs.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The decline in milk consumption among students coincides with broader challenges faced by school food services. These challenges include labor shortages, limited refrigerated storage, rising food procurement costs, supply disruptions, and delivery schedule issues, particularly for milk.[4]

The pilots highlighted within this document take these limitations and issues into account and, when possible, attempt to address them. By understanding and addressing the factors that influence milk consumption, such as flavor preferences, packaging, and social influences, these pilots aim to create more appealing milk products and improve the overall efficiency of school food services.[5]

NUTRITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF SCHOOL MILK TO STUDENTS' DIETS

Milk is a vital component of a student's diet, providing essential nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, and protein, which are crucial for growth and development. Calcium and vitamin D are particularly important for building strong bones and teeth, while protein supports muscle development and overall growth. Additionally, milk contains other vital nutrients like potassium, vitamin A, and B vitamins, which contribute to overall health and well-being. Despite these recognized benefits, U.S. per capita fluid milk consumption has been declining for over 70 years, with a sharper drop in the 2010s.[1] Schools remain a crucial source of milk, yet 68% to 94% of school-age children fail to meet recommended dairy intake levels. Importantly, 77% of daily milk consumption for low-income children ages 5-18 comes from the national school meals programs.[2] This underscores the importance of milk as part of school meals to help children meet their nutritional needs for growth and development.

Increasing milk consumption in schools can help address these challenges by ensuring that children receive the nutritional benefits of milk, which supports their physical and cognitive development, leading to better academic performance and overall health. Increasing milk consumption in schools can help address these challenges.[3]

https://youtu.be/3JNwjp3DJb0?si=vP0iwGPZKX00YTAh

OPPORTUNITIES

A survey by the NDC found that improving the school milk experience and expanding availability are key opportunities. This included:

- Improving milk packaging (easier to open and drink from)
- Enhancing milk taste quality (affected by fat content, vitamin delivery, and packaging quality)
- Increasing milk availability locations

REFERENCES

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2. Kids not meeting requirements: https://www.idfa.org/whole-milk-in-school-meals#:~:text=Yet%20the%20DGA%20stresses%20that,fat%20and%20fat%2Dfree%20milk.
3. https://www.healthyeating.org/nutrition-topics/nutrition-science/scientific-research/milk-dairy-school-meal-programs#:~:text=Milk%20is%20a%20required%20and,meet%20their%20daily%20nutrient%20needs.
4. K-12 survey: The challenges of school foodservice
5. https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-08-decline-consumption-children-school-lunch.html

1% FLAVORED MILK REINTRODUCTION PILOT PROGRAM

TEXAS & OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS REINTRODUCE 1% FLAVORED MILK AFTER SALES DROPPED WITH FAT-FREE

GOALS:

TO UNDERSTAND & DOCUMENT THE IMPACT OF OFFERING 1% FLAVORED MILK ON:

- **Overall milk sales**
- **Student participation in school meals**
- **Student preferences and acceptance**
- **Improve student milk consumption**

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN PILOT:

- **Schools that previously offered fat-free flavored milk**
- **Schools committed to switching to 1% flavored milk**

SITUATION: Many schools removed flavored milk to reduce added sugars; however, this raised concerns about decreased milk consumption and its impact on students' nutrition. Flavored milk in schools provides essential nutrients to support growth and development like calcium, vitamin D, potassium and protein with minimal amounts of added sugars.

VISION: Create a scalable program to increase milk consumption by offering 1% flavored milk in schools. Leverage the preference for 1% flavored milk to boost overall milk consumption and student meal participation.

Measure outcomes and share broadly with the industry.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL REPORT

1% FLAVORED MILK PILOT

JANUARY 2018 TO DECEMBER 2018

OVERVIEW

- Eleven school districts in Texas and Oklahoma implemented a program to increase milk consumption through 1% flavored milk.
- This program was implemented January 2018 and August 2018, then compared to the same semester in from the prior academic year.
- School districts saw varying degrees of growth, but all saw growth

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PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

