Taste Test Guide

Adapted from: Vermont Harvest of the Month
(http://www.vermontharvestofthemonth.org)

Why do taste tests?

Students are often reluctant to try new foods. Taste tests introduce new menu items in a way that increases familiarity with healthy food choices, involves the school community, and builds a culture of trying new foods. Research has shown that children (and adults!) need to try new foods multiple times (up to twelve times or more) before deciding that they like them. Taste tests of Louisiana Harvest of the Month (LA HOM) products give students an opportunity to try locally produced, in-season foods each month. Students may not like broccoli as kindergarteners, but providing regular opportunities for them to try it in various forms throughout their school years can lead to a whole new generation of broccoli lovers! All participating LA HOM schools or afterschool programs are encouraged to conduct at least one taste test each month.

When and Where

When: Taste tests work best when implemented on a regular schedule. We suggest a monthly school-wide taste test highlighting the current LA HOM product.

Where: Taste tests can be run successfully in either the classroom or the cafeteria. Each school or afterschool program has its own unique circumstances, schedules, and infrastructure, so be sure to take these into consideration when deciding where to implement your taste tests.

Benefits

- Classroom Benefits
  - Educators can integrate lessons from LA HOM classroom handouts.
  - Data is collected in a more controlled environment.
  - LA HOM Team Leaders serve as leaders within the school.
  - Taste tests can be prepared by cafeteria staff or within each classroom (depending on the recipe and availability of equipment)
- Cafeteria Benefits
  - Cafeteria staff or other school staff can integrate lessons from LA HOM cafeteria handouts.
  - Data is collected in a central location.
  - No classroom or instruction time is required.

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How do I run a successful taste test?

Below are some helpful tips for conducting successful taste tests at your school:

- **Involve students.** When students are involved in preparing, serving, and surveying other students during a taste test, they will be more willing to try the new foods. Work with educators to create a schedule for classes to participate in preparing and sharing the taste tests.
- **Recruit volunteers.** Parent volunteers are very helpful during taste tests, especially for serving or helping to prepare food. Place a note in your school or afterschool program newsletter asking for parents and guardians interested in helping out.
- **Have a regular schedule.** Commit to taste tests on a certain day each month; this aids planning and makes taste testing a predictable part of the school or program culture.
- **Choose appropriate recipes.** The best recipes are simple and inexpensive to make, so they can be easily added into the regular meal program. Look at the Cafeteria and Classroom handouts for recipe ideas each month.
- **Use local ingredients.** Whenever possible, use ingredients that are grown or raised locally or in Louisiana for taste testing for the LA HOM items and the other ingredients. Consider working with the food service to coordinate purchasing of LA HOM items.
- **Use Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program funds.** LA HOM works great with the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack program since it includes both the foods and nutrition education.
- **Advertise.** Generate excitement for your taste tests by announcing them in the school newsletter, take-home letters, bulletin boards, and morning announcements.
- **Don't yuck my yum!** Remind students not to say negative things about how something tastes because it might discourage others from trying something new. If a student tries something that she or he does not like, ask that they quietly spit it out in a napkin so other students have an opportunity to taste it and form their own opinions. Encourage students to use respectful language such as "I don't care for it." Remind students that sometimes you have to try new things several times before you begin to like them. You may be surprised to find that your new favorite dish includes ingredients that were previously your least favorite!
- **Use the right materials.** If you're doing a taste test in the cafeteria, talk to your food service director about whether you can simply serve a sample on each child's tray. Consider purchasing reusable sample cups for the total approximate number of students you plan to engage in taste tests.
- **Send home copies of the recipe.** Students love to share what they have done and learned at school with their families. Ask students if they tried the recipe at home!

How should I collect feedback from students?

Getting feedback, both formally and informally, from the students is an important part of the taste test process. There are many ways to gather this feedback, and the size, scope, and context of your taste test will determine which approach is best. Here are three suggested methods of capturing feedback:

Ballot Boxes or Cups:

- Set up a table in the cafeteria with three containers labeled to indicate *Tried it, Liked it*, and *Loved it* options. The ballot boxes could display the words or symbols such as smiley/frowny faces or thumbs up/down. Have a container of small objects such as dry beans or tokens ready for students to use to cast their votes.
- After the kids have tasted the food, encourage them to cast their vote in the box that corresponds to their opinion.
- This method is interactive, fun, and allows them to record their opinion anonymously. Students might also be more apt to vote in accordance with their own opinion, rather than being influenced by what their friends' reactions are.
- For taste tests in the classroom, count out the tokens aloud with the students and chart the results.

Visual Count, Tally:

- In a large group, you can walk around the room and keep a tally for every *Tried it, Liked it*, and *Loved it* as each child tells you their opinion about the taste test.
- Count and keep tally.

Paper Survey:

- Casting a paper ballot can be fun, and it has the same advantage as an anonymous ballot box: the secrecy can encourage students to vote in accordance with their own opinion.
- Create a simple paper ballot asking students to circle their preference: *Tried it, Liked it,* or *Loved it*.
- Set up a ballot table and remind students to cast their votes after trying the taste test.

What do I do with the data once it is collected?

Food and nutrition education has both cross-curricular and extra-curricular applications. Below are a few ideas:

- **Curriculum connections.** Taste test votes provide a wonderful set of data to work with in mathematics lessons about statistics, graphing or percentages. See the monthly Classroom handouts for more activity ideas.
- **School garden connections.** If a taste test item is particularly popular, contact your school garden coordinator(s) to see if it would be possible to grow it right there on the school grounds.
- **Share your results.** Share your results with your child nutrition director and manager to see if that food could be added to the menu.

Classroom Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item:

Today's Recipe:

School:

Teacher's Name:

Total # Students:

Date:

Reminders for Teachers or HOM Volunteers:

- Please remember to share fun facts from the Classroom handouts with your students. This is a great opportunity for students to practice reading out loud.
- Pass out the taste test samples, then, ask for a show of hands to complete the survey below. Thank you!

Show of Hands Survey

Raise your hand if you	*# of students*
Tried it	
Liked it	
Loved it	

Thank you for helping collect this data.

Please return this form ASAP to: _____

(HOM Team Leader)

Cafeteria Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item:

Today's Recipe:

School:

Total # Students:

Date:

Reminders for Cafeteria Staff or HOM Volunteers:

- If the environment permits, share fun facts from the cafeteria handouts with students.
- If there is a voting station, make sure it is clearly marked.

Taste Test Results

Tried it	
Liked it	
Loved it	

Comments:

Thank you for helping collect this data.

Schoolwide Results Sheet

Date of the Taste Test:

Harvest of the Month Item:

Recipe:

Where did the taste test take place? ____ **Classrooms** ____ **Cafeteria**

	Tried it	Liked it	Loved it
Total			

Comments:

Thank you for helping collect this data.

Taste Test Ballots

Circle Only One

✓ Tried It

☺ Liked It

♥ Loved It

Circle Only One

✓ Tried It

☺ Liked It

♥ Loved It

Circle Only One

✓ Tried It

☺ Liked It

♥ Loved It

Circle Only One

✓ Tried It

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