



ACTION



SPRING 2026

WHOLE MILK FOR SCHOOL MEALS

SLDDC holds school nutrition focus group, plans milk tastings for fall

On Jan. 14, 2026, President Donald Trump signed the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025, ushering in the option to serve whole milk and reduced-fat milk as part of school meals. The USDA issued the final rule, with a 30-day comment period, May 8. This final rule, which goes into effect at the end of the comment period, clarified that the new milk options may be served at both school breakfast and lunch.

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Students from Granite City High School in Granite City, IL, sample and rate whole milk during their lunch hour. SLDDC held this milk sampling May 13. This fall, SLDDC will offer this type of event to more schools.



SURVEY SAYS!

A recent survey of food service directors in SLDDC territory found the following:

- 93% are aware of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025.
- 53% plan to provide more/different options in the future.
- 44% are considering the new options.

Mobile Dairy Classroom cruises into Illinois, reaches 5,300 students

The Mobile Dairy Classroom rolled through LaSalle and Macon counties in Illinois in early April. During the packed two-week schedule, Louise the Jersey cow visited nine schools in LaSalle County and eight schools in Macon County. Overall, more than 5,300 students learned about dairy farming, dairy farmers and dairy nutrition through the Mobile Dairy Classroom experience.

"The Mobile Dairy Classroom continues not only to inform but also delight the students at every school it visits," said Monica Nyman, SLDDC senior nutrition educator. "Every time the students see the milking, they get excited. This program does a great job at showing students where their food comes from and the importance of dairy farming."

Students ask questions during the Mobile Dairy Classroom presentation at Tonica Grade School in Tonica, IL. Louise the Jersey cow visited with the students on April 7. The Mobile Dairy Classroom will visit Missouri schools for two weeks in October.



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Students celebrate School Breakfast Week with quest for dairy



SLDDC funds Grass to Glass promotion with Adopt-A-Calf classrooms

Cheese, please!



New Haven School District fuels students with smoothies twice a week

SLDDC salutes Homegrown Heroes in Illinois and Missouri

From policy to table, dairy is in the national spotlight



As many of you are aware, the last few months have been an exciting time for dairy farmers and the dairy industry. Dairy is having a well-deserved moment in the spotlight! First, in January, President Trump signed the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025, which now allows schools to serve whole and reduced-fat milk

to students. In addition, the newly released 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend three servings of dairy a day as a core component of a healthy dietary pattern. Dairy foods like milk, cheese and yogurt, at all fat levels, are fully embraced by the guidelines. Dairy farmers are thrilled as they believe that giving school kids and consumers more choices will drive consumption.

And, at SLDDC, our team is committed to bringing these updates to life through hands-on nutrition education in our communities. We are working directly with schools and community partners to share practical, science-based information about dairy's role in a healthy diet, while highlighting the expanded options now available.

As we look ahead in 2026 and beyond, we're encouraged by policies that support both a healthier population and the dairy farmer community. Giving families and schools more flexibility in choosing dairy options is a step forward – one that benefits students, supports farmers and strengthens the connection between the food farmers produce and the people who consume it.

We're proud to stand with dairy farmers and consumers alike in celebrating these advancements and the role dairy continues to play in overall health. We are unwavering in our commitment to engaging students, teachers and staff, as well as dedicated to growing dairy devotion in the communities we serve.

Best,

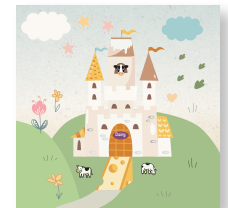
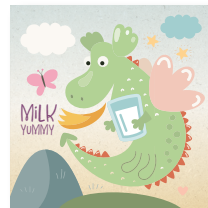
Ellen Wheeler
SLDDC Executive Director

Students celebrate School Breakfast Week with quest for dairy

SLDDC made sure dairy was front and center for School Breakfast Week March 2-6 by providing 537 schools with a promotional kit featuring the medieval theme of "The Quest for Dairy at School Breakfast." Participating schools submitted photos of students enjoying dairy foods at breakfast and dressing up to represent the medieval theme. SLDDC awarded prizes to four schools in Hannibal, MO; Ashley, IL; East St. Louis, IL; and Pontiac, IL.

"It was exciting to see how schools used the promotional materials to encourage dairy foods at breakfast," said Jessica Kassel, SLDDC nutrition educator. "We loved hearing about cafeteria success stories, too. Some staff members proudly reported how this week-long event boosted numbers at breakfast. This initiative reached approximately 227,000 students at the participating schools."

With a little AI technology, cafeteria staff at Duello Elementary in Lake St. Louis, MO, created the ultimate Quest for Dairy celebration for the students.



St. Louis District Dairy Council produces SLDDC Action three times a year.



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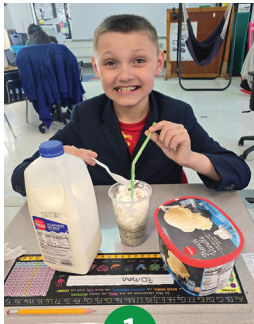
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SLDDC funds Grass to Glass promotion with Adopt-A-Calf classrooms



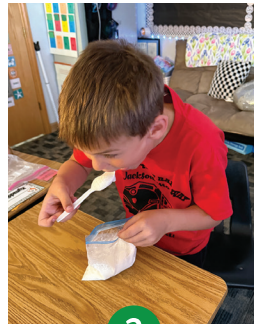
To help students make the connection that dairy farming leads to delicious dairy foods, SLDDC launched its Grass to Glass promotion for teachers participating in the Adopt-A-Calf program. Approximately 200 teachers took advantage of this promotion that allowed them to purchase dairy foods for an in-class food sampling. As a result, more than 5,000 students tried dairy foods through this promotion



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2



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- 1 Students at Alton East Elementary in Alton, IL, created milkshakes as part of the Grass to Glass promotion.
- 2 Students at Aux Sable Elementary in Minooka, IL, sampled milk and yogurt while completing an SLDDC coloring sheet.
- 3 Brain freeze! Students made homemade ice cream at Altenburg Public School in Missouri.