CLICK TO READ ABOUT 1% CHOCOLATE MILK

RESULTS

UP TO 15%

INCREASE IN FLAVORED MILK SALES

All participating school districts saw varying degrees of growth

+2%

TOTAL MILK SALES GROWTH

vs. year prior (-2% trend) for a 4 point improvement across all milk

+8%

INCREASE IN FLAVORED MILK SALES

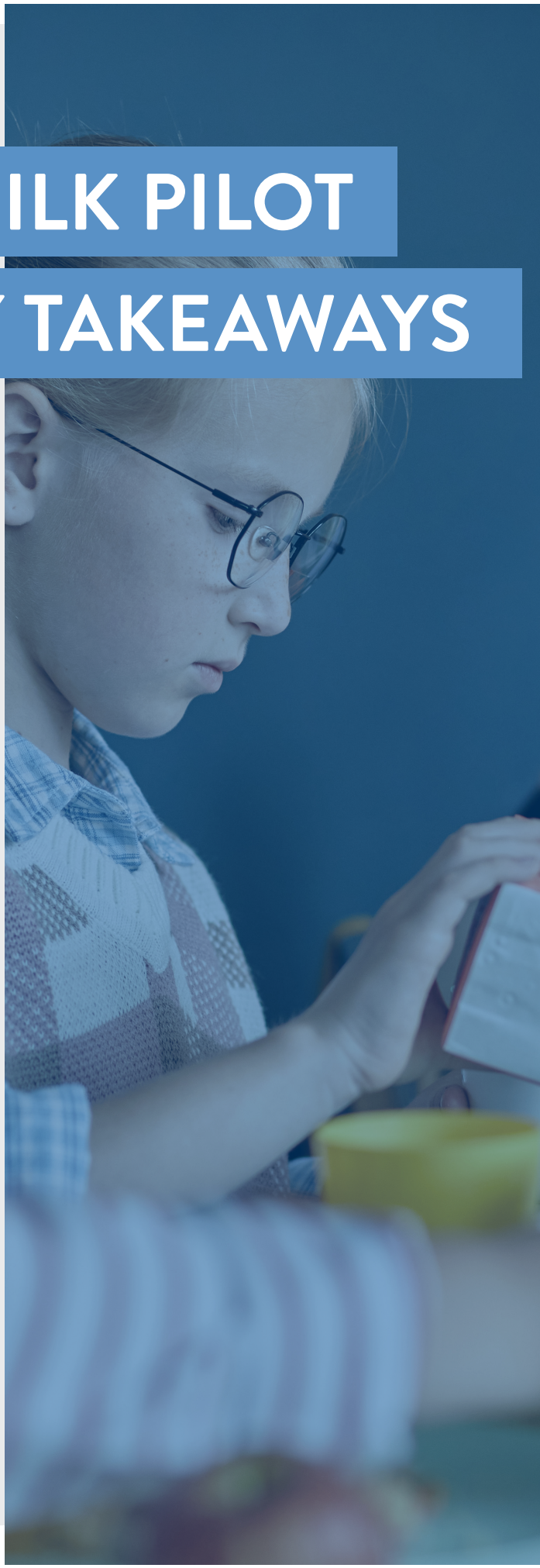
vs. prior year

QUICK

ADOPTION OF FLAVORED MILK BY STUDENTS

with some districts switching completely from fat-free within 30 days

1% FLAVORED MILK PILOT BENEFITS & KEY TAKEAWAYS



KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

Proven incremental milk volume opportunity through the school channel

High acceptance of 1% flavored milk among students

Positive impact on overall milk sales and student meal participation

Increased milk consumption

CLICK TO READ ABOUT CHOCOLATE MILK IN SCHOOLS

CONSIDERATIONS

- Adequate supply of 1% flavored milk
- Monitoring student preferences and adjusting offerings accordingly
- Support from school administration and foodservice staff

BULK MILK DISPENSING

PILOT PROGRAM

BULK MILK PILOTS CUT WASTE AND MAY BOOST CONSUMPTION

GOALS:

TO UNDERSTAND & DOCUMENT IMPACT OF USING BULK MILK DISPENSERS ON:

- **Milk sales and consumption**
- **Waste levels**
- **Student and staff perceptions**
- **Operational challenges and opportunities**

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN PILOT:

- **Schools with adequate staffing and administrative support**
- **Availability of bulk milk in desired flavors**
- **Schools with functioning dishwashers for reusable cups**

SITUATION: Milk and dairy consumption among students as part of school meals is important to help them meet their daily nutritional needs to for growth, development and learning.

VISION: Create a scalable program to increase milk consumption and reduce waste by using bulk milk dispensers in schools. Leverage the benefits of dispensers to enhance the overall milk drinking experience for students.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL REPORT

BULK MILK DISPENSING PILOTS

JANUARY 2020 - FALL 2022

OVERVIEW

- Twelve schools across five districts (Lockport, NY; Anderson County, TN; Putnam County, TN; Edgewood, TX; and Cumberland, TN) implemented bulk milk dispensers, replacing cartons for lunch with these machines and milk in bags.
- Data was captured starting January 2020 until students went home due to the pandemic, then resumed in 2021 and continued through Fall 2022.

