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Survey Prompts Significant Changes in AAFES School Lunches

MAINZ-KASTEL, Germany – A survey, administered last spring by the school lunch provider at Army and Air Force installations in nine countries overseas, has resulted in some noticeable changes to the menu for the current school year.

“The results made it clear that the vegetarian option should consist of more than just a salad and options for students unable to tolerate the protein gluten found in wheat, barley or rye should be expanded,” said Army & Air Force Exchange Service school lunch program’s Staff Dietician Maj. Janetta Blackmore. “Our homework was not only to find a way to meet the daily nutritional needs of gluten-sensitive and vegetarian students, but also satisfy the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s nutritional guidelines while providing meals that taste good.”

A summer of work later, AAFES-operated lunchrooms are serving up a diverse menu that includes turkey tetrazzini, blackbean burgers, spinach & tomato salads, whole grain pastas and “chik’n” nuggets for vegetarians as well as nine gluten free entrées for gluten-sensitive students.

In addition to meals specific to special dietary considerations, the AAFES survey resulted in changes to standard school lunch options including more frozen vs. canned vegetables like “flame roasted potato medley,” “Montego Bay vegetable blend” and “roasted Mediterranean vegetables” that includes yellow squash, zucchini, carrots, green beans, onions, red/yellow & green bell pepper. Baked garlic and rosemary seasoned new potatoes will replace tater tots on the patterned meal menu.



“We are even changing the way we serve foods to the students, arranging items in individual portions on trays to showcase the various food choices” Blackmore said. “And High school students now have six choices instead of the four they had last year and elementary students’ options have gone from three to four meals each day.”

Consistent with the feedback received, AAFES’ school lunch team is also decreasing flash-fried foods and placing a greater emphasize on baking. In fact, schools within the AAFES system in Europe are already relying solely on baked goods while kitchens in the Pacific work to acquire the equipment needed to totally eliminate fried products from their a la carte menus.

The changes implemented as a result of the survey have even gone beyond the lunch tray as parents can now make prepayments for school lunches using a bank account or credit card through www.mealpayplus.com.

“What we’re providing is a direct result of the input received last year,” said Blackmore. “I think it’s important that everyone knows that their input is important to the quality of the school experience and hope parents and students will keep the changes in mind when AAFES conducts its next school lunch survey this spring.”

AAFES serves approximately 21,000 pattern meals each day for a total of more than 4.4 million meals each school year. AAFES supports educational programs in 92 schools throughout Europe and the Pacific on a break even basis as a service to Army and Air Force Families.

-- 30 --

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