

FARM TO SCHOOL *Taste Test Guide*



What is a Taste Test?

A taste test is a small sample of food offered to introduce the flavor, texture and smell of the new food. The food being tasted could be slices of South Carolina grown peaches, a small bowl of watermelon mint salad or a freshly prepared citrus green bean bake! After the sample has been tasted, the taste test participants can vote on how much they liked it or if they would be willing to try it again.

Why do a Taste Test?

Children can be predictable in their eating habits and the foods they choose, but taste buds change every seven years! It is important for children to taste new and different foods so that they can experience foods that they do not usually eat. It can take up to ten times to determine if a new food is liked or not. First time taste tests are a great way to introduce new foods in a fun, exciting, and pressure-free environment.

Schools that are looking to implement and promote healthy changes to their menu benefit from conducting taste tests. Taste tests provide

children with the opportunity to try new foods and prevent excess food waste. Introducing children to new foods with taste tests can help ensure that an item is marketable before it is offered on the menu. Best of all, children can experience new flavors with their peers, have hands-on participation, and both the administrators and the children can proudly say, "We love trying new foods at our school!"

Before taste testing can begin, there are three steps to consider when planning and implementing a taste test activity at your site.



1. **Develop a taste testing committee.** The committee can consist of a combination of food service staff, children, teachers/ caregivers, and/or administration members. The committee will decide how often taste tests should occur, the format, the location, what foods to try, and how to fund the foods being tested. They can also analyze taste test results.
 - Find supportive staff outside of the committee; your best allies are the people who interact with your staff.
 - Meet with food service personnel to communicate the committee's thoughts on how to use local food on the menu.
 - If you plan to use food from local farmers, consult resources from SC Farm to Institution, such as the SC Farmer Profile.
 - › The SC Farmer Profile helps find a farmer in the area who can supply produce to you institution. Your farmer may also be able and willing to speak to a group the day of the taste test.



2. **Set goals for the taste test program.** Before doing a taste test, establish some goals that are easy to communicate. Below are a few questions to consider:
 - Will the taste test expand children's food choices?
 - Will the taste test encourage healthier snack or lunch choices to be brought from home or purchased in the school cafeteria?

- Will the school's lunch and breakfast menus be expanded?
 - How will local foods be introduced?
3. **Remember the details.** Details are an important part of any program. Meet and thoroughly plan with your taste test committee to ensure that the smallest details of the program have been discussed. Some questions for the committee to think about are:
 - What food will be featured first? Will there be a theme?
 - Where will food be purchased from? How will the food be ordered?
 - Which recipes will be tried?
 - How much with the ingredients cost?
 - Does the food service staff have adequate equipment to prepare the food? Who will prepare it?
 - If everyone likes the new food, can the recipe be incorporated into future menus?

Below is a sample timeline for coordinating and implementing an institution-wide taste test.

2-3 WEEKS PRIOR

- At the committee meeting, decide which food will be tested. Make certain that the foods chosen fit into the childcare/school's program and align with the committee goals.
- Consider seasonality because produce tastes best when it's fresh and in season.
 - › Refer to the South Carolina Harvest Finder, SC Produce Availability Table, SC Palmetto Pick of the Month, and other resources to determine which produce is available.
- Find a group that is willing to help! Whether it is preparing and serving the food, cleaning up, or conducting a survey afterwards.
 - › This does not have to be food service staff, consider asking children or any volunteers who visit your site.
- If purchasing from a farmer, contact them be sure the product is available.
- Optional: Prepare nutritional information about the food.



ONE WEEK PRIOR

- Check with taste test committee to make sure everyone is prepared; reserve time during your classroom time.
- Make sure the taste test food has been purchased and will be delivered promptly.
- Prepare a taste testing survey. Refer to the end of the document for sample evaluation guides to use.
- Advertise the taste test with the newsletters, announcements, or on the website.



Tips for a Successful Taste Test

- Choose foods that increase the consumption of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Refer to the Palmetto Picks, SC Harvest Finder, SC Produce Availability Table, and other resources from the SC Department of Agriculture to determine which produce is available.
- Try foods that are or could be incorporated into meals on site.
- Start with monthly taste tests of simple, affordable food so that it can be easily repeated.
- Use local produce when possible, and invite local farmers using the SC farmer profile.
- If possible, work with faculty, staff, and food service personnel to have a small group of children help prepare the food. Remember, “if they make it, they will eat it.”
- Offer small bite-size servings.
- Publicize the taste tests in emails or newsletters.
- Encourage tasters who did not finish the sample to compost the rest.

