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## Healthier fare: Will kids bite? Feds to tighten school nutrition guidelines

By **Ashley M. Heher** | Associated Press | Story updated at 7:29 PM on Thursday, July 19, 2007

CHICAGO - Mark Smith is convinced he can turn a generation of junk-food eaters into die-hard devotees of what he calls "the salsa of this decade."

The dynamo treat? Single-serve portions of hummus and it may be coming to a school cafeteria near you.

As the federal government prepares to raise standards for food served in schools, vendors like Smith are rolling out healthier versions of lunchroom favorites. Now there are whole-grain pizzas and baked chicken nuggets, along with new offerings like hummus. It's all part of an uphill - and so far losing - battle to slow rising obesity rates.

Government rules, which limit fat and require certain levels of vitamins and protein, are about to get tougher. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the national school lunch and breakfast programs, will announce changes by the end of the year.

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hummus.

"It's our jobs as adults to teach children how to eat," said Thorton, president of the School Nutrition Association.

"We're not going to turn this around overnight. We have to change parents, too. It's going to take everybody."

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Robin Lightfoot of Garden City, Kan., listens to Kathy Cheop as she samples hummus at the Wild Garden booth at the School Nutrition Association's annual meeting Tuesday in Chicago.  
**Associated Press**

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But getting kids to choose broccoli florets over a fries-and-soda combo is a tall order. A recent Associated Press review of school nutrition studies found that classes on healthy foods and menu changes in the lunchroom have had little effect in altering generally bad eating habits of U.S. school kids.

"I've witnessed kids who have a choice of fresh foods and vegetables and other choices and they choose the other choices, because that's what kids do," said Dr. Reginald Washington of Denver, who is on a committee on childhood obesity for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Kids agree. Sean McCarney, a 12-year-old from North Huntington, Pa., says his peers are "programmed to like fried stuff so it's hard for them to change over."

Food suppliers know that, and they are scurrying to find options that could become lunchroom favorites.

While hawking his hummus and pita chips at this week's School Nutrition Association annual meeting in Chicago, Smith rattled off the health benefits of the garbanzo bean-based dip.

"It tastes really good," he added. But it may not be for everyone, especially young eaters, said the vice president of sales for Ziyad Brothers Importing of Cicero, Ill.

"The name hummus scares them a little bit," he said.

Despite the challenges, educators say they hope the updated meals introduce children to new foods, like sliced kiwis, blood oranges, and even

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