

Study examines role of vegetable food pairings in school plate waste

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"Plate waste warriors," or Texas A&M University students paid by the hour, weigh each entrée before being served as part of a study on what foods are most eaten on school meals. Credit: Texas A&M AgriLife Research / Blair Fannin

A study led by a team of Texas A&M University System researchers found school meals paired with popular vegetables are less likely to wind up in garbage bins.

A [team](#) led by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and the Institute for Obesity Research and Program Evaluation at Texas A&M University measured food waste in three elementary schools in Bryan and Dallas.

The schools are participants in the U.S. Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program both in pre- and post-implementation of the new standards.

The study was funded by the Alliance for Potato Research and Education and is published in the journal, *Food and Nutrition Sciences*.

"Our research team looked at whether there is a relationship between consumption of certain entrees and vegetables that would lead to plate waste," said Dr. Oral Capps Jr., an AgriLife Research economist in College Station. "We found that popular entrees such as burgers and chicken nuggets, contributed to greater waste of less popular vegetables."

Conversely, entrees paired with potatoes - served as tator tots, oven-baked French fries, and wedges - experienced the least amount of overall waste, Capps said.

"Our study shows that optimizing entrée-vegetable pairings in schools meals has the potential to positively impact vegetable consumption, which is especially important for those [students](#) relying on school meals for their energy and nutrient needs," Capps said.

The data were collected by a team of "plate waste warriors," Texas A&M students who were paid by the hour, Capps said. Each wore a different colored apron that is associated with the assigned waste bin in which the entrée is discarded. A minimum of eight workers was needed at each school during the lunch periods, which were typically 10:45 a.m. through 1 p.m. The A&M students gathered the trays containing leftover portions.

Leftovers were separated into different waste bags and each bag was weighed on a scale for plate-waste measurement. When students went through the lunch line, a sticker was placed on the food tray to identify the vegetable and entrée chosen. Students on the free lunch program were also evaluated for [plate waste](#). The tray with the corresponding sticker was weighed and recorded to help calculate overall food waste.

More information: Investigating the Relationship between Food Pairings and Plate Waste from Elementary School Lunches [DOI: 10.4236/fns.2015.611107](#)

Provided by Texas A&M University

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