DAY OF THE TEST TASTE

- Remind staff and children of the taste test on the morning announcements and with signs in conspicuous areas - for example, the lobby.
- Take pictures and notes to report for the newsletter, social media, afternoon announcements, and evaluation team.
- Have the food service personnel explain food safety when preparing foods; allow time for everyone to wash their hands.
 - › Use separate cutting boards for produce and meat, poultry, and seafood.
 - › Use hot and soapy water to wipe down preparation surfaces and spills.
 - › Cough or sneeze into elbow, not into hands.

DAY AFTER

- Report the results to staff and students describing the taste test, the food tasted, and the recipe to try at home on the morning announcements or other means of communication at your site.
- Have recipe information readily available for everyone at the site.
- Share any pictures or quotes from participants.

Taste Tests in the Cafeteria

Cafeteria taste tests are a great way to introduce new foods to everyone at the school — teachers, children, administrators, and auxiliary staff. Taste tests in the cafeteria give everyone an opportunity to see the relationship between food service personnel and the meals served. Regular taste tests can become an exciting school-wide event.

Tips for Successful Cafeteria Taste Tests

- Place a sample at each chair at each table.
- Invite more than one class or group to enjoy the taste test together.
- Have trash cans readily available by the exits.

Taste Tests in a Classroom

Many schools introduce new foods in an informal setting among their peers. Classroom taste testing can be ideal because it is a familiar setting and too much change for some children can be overwhelming. Giving them the opportunity to stay in their classroom can make them feel more comfortable while tasting a new food.

Tips for a Successful Classroom Taste Test

- When using local foods, show where it is grown in the state.
- Keep food service staff involved. Invite them to the classroom to introduce the new food and this will help strengthen their relationship with the children.
- Invite a farmer to bring their local food and discuss how it is grown.
- Invite a local chef or dietitian to discuss healthy recipes or provide demonstrations.
- To help keep down costs, ask parents/guardians to provide some of the foods
- Ask parents and volunteers to help organize taste testing.
- Encourage children to experiment with recipes and create names for new dressing or dips to increase vegetable consumption.

Taste Test Reminders

- Wash hands well!
- Have options for children with allergies.
- Sit down while tasting.
- Do not forget to clean up!



Palmetta Pick

OF THE MONTH



SOUTH CAROLINA
FARM *to* SCHOOL



JANUARY

Greens



FEBRUARY

Broccoli



MARCH

Cabbage



APRIL

Strawberries



MAY

Summer Squash



JUNE

Corn



JULY

Watermelons



AUGUST

Peaches



SEPTEMBER

Tomatoes



OCTOBER

Cucumbers



NOVEMBER

Apples



DECEMBER

Sweet Potatoes



For more information about other fruits and vegetables
available in South Carolina each month, please visit

CERTIFIEDSCGROWN.COM

For more information about South Carolina
Farm to School, including recipes, please visit

SCFARMTOSCHOOL.COM

Sample Taste Test Evaluation Form

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Today I tried: _____

(Name of food)

The food looked:



The food tasted:



The food smelled:



The food made me feel:



Other notes: _____

Sample Taste Test Evaluation Form

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Today I tried: _____
(Name of food)

Directions: Circle the number that best answers each question.



How does the food look? 1 2 3 4 5 6

How does the food taste? 1 2 3 4 5 6

How is the texture?
(How does it feel in your mouth) 1 2 3 4 5 6

How would you rate the food overall? 1 2 3 4 5 6

Other notes: _____

Sample Taste Test Evaluation Form

HIGH SCHOOL

Today I tried: _____

(Name of food)

Directions: Check one rating for each of the following: Appearance, Flavor, Texture, Smell, and Overall Acceptability on a scale from 1 to 9, 1 being “like extremely” to 9 being “dislike extremely.”

	Like Extremely 1	Like Very Much 2	Like Moderately 3	Like Slightly 4	Neither Like nor Dislike 5	Dislike Slightly 6	Dislike Moderately 7	Dislike Very Much 8	Dislike Extremely 9
Appearance									
Flavor									
Texture									
Smell									
Overall Acceptability									

Other notes: _____

This document was adapted from VT FEED Vermont Farm to School: A Guide to Taste Testing Local Food in Schools March 2010. vtfeed.org/resources/guide-taste-testing-local-foods-schools

For more information on food safety, refer to: fsis.usda.gov/shared/PDF/Kitchen_Companion.pdf

Taste Test Evaluation Form adapted from: fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/implementing-farm-school-activities-food-safety#foodsafety