Cheese,
Please



Students at Parkway Central High School in St. Louis sample four different cheeses after learning about all aspects of cheese – from the history of cheese to modern-day production. During the spring semester, SLDDC nutrition educators reached almost 600 students with this presentation.

[SERVIN' UP SMOOTHIES SPOTLIGHT]

New Haven School District fuels students with smoothies twice a week

Krissy Zumsteg, food service director for New Haven School District in New Haven, MO, has been leading the district's new Servin' Up Smoothies program this school year. Through this program, SLDDC provided New Haven School District with an immersion blender, mixing container, smoothie recipes and marketing clings. In return, the district has provided students with smoothies twice a week throughout the school year.

From the start of the program, New Haven students have consistently shown their love for smoothies. During the fall semester, students bought 2,889 smoothies, which included a total of 9,848 ounces of yogurt and 22,117 ounces of milk. While the sales

data for the spring semester are not completely finalized, the smoothie sales have remained consistently strong.

"We loved seeing the students try the various recipes," Zumsteg said, noting that the smoothies boosted participation for breakfast, especially for the middle and high school students. For these students, the smoothies were a grab-and-go option.

She also tried different ways to boost eye appeal, such as adding whipped cream and cinnamon sprinkles. The staff also learned that students were more likely to buy smoothies served with straws and that certain types of cups resulted in higher sales. "It's all about presentation!" she said.



Students in the New Haven School District have enjoyed smoothies twice a week throughout the school year. SLDDC's Servin' Up Smoothies program made this new breakfast option possible.



SLDDC salutes Homegrown Heroes in Illinois and Missouri

Schools across Missouri and Illinois submitted nominations for the 2026 SLDDC Homegrown Hero campaign that recognizes individuals who continually give back to their schools and communities. The contest encouraged schools to share their nominee's story in their own way. The resulting submitted letters, essays, photos and videos detailed inspiring stories of those who strive to improve the lives of others every day.

On May 12, SLDDC Nutrition Educator Jessica Kassel awarded the Missouri Homegrown Hero Award to Matt Unger of Stover, MO, who is the outgoing superintendent of Morgan County R-1 School District.

"For the past 11 years, Unger has served as superintendent with dedication, vision and a deep commitment to the students and community he serves," said Brenda Arnold, who works with Unger and nominated him for the award. "Under his leadership, the district has seen remarkable improvements and growth. He oversaw the construction of a FEMA tornado shelter that not only serves as a vital safety resource for the community but also houses a new gymnasium. Recently, the district built an early childhood center



Matt Unger, superintendent of Morgan County R-1 School District in Stover, MO, received the SLDDC Homegrown Hero Award May 12. His staff nominated him for his dedication to making the school district better over his 11-year tenure.

to support the area's youngest learners. In addition, nearly 90% of the school has been renovated during his tenure, creating an updated learning environment that reflects pride in the district and a commitment to student success."

Beyond his service to the school district, Unger also serves on the Park Board and the Morgan County Health Department Board, demonstrating his dedication to improving the quality of life for everyone in the area.

Also, on May 12, SLDDC Nutrition Educator Meagan Modrusic honored Diane Fessler of Jerseyville, IL, with the Homegrown Hero Award. Fessler has taught at Jerseyville Elementary School for numerous years.



Diane Fessler, a retiring teacher at Jerseyville Elementary School in Jerseyville, IL, received the SLDDC Homegrown Hero Award May 12. Fessler was nominated for her tireless dedication to her students and area youth.

"Diane has dedicated her life to teaching and serving others," said Angie Noble, who teaches with Fessler and nominated her for the award. "As a second-grade teacher, she has helped shape the lives of generations of children. I know this not only as a colleague but also as a former student of hers. Having experienced her classroom firsthand, I can attest to the compassion, patience and understanding she shows every child who walks through her door. She has a special ability to make students feel valued, supported, and capable."

Fessler is also known for her dedication and support of youth through her volunteer work with the local 4-H chapter and the county fair. She is an active member of the county farm bureau and is known for her advocacy on behalf of farmers.

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As required in the past, schools participating in federally funded Child Nutrition Programs must offer at least two different milk options daily. The expanded milk options now include whole milk, reduced-fat milk, low-fat milk, fat-free milk, lactose-free milk and nondairy beverages nutritionally equivalent to dairy milk.

In April, SLDDC held a focus group with several food service directors serving in both large and small school districts in the greater St. Louis metro area. All participants expressed interest in serving whole milk, but noted they are considering many factors before fully implementing. In the meantime, the group said whole-

milk taste tests among students would be a first step. To help food service directors gauge students' milk preferences, SLDDC will roll out a fall program that will allow hundreds of schools to facilitate milk tastings with students.

"We're encouraged and energized by the growing interest from schools in offering more milk choices for students," said Ellen Wheeler, SLDDC executive director. "When kids have options they enjoy, they're more likely to choose milk and benefit from its powerful nutrition package. It's a win for student nutrition and a win for our local dairy farmers."