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New England Dairy

MIDWEST Dairy®

AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION NORTH EAST — YOUR MILK COMES FROM A GOOD PLACE

PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

CLICK HERE FOR BULK DISPENSING FAQ

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+

GENERALLY POSITIVE FEEDBACK

qualitatively

4-8 WEEKS

OF EXCITEMENT, THEN TAPERED OFF

MIXED RESULTS

CONSUMPTION VARIED BY LOCATION WITH MINIMAL CHANGE IN MILK SALES

-13%

DECREASE IN MILK WASTE

+3.4%

INCREASE IN INCREMENTAL CONSUMPTION

per meal

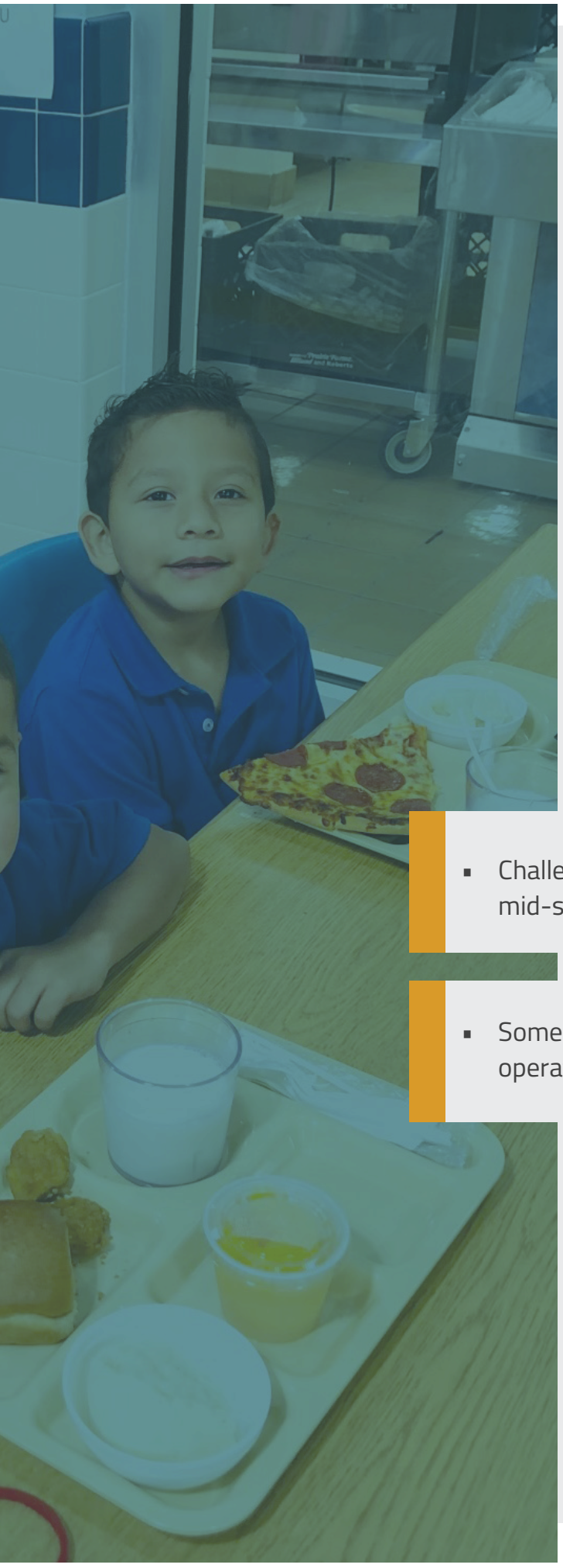
RESULTS

BULK MILK DISPENSING BENEFITS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

- Reduction in milk waste
- Positive student and staff reception
- Environmental benefits from reduced trash volume

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kazS5CBICBs



CONSIDERATIONS

- Availability of bulk milk in desired flavors
- Adequate staffing for mid-service bag changes and dishwashing
- Cafeteria equipped with dishwasher
- Implementation at the start of the semester
- Support from school administration and nutrition staff

OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS:

- Challenges with line space and bag change mid-service
- Some schools reverted to using cartons due to operational difficulties

CLICK HERE FOR BULK MILK SOP

CLICK HERE FOR BULK MILK FAQS

SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK PILOTS

IN UTAH & TEXAS

SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

SITUATION: Increasingly, external factors have disrupted the uninterrupted availability of fresh milk in schools. These challenges include significant driver shortages, particularly in rural and dense urban areas, and a reduction in school nutrition staff to manage the rising demand for meals. Additionally, fewer processors bidding on school milk contracts have resulted in limited or inconsistent supplies. The Covid-19 pandemic further underscored the need for flexible milk serving options that do not always require refrigeration due to diverse serving scenarios. This was followed by widespread plant closures and the carton shortage of 2022-23. Each year, it seems, new challenges emerge.

