

An Assessment of School Foodservice Professionals' Use and Request for Cranberry Products
Survey conducted by the Cranberry Marketing Committee at the 2013 School Nutrition Association Annual Nutrition Conference demonstrates a call for dried cranberries

Abstract:

The Cranberry Marketing Committee developed and conducted a survey at the Annual Nutrition Conference of the School Nutrition Association. The survey was designed to assess the use and demand for cranberry products among school foodservice professionals. Two hundred and three survey responses were collected, and the results demonstrated a great interest around using cranberries in school lunch, especially dried cranberries. Barriers to the use of cranberries in school lunch included cost, availability and recipes. Most respondents indicated they would be more likely to use cranberries in school meals if more forms were available on the USDA Foods Available List. Overall, cranberries are used in school lunch but may be used more often if the identified barriers are overcome and more cranberry products are added to the Foods Available List.

Background:

In March 2013, as a result of interest by the US cranberry industry, the Cranberry Marketing Committee (CMC) attended meetings with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) regarding increasing government procurement of US-grown cranberry products. As a result of those meetings and ongoing discussions, it was recommended that the CMC evaluate the use of and interest in cranberry products among customers of the USDA commodity feeding programs, including school foodservice. The demand for cranberries was assessed and opportunities were identified to help schools use cranberries in school foodservice programs.

This assessment led to the creation of a "School Lunch Toolkit" that includes five new school foodservice recipes, serving suggestions, nutrition information and ways cranberries help schools meet the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) requirements. The School Lunch Toolkit was distributed to attendees during the Annual Nutrition Conference of the School Nutrition Association (ANC-SNA) in Kansas City, July 15-17, 2013. At the same time, the CMC conducted a survey of 203 of the estimated 7,000 school foodservice supervisors, directors and managers that attended the conference. The goal of the survey was to gather more in depth information about the use and demand for cranberries among schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

This effort was initiated because the only cranberry product form currently available to school foodservice procurement programs through the USDA Available Foods List is cranberry sauce. As a result of the new NSLP guidelines, dried fruits, including cranberries, are creditable. In fact, dried fruit credits at twice its volume, providing the equivalent of ½ cup of fruit in school breakfast and lunch for every ¼ cup served. Furthermore, dried cranberries, like other dried fruits, may be used in the USDA Competitive Foods Program.

The CMC's presence at the ANC-SNA was also intended to inform school foodservice professionals how they can help get a broader array of cranberry products, particularly dried cranberries, added to the USDA Available Foods List.

Survey Design, Delivery and Results:

The 19-question survey was developed on SurveyMonkey® and administered on iPads at the CMC's ANC-SNA exhibit hall table. In exchange for completing the survey, attendees received a branded Cranberry Marketing Committee snack container. The complete de-identified survey results are available for viewing at uscranberries.com.

Discussion:

What school foodservice is saying about cranberries

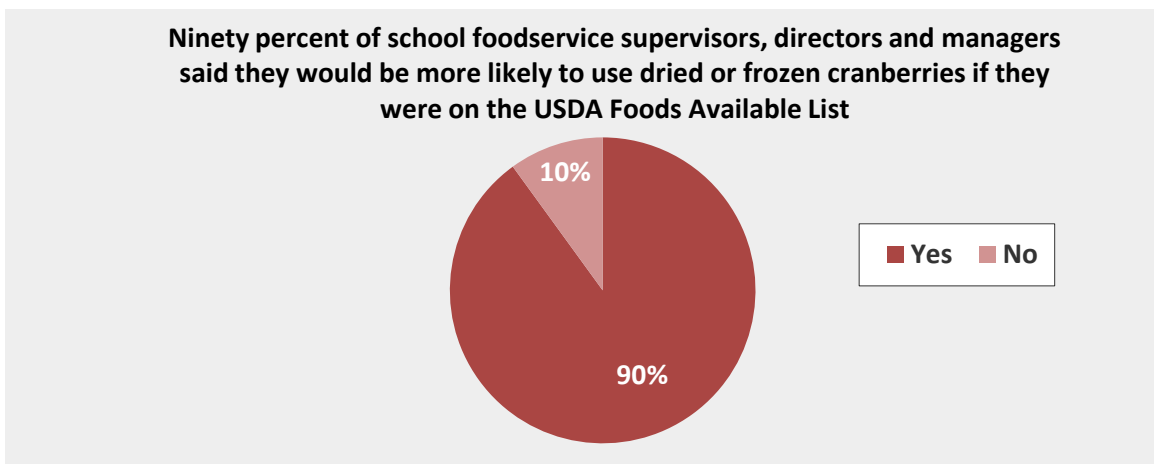
School foodservice supervisors, directors and managers want dried cranberries in child nutrition programs. The survey demonstrated that school foodservice professionals value cranberries and their versatility, especially dried cranberries, in school lunch. While some schools do use various forms of cranberries, cost and availability were identified as major barriers to use for school foodservice operations that do not use cranberries.

