



Taste Test Guide

Taste tests are a fun opportunity for students to try new foods and share their opinions. In this way, student voice and choice are strongly represented in taste test results, which has proven to be an authentic tool for developing new menu items for school nutrition programs that students will enjoy.

Gathering Support

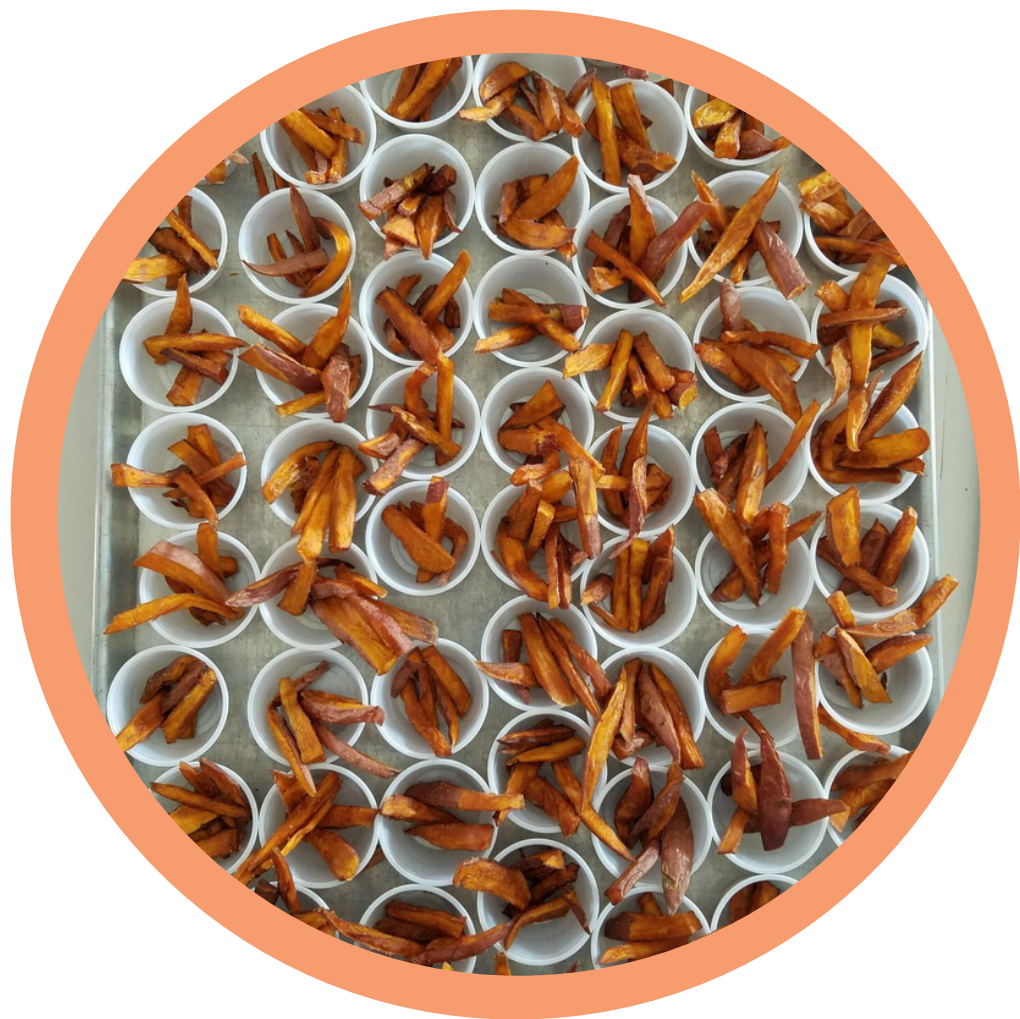
Successful taste tests are supported by the school community and dedicated volunteers. If your school has a farm to school committee, this can be a great place to gather support for your taste test. Committee members can provide resources, share ideas, and volunteer their time to support the taste test. If your school does not have a farm to school committee, we recommend reviewing this [handout](#) and creating one! Students or student groups may help to host taste tests. You may also consider connecting with family and consumer science teachers in your school district to recruit high school students that may be interested in helping to host the taste test. In addition, PTO/PTA, local church groups, and Family and Consumer Science (FCS) Agents at your local University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service office may also be interested in supporting taste tests at your school. Find your FCS Agents [here](#). If you host the taste test in the cafeteria, we highly recommend that you collaborate with school nutrition staff, lunch monitors, and custodial staff to ensure the success of your taste test!



Planning Steps

1. Determine the date, time, and location.
2. Engage with key collaborators.
3. Select a recipe to try out.
4. Plan for food preparation and storage.
5. Create a promotional plan.
6. Choose a method for students to vote.
7. Purchase or procure ingredients and materials.
8. Promote the taste test opportunity with your school and community.
9. Prepare recipes and ingredients for the taste test.
10. Host taste test with students.
11. Document student votes and photos of the taste test experience.
12. Share taste test results and photos.