VISION: Prove new economic models for industry and schools by piloting single-serve, shelf-stable milk that delivers quality, consistency, and a positive experience. This initiative aimed to address the operational challenges of serving traditional fresh milk in schools, particularly those facing supply issues. By implementing an innovative solution seeking to ensure that all students have access to nutritious milk, regardless of logistical constraints, while also providing a sustainable and cost-effective alternative for school food services.

GOALS TO DEMONSTRATE:

- **Diminished Supply Chain Disruptions**
- **Increased Meal Participation**
- **Increased Milk Consumption**
- **Decreased Waste**

DOWNLOAD A ONE-PAGE OVERVIEW ON SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK PILOTS

EXAMPLE #1

BOX ELDER & OGDEN, UTAH

SEPTEMBER 2021-JUNE 2022

OVERVIEW

- The Ogden and Box Elder Districts piloted shelf-stable milk independent of NDC during the 2018-19 school year.
- All schools in the districts replaced the traditional fresh milk cartons with shelf-stable milk for all students.
- In 2021, NDC, Dairy West and Tetra Pak re-engaged two disticts, who had continued with the shelf stable product, to examine data and to determine if the results from the original pilot had been maintained.
- The initial pilot growth of +9% in milk usage and +10% in consumption experienced continued growth over the four year period.
- Both districts continue to offer shelf-stable milk as their primary milk source.

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Tetra Pak®

dairy west®

BOX ELDER SCHOOL DISTRICT
Learning is Everything

OGDEN SCHOOL DISTRICT

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SHELF-STABLE MILK

https://vimeo.com/1052009484/53602cfe-ba?share=copy

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2021 RESULTS

+16%

INCREASE IN MILK CONSUMPTION

vs. pre-pilot in elementary schools, 10% overall

+3%

MEAL INCREASE OVERALL

vs. pre-pilot

100%

OF THE SCHOOLS IN BOTH DISTRICTS HAVE MADE THE PERMANENT SWITCH TO SHELF-STABLE MILK

-12%

DECREASE IN MILK WASTE

(or -5.0 pts) vs. pre-pilot

DELIVERY & ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS DECREASED DUE TO FEWER SHIPMENTS

EXAMPLE #2

DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, TEXAS

JANUARY-JUNE 2022

OVERVIEW

- Nine elementary schools within the 230 school district replaced the traditional fresh milk cartons with shelf-stable milk for all students.
- Milk consumption and meals grew in pilot schools, while waste was reduced.
- District supported the pilot with upfront sampling with students, marketing materials in the cafeteria along with PA announcements.
- 39% of students surveyed reporting relying on school meals for their milk.
- Changes to school distribution in addition to other efficiencies yielded lower local distribution cost and helped offset the additional cost of the product.

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Tetra Pak®

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+12%

INCREASE IN OVERALL MILK CONSUMPTION

in pilot schools from the combination of more volume and less waste

-5%

DECLINE IN MILK WASTE

in pilot schools vs. no change in the rest of the district

+3.6%

INCREASE IN MILK PURCHASES

vs. a decline of -2.4% in the rest of the district

+9%

INCREASE IN TOTAL MEALS SERVED

in pilot schools vs. a 1% increase in the rest of the district

RESULTS

SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK PILOTS BENEFITS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

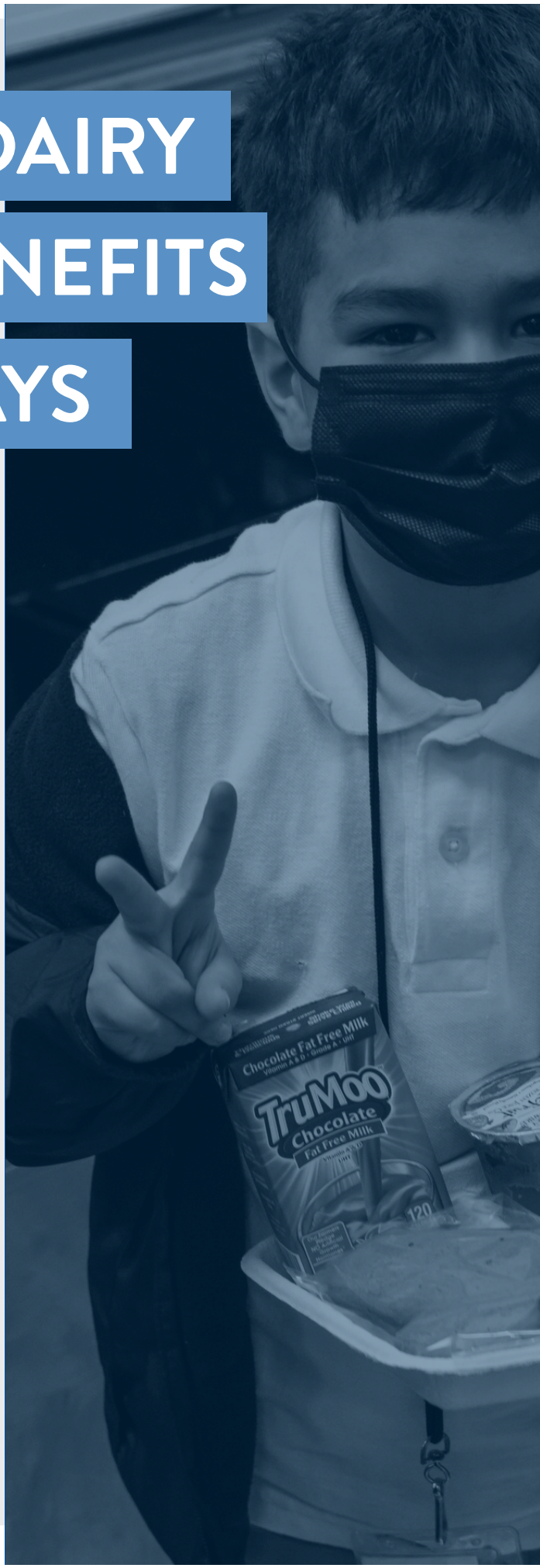
KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