Ninety percent of foodservice professionals said they would be more likely to purchase dried or frozen cranberries if they were on the USDA Foods Available List (Figure 1). Adding dried cranberries to the USDA Foods Available List would help schools overcome the barriers of cost and accessibility by making cranberries available for purchase with entitlement dollars. Lack of recipes was cited as another barrier and has been addressed by the CMC, which has developed five cranberry-focused recipes that count toward the NSLP guidelines; they are available on uscranberries.com.

The findings below illustrate both the desire for dried cranberries in school lunch and a demand for their availability through the USDA Foods Available List.

Key findings from survey

Figure 1. The USDA Foods Available List and Likelihood of Cranberry Usage



Dried Cranberries: An in-demand commodity with year-round uses

- Of those people more likely to use cranberries if they were on the USDA Foods Available List, 97 percent stated they would use dried cranberries, 24 percent would use fresh cranberries, and 27 percent would use frozen cranberries
- Twenty-seven percent of people who use cranberries use dried cranberries once per month, 13 percent use them twice per month, 18 percent add them to the menu weekly, 14 percent do so daily, and 15 percent use them only around the holidays

Cranberries: Already on the menu for the National School Lunch Program

- Forty-seven percent of survey participants use cranberries (any form) in school lunch recipes. Of those people:
 - Twenty-eight percent serve them once per month, 13 percent do so twice per month, 21 percent use them weekly, 14 percent use them daily, and 24 percent only use them around holidays
 - Ninety-six percent use them in salads, 18 percent use them in sandwiches, 7 percent put them in casseroles and 11 percent add them to salsas

- Eleven percent use them in other recipes, such as cookies, breads/muffins, sauce, trail mix, yogurt, Jell-O, bistro packs or on salad bars
- People who don't use cranberries identified several barriers to use
 - The most common barriers are availability (37 percent), cost (33 percent), and lack of recipes (48 percent)
 - Survey participants had many ideas for increasing the use of cranberries in school lunch, including helping more cranberry products become commodities, providing more school/kid-friendly recipes, improving cost and having cranberries available at point of sale for students

Dried Fruit: Helps schools meet NSLP guidelines

- Sixty-nine percent of participants use dried fruit to meet the NSLP fruit requirements
 - Thirteen percent of those participants use them in recipes, 36 percent use them as a separate side item with the meal and 51 percent use them both ways
 - People use a variety of dried fruits, including cranberries, raisins, prunes, pineapples, cherries, apples, dates, blueberries, peaches, USDA trail mix, mixed fruit, bananas and figs

Cranberry Sauce: A holiday staple

- Cranberry sauce was found to be most frequently used around the holidays, with 67 percent of respondents who use cranberries serving cranberry sauce—on its own or in recipes—at the holidays

Fresh and Frozen Cranberries: The under-utilized, versatile school lunch ingredients

- Fresh and frozen cranberries are not frequently used in school lunch despite their broad range of uses
 - Of people who use cranberries, 7 percent use fresh cranberries once per month, 3 percent use them twice per month, 4 percent use them weekly, 2 percent do so daily, and 15 percent cook with them only around the holidays
 - Of those who use cranberries, 6 percent use frozen cranberries once per month, 2 percent use them twice per month, 1 percent do so weekly, and 4 percent only put fresh or frozen cranberries on the plate around the holidays

Conclusion and Recommendations:

While nearly half (47%) of survey respondents indicated that they currently include various cranberry product forms in their offerings, the absence of recipes, cost and availability of cranberry products were identified as the predominant reasons why cranberries are not featured more prominently in school foodservice. The development of the Cranberry School Lunch Toolkit and Recipes has helped reverse the absence of recipes, but cost and availability continue to be a problem. By including dried cranberries on the USDA Foods Available List, more schools would have access to a fruit option they want to include in school meals. An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (90%) indicated that if dried or frozen cranberries were on the USDA Foods Available List, they would be more likely to purchase these cranberry product forms. The survey demonstrated that some schools do use cranberries, but more would with improvements in cost and accessibility, which can be achieved by adding dried cranberries to the USDA Foods Available List. With demand for cranberries from school foodservice professionals, the USDA AMS is open to reconsidering them for this list. Schools may express interest by reaching out to their contacts at the USDA or their [NSLP State Agency](#).

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