

Appendix 6: THE STUDY OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions relating to two objectives are included under one heading. The questions address the following issues: Question 1, the magnitude of purchases in terms of volume and value (and trends); Questions 2 to 4, the composition of food purchases; Questions 5 to 11, procurement practices and distribution issues; and, Questions 12 to 14, the nature of purchases for a la carte use (an important issue in relation to meal choice in schools).

Develop national estimates of the quantity, value and per unit value of purchases

1. For SFAs participating in USDA-sponsored school nutrition programs in SY 2009/10, and distinguishing among purchased processed foods containing and not containing USDA-donated commodities and unprocessed commodities donated by the USDA:
 - a. What is the total quantity, value, and per unit value of all food acquired nationally?
 - b. What is the estimated dollar value per thousand students of these purchases?
 - c. How many SFAs report the purchasing of each of the individual food product types?
 - d. How does the volume of USDA commodity donations compare to current national estimates of commodities acquired by SFAs?
 - e. What are the characteristics of the different foods purchased and what are the differences in costs?

Analyze changes in the mix of foods and relative costs since 1996/97

2. For those SFAs participating in USDA-sponsored school nutrition programs in SY 2009/10, and distinguishing among processed foods containing and not containing USDA-donated commodities and unprocessed commodities donated by the USDA:
 - a. What changes occurred in the composition of foods acquired between SY 1996/97 and SY 2009/10?
 - b. What changes occurred in the dollar value and per unit value of individual food products acquired between SY 1996/97 and SY 2009/10?
 - c. What changes occurred between SY 1996/97 and SY 2009/10 in the extent to which foods are already prepared or processed?
3. To what extent have changes in the mix of foods acquired between SY 1996/97 and SY 2009/10 resulted from factors external to the school meals programs (e.g., because of changes in relative prices or the availability of different commodity donations)?
4. Are there differences in the mix of foods and the prices paid for food by:
 - a. FSMC supplied and Non-FSMC supplied districts?
 - b. Nutrient Standard menu-planning SFAs and food-based menu-planning SFAs?
 - c. Urban and rural SFAs?
 - d. Districts with different enrollment size?
 - e. Districts with different levels of poverty?
 - f. Districts with different levels of free and reduced price eligible students?
 - g. Districts in different regions?

Analyze school food purchase practices and their relationship to food costs

5. What practices are school systems following in the purchase of food and how have they changed since 1996/97?
6. What is the principal basis of selection among foods and among alternative sources of supply?
7. How important is the availability of local foods and what priority has been attached to purchasing food of local origin?
8. What is the level of competitiveness of the local food service market?
9. What practices are followed in the receipt of food including USDA-donated foods?
10. What are the relationships between school food procurement practices and (a) SFA characteristics, (b) school food costs, and (c) the mix of foods purchased and how have these changed since 1996/97?
11. How can the commodity distribution program be improved?

Analyze the role now being played by a la carte foods

12. Of the individual food products acquired by SFAs in 2009/10, which are used exclusively for a la carte offerings, both a la carte and reimbursable meals, and for reimbursable meals only?
13. What was the total value (in dollars) of food identified for use predominantly as a la carte in 2009/10?
14. What are the changes in the types of foods used predominantly for a la carte in 2009/10 compared with the results of SFPS-II?

The data collected and their analysis will contribute to decisions relating to the levels of reimbursement of meals, distribution procedures, communication policies as well as considerations of the general direction of current and past policies. The absence of this information could lead to the misalignment of programs to local needs (for example in the provision of donated foods) and the setting of program parameters that are inefficient (that incorrectly reflect the cost of purchasing foods).