



Contacts: Tatum Wan,
twan@urbanschoolfoodalliance.org
(818) 590-1530

Jackie Wei, NRDC
jwei@nrdc.org
(310) 434-2325

GOOD-BYE POLYSTYRENE TRAY. HELLO COMPOSTABLE PLATE.
Six largest school districts to remove 225 million polystyrene trays a year from landfills by creating a new compostable round plate for cafeterias

NEW YORK, May 20, 2015 – The Urban School Food Alliance (Alliance), a coalition of the largest school districts in the United States that includes New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami-Dade, Dallas and Orlando, announced that it will start rolling out the use of compostable round plates at cafeterias this month, saying good-bye to polystyrene trays. Food and nutrition directors in the Alliance specified the round shape to allow students to eat their food off of plates like they do at home, replacing the institutional rectangular lunch tray.

“This news is a game changer,” said Alliance Chairman Eric Goldstein and chief executive officer of School Support Services for the New York City Department of Education. “As leaders in school meals, we’re proud to create a product that students will not only find easy to use, but one that also protects the environment for many years to come.”

The districts in the Alliance collectively procure more than \$550 million in food and supplies annually to serve more than 2.9 million students enrolled in their schools. A landmark collaboration, the Urban School Food Alliance’s six districts worked together to challenge industry to develop an innovative and affordable environmentally-friendly round plate to replace the standard polystyrene tray school cafeterias use across the country. Serving 2.5 million meals a day, the six districts project to remove 225 million polystyrene trays from landfills every year.

“These cities are teaching kids that sustainability and smarter choices can be integrated into every part of your daily life – even your lunch,” said Mark Izeman, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), one of the nation’s leading environmental and public health organizations and a non-profit partner of the Alliance. “Shifting from polystyrene trays to compostable plates will allow these cities to dramatically slash waste sent to landfills, reduce plastics pollution in our communities and oceans, and create valuable compost that can be re-used on our farms. We are proud to work with a group of school systems dedicated to driving landmark changes in the health and sustainability of school food.”

Schools across America use polystyrene trays because they cost less than compostable ones. Polystyrene trays average about \$0.04 apiece, compared to its compostable counterpart, which averages about \$0.12 cents each. Given the extremely tight budgets in school meal programs, affording compostable plates seemed impossible until the Urban School Food Alliance districts used their collective purchasing power to innovate a compostable round plate for schools at an affordable cost of \$0.049 each.

"Together, we developed a quality sustainable product that will be strategically used in our cafeterias to be ecologically sound and maintain effective business practices," said Penny Parham, administrative director of the Department of Food & Nutrition at Miami-Dade County Public Schools. "We are proud of the opportunity we have created."

The American-made molded fiber compostable round plate is produced from pre-consumer recycled newsprint. It is FDA-approved and manufactured in Maine by Huhtamaki North America. The Alliance round plate has five compartments, with the beverage compartment strategically placed in the middle to balance the weight of a typical meal. The innovative design prevents hinging or bending and is easy to handle.

This spring, Urban School Food Alliance schools districts will work toward purchasing compostable cutlery and are expected to roll out the new utensils in schools during the 2015-2016 school year. Compostable cutlery will replace institutional-looking plastic "sporks" (combination of spoon and fork in one) that students find cumbersome to use.

To continually maintain the health and well being of students, the Urban School Food Alliance announced last December that members will start procuring antibiotic-free chicken for the 2015-2016 school year. The Alliance seeks to ensure that students receive the highest quality meals possible.

To learn more about the Urban School Food Alliance, please visit www.urbanschoolfoodalliance.org.

To reach out to each member city of the Urban School Food Alliance, please email the respective communications specialist from each district:

New York Department of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
Chicago Public Schools
Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Dallas Independent Public Schools
Orange County Public Schools (Orlando)

Jason Fink - JFink4@schools.nyc.gov
Ellen Morgan - ellen.morgan@lausd.net
Jessica Perez - jperez336@cps.edu
Denise Landman - dlandman@dadeschools.net
André Riley - anriley@dallasisd.org
Jennifer Smith - jennifer.smith3@ocps.net

###