

# Children Need Healthy Lunches

*Kathleen Rogers*

Our children are being shortchanged in the lunch line at school!

Up to half of the food a child eats in a day is consumed at school lunch. Some children also eat breakfast at school. But these meals are often not balanced and can contribute to poor eating habits and poor health. Many schools don't offer fresh fruits and vegetables, and almost a third of schools only offer the minimum recommended servings.

There are many reasons why schools don't provide nutritious lunches. One reason is that our government subsidizes meat and milk production. Meat and milk make fatty products like burgers, chicken nuggets, and pizza. These are the foods that schools feed to our children. Schools also buy inexpensive foods that require little preparation. The result? Children wait in long lines to be served food that is not even healthy!

Minorities and low-income children are disproportionately affected by this growing problem. Many of these children develop health problems such as obesity, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, and weak immune systems.

What can we do to improve the food our children consume at school? We can petition our elected officials to feed all children and feed them well. Congress should ensure that school lunches meet health standards set out by the Department of Agriculture and Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine.

The Child Nutrition and Women, Infants, and Children Reauthorization Act is set to expire in September 2009, which gives us a wonderful opportunity to address this serious issue. You can take action by contacting the U.S. Department of Agriculture and demanding increased funding and health guidelines for school lunches. For more information, visit <[www.earthday.net/policy](http://www.earthday.net/policy)>.



## Activities and Discussion

**What do you** remember about your school lunches? What do you think of your children's school lunches?

**Read the** highlights of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, which you can find at <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras)>.

**Contact** your representative in congress and let him/her know how you feel about this bill.

**Print out** the survey from <[www.angrymoms.com](http://www.angrymoms.com)> and use it to find out how people in your community feel about school lunches.

**Compare** this article to the one on p. 32. What type of action does Kerry Chemelowski take to improve his health? What type of action does this article ask you to take?

*Kathleen Rogers is the President of the Earth Day Network.*