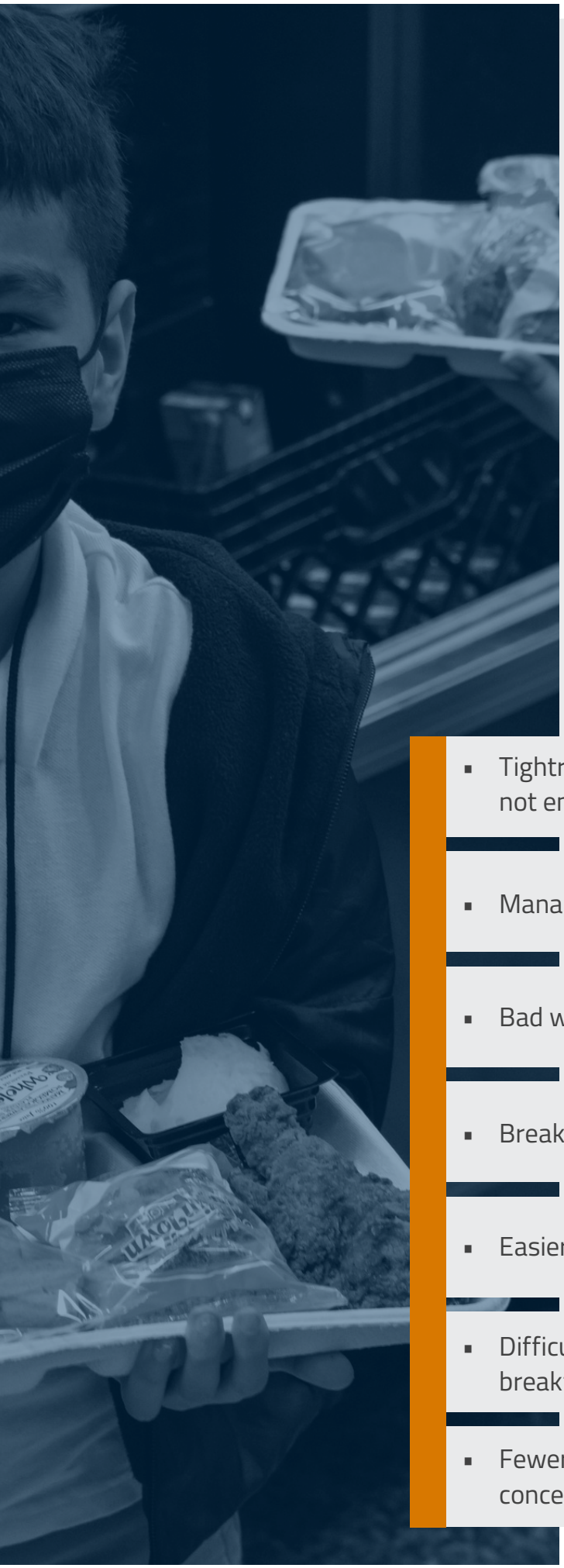
Students have shown acceptance and enjoyment of the product, so milk consumption has increased.

Greater confidence and trust has led each plan to continue to offer shelf-stable milk in their districts and fund the cost difference.

Expansion on distribution improvements resulted in reduced costs and provided more control.

Pilots showed that shelf-stable milk increased milk consumption and reduced waste. This also led to higher meal participation, providing both nutritional and financial benefits.





