

SCHOOL MILK IN FINLAND

Background

School meal service in Finland is one of a kind in the world, since free school lunches are served at comprehensive schools as well as at upper levels every school day. The first catering kitchens in schools were established in the early 1900's. In 1943 a law was passed requiring the municipalities to arrange a free lunch for all pupils at elementary schools and since late 70's the school meals have been free to all pupils from primary to high school levels, aged 7-19.

School lunch includes warm main course, salad, milk and bread.

There are guidelines for school meals, including advises about nutrition, composition of meals (main dish, bread, vegetables, skimmed (0 % fat) or low fat (1-1,5 %) fat milk and water) and about environment of the canteen. The meals are served at schools by well trained personnel and under supervision of teachers. Carbonated drinks and vending machines are not allowed at school canteens.

The importance of the school meals as a pedagogic tool to teach good nutrition and eating habits is emphasized as well as the significance of increasing the consumption of vegetables, full corn bread and skimmed or low fat milk. No other drinks but milk and water should be served on regular bases in the school canteens. A glass of milk gives a wide range of nutrients and most of them in good amount of child's daily need of nutrients.

What does it cost?

In the city of Helsinki the cost of school lunch service is 5 % of the total budget of education, 50 % of that going to food and the other half to the salaries and the rent of the canteen and kitchen equipment. The real cost of an average school lunch is this year 1,65 € in comprehensive schools. In average the milk costs 12 % of the total cost of food. This is paid by city budget, supported by the state budget and school milk subsidy from European Union.

School milk

Milk is served at every school cooled every normal school day. In most schools there are at least two types (semi-skimmed and skimmed milk) of milk available. All school milk is pasteurized and there is also low-lactose milk available. Milk includes added vitamin D in Finland. About 5 % of total milk consumption in Finland is consumed at schools.

The most important thing in school milk service is to give the model of drinking milk with meals. This model must frequently be promoted by dairy companies together with canteen personnel and teachers. The dairy maid is elected every year. She visits schools to promote milk and to serve as a model for pupils.

Cool milk, kind staff, good food and a nice canteen are factors which increase the consumption of school food and milk, too. The consumption of food and milk varies from school to school and it does not depend only on the amount of money school spends on food but on the atmosphere in school canteen and for example on the support of grown ups at school.