Recipe Selection



Choosing a recipe for a taste test is an exciting part of planning! Start by checking out this great [Recipe Book](#) from FoodCorps and these [recipes](#) developed by Apple Seeds, Inc. Engaging with members of the farm to school committee, cafeteria staff, teachers, students, and the school community is important in the decision making process. Consider the cultural backgrounds or food traditions of students when brainstorming recipes. Look for recipes that are adapted from sites or programs that have a history of working with kids, school nutrition staff, and/or serving large quantities. Choose a recipe that your program has the capacity to manage given monetary, equipment, or time

constraints. It is beneficial if the recipe is feasible for school nutrition staff to potentially incorporate into the menu. Keep in mind the seasonality of ingredients when selecting a recipe. This [Local Harvest Calendar](#) is a great resource to determine what foods are accessible throughout the year in Arkansas. You might select a recipe with ingredients that are available to purchase from a local farmer! Search for local food and producers in your area [here](#). Consider accessibility and affordability of recipe ingredients for families too; students will likely want to recreate the recipe at home and share it with their loved ones.

Food Sourcing

There are numerous options to source ingredients for your taste test. We encourage you to be creative and consider ways to work with cafeteria staff, local farmers, or community organizations for sourcing ingredients. Below is a list of potential food sources for the taste test:

- School district or cafeteria purchasing
- National Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- School garden produce
- Local farmers/farm stands
- Farmers markets
- Local grocery stores
- Community gardens
- Food donations (grocers, wholesale, markets, non-profits)
- Food bank or food pantry
- Nutrition centers
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service SNAP-Ed

Program: Find your County Extension Agent to determine your eligibility for participation in the program [here](#).



Taste Test Promotion

Before you host a taste test, it is important to get the word out to the school community! There are many ways to promote a taste test including but not limited to the examples provided below. Feel free to brainstorm other creative ways that are not mentioned in this guide!



Posters & Flyers

Connect with a class or group of students to make fun, colorful posters to display around the school. Be sure to include the day, time, and location of the taste test, the food product(s) that will be offered, and encouraging language. Check with school administrators about hanging up posters and flyers and place them in approved, high-traffic areas at eye level to gain attention.

Bulletin Boards

Partner with the art teacher to create a bulletin board display of student artwork related to the upcoming taste test. Reinforce state standards on an informative bulletin board by providing a map of where the main taste test ingredient originated from or how the ingredients can benefit the body. Create an interactive bulletin board with a word search of ingredients for the taste test, or provide a space where students can write how they feel about the upcoming taste test.

Other Ideas

Keep parents and families informed by sharing information in the school newsletter or sending a flyer home with students! News blast the upcoming taste test during morning announcements on the day before and the day of the taste test. Social media can also be a great avenue for promoting the taste test!

Taste Testing

Taste tests are a way to celebrate trying new foods and can be a recognizable way to promote a schoolwide culture of "trying new things" to students, teachers, administrators, school nutrition staff, and families. Decide where to host the taste test based on your school's needs. For instance, you could host a taste test in the cafeteria, a hallway most students walk through, the school's lobby, the school garden, the playground, or at a school-wide event. Cafeteria/school staff can help you identify what method best fits the school's needs. Here are a handful of strategies for facilitating a taste test:

- A cart is brought to students with a taste test item to sample.
- A table is set up with items, and students go to a volunteer to taste a sample.



- A volunteer carries items around in a bowl and serves samples directly onto student plates or trays in the cafeteria.
- Students sample the taste test item that is already included on the lunch menu.

Student Voting

The purpose of voting is to create space for student voices by gathering their feedback and opinions. Allowing students to provide feedback about what they tasted communicates to them that their input and preferences are valued. The most common way to measure student preference in a taste test is to ask them if they tried it, liked it, or loved it after they have tried the new food.

Brainstorm creative ways for students to cast their vote. Here is a list of ideas to get you started:

- Dropping a seed or other small object into a labeled jar
- Raising a thumb in the air
- Casting a paper ballot
- Sticker voting on a labeled poster
- Stamping a labeled poster
- Marking a tally on a labeled poster



Celebrating Results



Sharing student feedback from the taste test is a unique opportunity to celebrate students for being willing to try new foods and share their opinions. You might use the same outlets (posters, flyers, bulletin boards, announcements, etc.) to share taste test results and photos with the school community and families. Taste test results can be a useful tool to get students excited about trying new foods, inform school-food vendors about student preferences, and celebrate foods grown and produced in Arkansas. Taste test results might also influence what is grown in the school garden, school meal offerings, and future taste test recipes!

Want to know more?

For additional help and support you may contact: Lindsey Cartwright, Arkansas Department of Agriculture, lindsey.cartwright@agriculture.arkansas.gov, (501) 442-5710

This resource was adapted from a [Taste Test Guide](#) developed by FoodCorps.

For more information and to sign up for the newsletter, visit arfarmtoschool.org.