CONSIDERATIONS

Shelf-Stable milk as an option is most appropriate for:

- Rural districts or districts experiencing consistent disruptions.
- Districts with central warehouses and the ability to self-deliver to school buildings

REDUCED OR ELIMINATED THE FOLLOWING CHALLENGES:

- Tightrope walk of too much inventory (out of code risk) and not enough, especially at start-up and calendar breaks.
- Managing code dates.
- Bad weather and missed deliveries.
- Breaks in the cold chain.
- Easier/reduced handling in school.
- Difficulty serving outside of the cafeteria (alternative breakfast, offsite, summer, etc.).
- Fewer deliveries/opening of the back door (security concerns).

SMOOTHIE PROGRAM

PILOT

SMOOTHIES DRIVE MEAL PARTICIPATION AND DAIRY CONSUMPTION IN PILOT SCHOOLS

GOALS:

TO UNDERSTAND & DOCUMENT THE IMPACT OF OFFERING SMOOTHIES ON:

- **Meals and a la carte sales and participation**
- **Overall milk and yogurt consumption**
- **Student and staff acceptance and preferences**
- **Operational challenges and opportunities**

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN PILOT:

- **Schools with adequate staffing and administrative support**
- **Variety of geographies**
- **Schools committed to serving smoothies at least 3 times weekly**

SITUATION: Smoothies are a popular beverage among students, meeting USDA nutrition criteria and fitting easily into school meal requirements. The Smoothie Pilot Program aimed to assess the impact of offering smoothies on student participation in school meals and overall dairy consumption.

VISION: Create a scalable national program to increase meal participation and milk and yogurt consumption by offering smoothies in schools. Leverage the popularity of smoothies to boost overall dairy consumption and student meal participation.

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SMOOTHIE PROGRAM ACROSS THE U.S.

SCHOOL YEAR 2021

OVERVIEW

- One hundred and thirty schools throughout Chartwells service area implemented smoothies into their school meal programs a minimum of 3 times weekly.
- Schools were provided with the necessary equipment, recipes developed collaboratively by both Chartwells and General Mills along with training and marketing support.
- This program was implemented in school year 2021, with data being captured in November 2022 to compare to the same period in 2019.

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9 DAIRY COUNCILS THROUGHOUT THE U.S.

General Mills FOODSERVICE

USDA REIMBURSABLE SMOOTHIE PAGE

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RESULTS

+1.5%

INCREASE IN MILK SALES

+30%

INCREASE IN YOGURT SALES

ADP

IMPACT VARIED CONSIDERABLY

based on breakfast program changes, Universal Meal status, and staff support

HIGH

ACCEPTANCE AMONG STUDENTS & STAFF

SMOOTHIE PROGRAM BENEFITS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

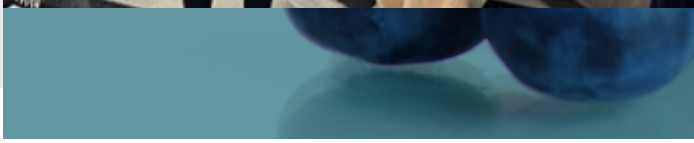
Proven incremental dairy consumption by students, thereby helping them to meet their daily dairy serving/consumption recommendations.

Provides menu utilization opportunity for bulk milk and yogurt

High acceptance of dairy-based smoothies among students and school nutrition staff

Smoothies can help boost meal participation

Smoothies can successfully be served at both breakfast and lunch meals



CONSIDERATIONS

- Adequate staffing
- Transportation equipment such as cooler bags if serving outside the cafeteria
- Availability of bulk milk, yogurt, and packaging
- Support from administrators

OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS:

- Challenges included staffing and equipment needs

LACTOSE-FREE SHELF-STABLE

DAIRY MILK PILOT

CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS FINDS SHELF-STABLE LACTOSE-FREE DAIRY MILK HELPED ADDRESS NUTRITION EQUITY AND INCREASE MILK CONSUMPTION AND MEAL PARTICIPATION

GOALS:

TO UNDERSTAND & DOCUMENT THE IMPACT OF OFFERING LACTOSE-FREE DAIRY MILK ON:

- **Overall milk consumption**
- **Meal participation**
- **Student and staff acceptance and preferences**
- **Operational challenges and opportunities**

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN PILOT:

- **Schools with high levels of students with lactose intolerance**
- **Schools committed to offering lactose-free dairy milk to all students or those with documented medical needs**

SITUATION: Lactose-free dairy milk is on the rise, with 25% of households choosing it in 2023, up from 15% in 2015. Despite this demand, it makes up just 0.1% of milk served in schools, leaving lactose-intolerant students underserved. There is a movement towards meal tray equity to ensure all students have access to nutritious and diverse options. Lactose-free dairy milk, particularly having it available in chocolate, solves for this disparity. (Prime 2019 All Channel Tracker)

VISION: To create an inclusive school nutrition environment where every student, regardless of dietary restrictions, has access to nutritious and appealing milk options. By introducing 1% lactose-free dairy white and chocolate milk in shelf-stable packaging, the initiative aimed to enhance student nutrition and support schools in providing balanced meal programs. This approach meets students' preferences for flavored milk and ensures operational efficiency with long shelf-life packaging.

