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Wallowa County CHIEFTAIN



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Smoothies: How do you get children to eat their fruits and veggies?

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Wallowa School District has discovered one solution

By Paul Wahl

Wallowa County Chieftain

Schools across the country are looking for ways to encourage children to eat more fruits and vegetables.

Wallowa School District has hit upon an idea that appears to be working.

Turn those otherwise objectionable ingredients into a cold and creamy smoothie and students will slurp them down and ask for more.

"Most students look forward to them," said Kathy DeVore, head cook, into whose domain the recently purchased slurpie machine has fallen. "There's very little waste with smoothies."

The tabletop unit was purchased with grant funds and works much like an ice cream freezer.

"We had heard about the success Imbler was having with smoothies and decided we would like to give it a try," said Supt. Bret Uptmore.

The \$1,000 award was announced June 19.

Uptmore credits Ann Bloom, Nutrition Education Program Asstant with OSU Extension Service in Wallowa County, for steering the effort.

"I'm always looking for small grants to write for them so the district can have equipment or whatever they need," Bloom said.

A new drinking fountain and water bottle refill stations were also purchased with grant money as well as funds from Soroptimist International.

This grant was part of a FuelUp2Play60 request to the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council in Portland.

"The kids like the smoothies because they taste good," Bloom said. "Parents and teachers like them, I think, because the kids get in an extra serving of fruits and vegetables without even really knowing they are eating something healthy for them."

The smoothie machine is pressed into action several days each week primarily for breakfast and occasionally for lunch. DeVore, who has been with the district four years but has nearly two decades of experience as school cook, mixes the fruit or veggie of the day with a product known as YoCream, produced by Dannon. It's mostly nonfat milk but also has live and active cultures like yogurt.

"Just about anything will work," said DeVore, who has regularly used berries, oranges, pears, pineapple and even graham crackers. Kale produced an appropriately green concoction that students eyed warily before imbibing.

Bloom said the Popeye Power Smoothie — made with spinach, of course — adds pineapple, orange juice or a banana to the mix as a disguise.

A gallon and a half of mixture makes 40 four-ounce servings, which is what elementary students receive. High schoolers get seven-ounce servings.

Any leftovers are frozen for later consumption.

Imbler schools have also discovered smoothies are a hit.

"Our goal was to entice more secondary students to eat breakfast," said Imbler Supt. of Schools Angie Lakey-Campbell. "We believe smoothies provide them with a quick easy breakfast that they can eat on the go if they need to."

It's also economical.

"It allows us to use products in our school lunch program that we would otherwise find difficult to use," she said. "For example, we serve frozen strawberries in our salad bar. When the berries thaw, there is a great deal of juice that comes with them. The juice works great as part of the smoothie mix."

Besides the obvious nutritional value, Uptmore said he likes the smoothies because they're fun.

"That's kind of been a theme for us this year," he said. "It's a bit of a departure in the way things are normally done and the staff, teachers and students have accepted it well."

Wallowa spends around \$113,000 annually for food service. There are nearly 200 students enrolled in k-12. Uptmore said not all students take part in the hot lunch program. Meals often include freshly baked bread.

Much of the funding is from federal and state coffers.

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