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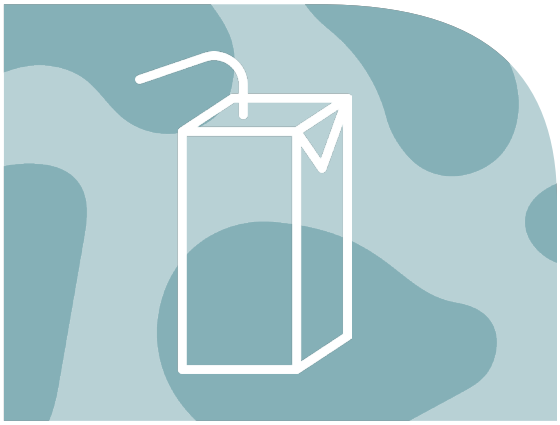
LACTOSE-FREE SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK PILOT



SEPTEMBER 2023-MAY 2024

- The districts of Cincinnati Public Schools were divided into four different test cells:
  - Cell 1: Four elementary schools offering lactose-free white dairy milk to students with documented medical needs
  - Cell 2: Six elementary schools offering lactose-free chocolate dairy milk to students without the need for a medical note.
  - Cell 3: Four senior high schools offering lactose-free chocolate dairy milk to students without the need for a medical note.
  - Cell 4: Expanded to 10 offering lactose-free chocolate dairy milk to all students without the need for a medical note.
- The Cincinnati Public School districts piloted lactose-free shelf-stable dairy milk starting in September 2023 with an intended end date in December 2023. However, due to the success of the first phase of the pilot, it was extended through the school year.
- Due to the continued success in the pilot schools overall, In 2024, the district expanded the program to all schools in the district.

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diversified Foods Inc.

CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

LACTOSE INTOLERANCE FACTS SHEET

LEARN MORE ABOUT LACTOSE-FREE MILK IN SCHOOLS

+10%

INCREMENTAL MEAL PARTICIPATION

vs. only 2 points in control schools

+20%

MILK SERVINGS

and continuing to grow

65%

OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REPORT LOVING OR LIKING THE CHOCOLATE LF PRODUCT

LESS WASTE

Students report finishing their chocolate lactose free milk more often than traditional milk drinkers.

RESULTS

LACTOSE-FREE SHELF-STABLE DAIRY MILK PILOT BENEFITS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

Proven incremental meal participation and milk volume opportunity for the school channel while also addressing nutrition equity.

High acceptance of lactose-free dairy milk among students

Positive impact on overall milk consumption and meal participation

Pilots showed that chocolate lactose-free shelf-stable dairy milk increased milk consumption and reduced waste. This also led to higher meal participation, providing both nutritional and financial benefits.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Adequate supply and safety stock of lactose-free dairy milk
- Monitoring student preferences and adjusting offerings accordingly
- Support from school administration and foodservice staff

STUDENT & STAFF ACCEPTANCE AND OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS:

- High acceptance of lactose-free chocolate dairy milk among students
- 73% of senior high students reported finishing their lactose-free chocolate dairy milk, reducing waste
- 66% of elementary students reported finishing their lactose-free chocolate dairy milk, reducing waste
- Need for safety stock to manage rising demand
- Minimal adjustments required in cafeteria operations

NATIONAL HOT CHOCOLATE MILK PROGRAM PILOT

HOT CHOCOLATE MILK PROGRAMS CAN BOOST PARTICIPATION AT BREAKFAST AND LUNCH!

NDC and Chartwells Foodservice partnered to implement a hot chocolate milk program in multiple schools, serving HCM at least 3 times per week during breakfast and/or lunch.

GOALS:

TO UNDERSTAND & DOCUMENT THE IMPACT OF OFFERING HOT CHOCOLATE MILK ON:

- **Meals and a la carte sales and participation**
- **Student and staff acceptance and preferences**
- **Overall milk consumption**
- **Operational challenges and opportunities**

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN PILOT:

- **Schools with adequate staffing and administrative support**
- **Variety of geographies**
- **Schools committed to serving HCM at least 3 times weekly**

SITUATION: The global hot chocolate market, valued at $3.8 billion in 2022, is projected to grow to $5.77 billion by 2030. Analysts attribute this growth to increasing consumer interest in nutritious foods and beverages. Hot chocolate milk (HCM) is particularly popular among students, with school districts reporting that it boosts meal participation and milk consumption. However, a large-scale pilot study to document these findings had yet to be conducted.

VISION: Create a scalable national program to increase milk consumption by offering hot chocolate milk in schools. Leverage the popularity of hot chocolate milk to boost overall milk sales and student meal participation and develop a case study that documents the results to share with school nutrition professionals.

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NATIONAL HOT CHOCOLATE MILK PILOT

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2024

OVERVIEW

- Fifty-eight schools, operated by Chartwells Foodservice implemented the hot chocolate milk program at breakfast and/or lunch a minimum of three times weekly.
- Schools were provided equipment and marketing support.
- Data was captured between January 2024 and February 2024 and compared to the same period in 2023.

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RESULTS

+5.6%
INCREASE IN BREAKFAST ADP
vs. pre-pilot

+3.4%
INCREASE IN LUNCH ADP
vs. pre-pilot

54,575
INCREASE IN MILK SERVINGS
of incremental 8 oz. servings

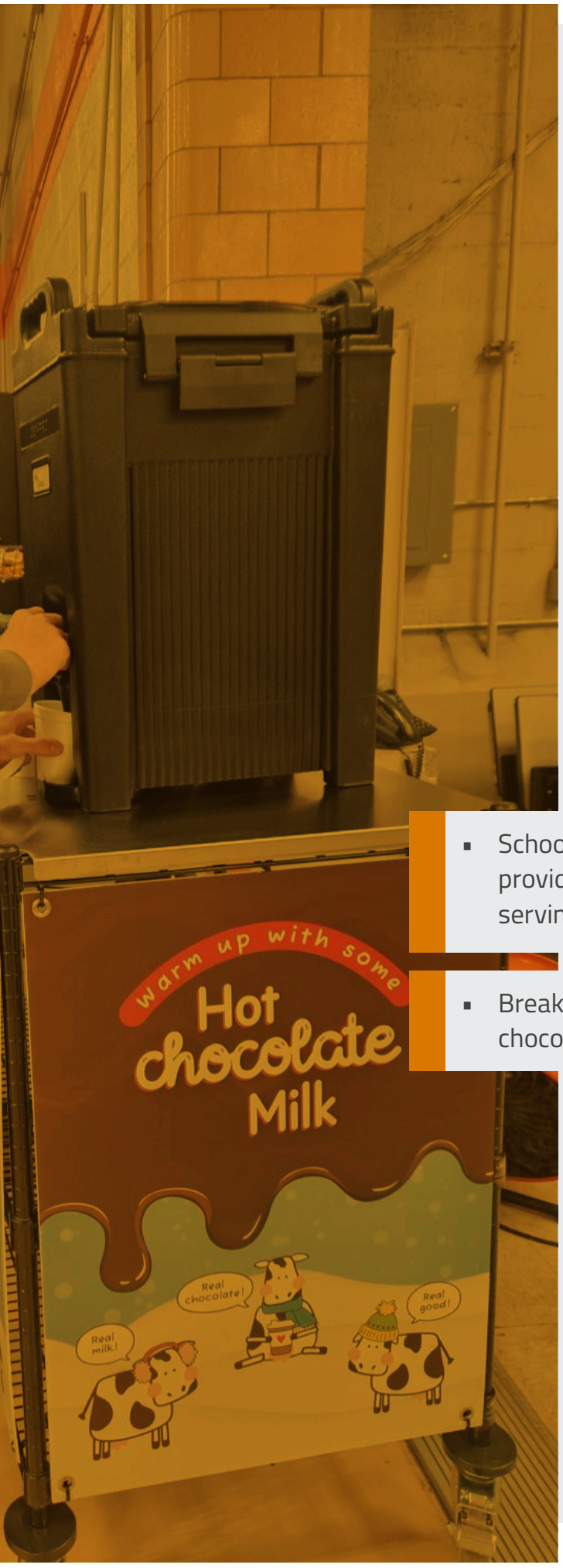
58%
OF STUDENTS LOVE HCM
who tried it

56%
STAFF LIKELY TO CONTINUE WITH HCM
next school year

NATIONAL HOT CHOCOLATE MILK PILOT BENEFITS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

KEY PROGRAM BENEFITS/TAKEAWAYS

- Proven incremental meal participation
- Provides menu utilization opportunity for bulk milk
- High acceptance among students and school nutrition staff
- Increased dairy consumption



CONSIDERATIONS

- Adequate staffing
- Equipment such as mobile serving carts
- Availability of bulk milk and packaging
- Support from school administration

OPERATIONAL INSIGHTS:

- Schools appreciated the marketing and equipment support provided with 81% of schools reporting using the provided serving cart
- Breakfast was the most popular time for serving hot chocolate milk

State and Regional

CHECKOFF ORGANIZATIONS

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