Farm to School
Taste Tests in the Classroom

Introduction

When introducing new foods into snacks and school meals, taste tests can offer a chance for students to try new foods without the commitment of making it their lunch line choice. Taste tests also create “buzz” and create a special atmosphere to farm to school projects. This Taste Test guide shares simple, yet effective ways to conduct taste tests.

This resource is based on experience in Kent School District, where Nutrition Services introduced a variety of Washington-grown fruits and vegetables in the classroom in a short, informal manner as a part of the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. A short producer introduction and “fun food facts” accompanied each new fruit or vegetable snack, which received a great positive feedback from teachers as they used it during taste tests in the classroom. The materials are archived at Kent School Farm to School Program Resource website.

Things You Need in the Classroom:

- Gloves
- Food safety protocol [Appendix 1]
- Spray bottle with chlorine water (See instruction in Appendix 1. “Food Safety Protocol”)
- Paper towels
- Aprons
- Serving platters
- Serving utensils (tongs, folks, spoons etc.)
- Compost bucket
- Plastic produce bags for leftovers
- First aid kit
- Hand sanitizer (optional)
- Food to sample
- Ideally a sample of raw whole produce to show students the real thing before processing
- Taste test ballots [Appendix 2.] or Classroom taste test slip [Appendix 3.]

Photo 1. First graders tasting carrots with the top on (George T. Daniel Elementary School, Kent, WA)
Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Taste Tests Ideas

Here are some ideas for simple taste tests (sample instructions to follow). Begin by talking with the teacher to find out the best way to make the taste test an educational opportunity.

- Roots with the Tops (Tops are also edible):
  - Beets (red, golden, Chioggia)
  - Carrots (orange, rainbow)
  - Kohlrabi (green, purple)
  - Parsnips
  - Turnips

- Introducing Different Types of Vegetable/Fruit:
  - Beans
  - Cucumbers
  - Lettuces
  - Peppers
  - Squash
  - Tomatoes
  - Apples
  - Pears & Asian pears
  - Plums, etc.

- Mighty Leafy Greens:
  - Baby bok choy
  - Kales
  - Spinach
  - Spring mix

Sample Instructions:

- Roots with the Tops:
  1. Receive, inspect, and store produce properly according to your kitchen protocol.
  2. Wash the root vegetable with the tops on thoroughly and remove all the dirt, wilted tops, and any with decay or damage.
  3. Pack the cleaned root vegetables into a bag or other designated clean container for individual classroom delivery.
  4. Keep refrigerated until serving/taste test.
  5. In the classroom, instruct students to wash their hands thoroughly before sampling.
  6. Wash your hand thoroughly, put on gloves, and sample out the root vegetable to students.
Sample discussion questions:
- How do you like it (root vegetable)?
- Have you seen (name of the root vegetable) with the tops on before?
- Can you imagine how it grows in the ground?
- The tops are also edible. Have a piece and see how you like it.
- How would you eat the tops? – cook? sauté?

**Introducing Different Types of Vegetable/Fruit:**

*Cucumbers* (slicing, pickling, English, Persian/Lebanese, Japanese, lemon etc.) make a great taste test, especially during the summer in WA. Find a partner/collaborator among your Summer Food Services Program sites. Introduce various types of cucumber; compare shape, taste, texture, etc.

1. Receive, inspect, and store produce properly according to your kitchen protocol.
2. Wash cucumbers thoroughly. Remove any one with decay or damage.
3. Put aside whole cucumbers for display, and slice remaining of each type of cucumbers for sampling. Divide into portion sizes in a clean container.
4. Pack each of the cleaned whole cucumbers into a bag or other designated clean container to send along with cut ones for sampling.
5. Keep refrigerated until taste test.
6. In the classroom, instruct students to wash their hands thoroughly before sampling.
7. Display each type of cucumbers for comparison.
8. Wash your hand thoroughly, put on gloves, and sample out the cut cucumbers to students.

Sample discussion questions:
- Which cucumber do you like the best?
- How do you describe the difference in each type of cucumbers?
- Do you know how cucumbers grow in the field? (You can prepare a photo of cucumber plant for presentation.)
- What is your favorite way to eat cucumbers?

**Mighty Leafy Greens:**

*Baby Bok Choy* makes a fun taste test and is a great one to introduce an Asian variety to those who are new to it. The shape, difference in the texture and flavor, and how it grows in the field, all make it an ideal candidate for an interactive taste test session. In the classroom, introduce baby bok choy by showing as a whole, and let students take leaves apart and try tasting both stalks and green leaves.

Tips:

- Unlike slicing cucumber, skin of other cucumbers (English, Japanese, Persian/Lebanese, Lemon) is thin and they are readily edible without peeling.
- For comparison, you can send in a regular bok choy (not baby bok choy). Other Asian greens such as Gai choi (Chinese mustard greens), Yin choi (Chinese spinach), or Tong choi (water spinach) Bok choy is also called pak choi.
1. Receive, inspect, and store produce properly according to your kitchen protocol.
2. Wash baby bok choy thoroughly without taking leaves apart. Make sure to clean the dirt at the root of the leaves. Remove any leaves with decay or damage.
3. Pack the cleaned vegetable into a bag or other designated clean container for individual classroom delivery.
4. Keep refrigerated until serving/taste test.
5. In the classroom, divide students into groups of 4 to 6.
6. Instruct students to wash their hands thoroughly before sampling.
7. Wash your hand thoroughly, put on gloves, and distribute a whole baby bok choy or two to the groups for them to tear leaves apart and try both stalks and leafy part.

Sample discussion questions:
- Have you had baby bok choy before? – if yes, how did you have it? (steamed? Cooked? Sautéed?)
- Did you know that bok choy is a type of cabbage? – it is also known as Chinese white cabbage.
- Which part do you like better, stem or leaf?
- How do you describe the flavor of each part?
- Can you imagine how it grows in the ground?
- What is your favorite way to eat baby bok choy?

Tips for Successful Classroom Taste Tests – for teacher
- Show where the food is grown on a state or county map.
- Tie the taste test to other subjects, like math. For example, show students a purple carrot with the top on, have them estimate its weight, then have them weigh it. Or use an apple to learn fractions. Ask younger children to guess the color after it is peeled.
- Invite district’s dietitian or food service staff to a classroom taste test to introduce a new food and make more school-wide connections.
- Invite a farmer to bring his or her local food and discuss how it is grown or made.
- Be sure to communicate regularly with parents about what their children are trying – they won’t believe it!
- To increase the consumption of vegetables, invite classes to experiment with recipes and create names for new dressings and dips, for instance.
- Keep the school food service aware and involved in your classroom taste tests – they might be able to provide some of the raw ingredients, connect you with local farmers that they work with, and feature the foods in their breakfasts and lunches.

Reference: Vermont FEED: Food Education Every Day “Vermont Farm to School – A Guide to Taste Testing Local Food In Schools”

Made possible by funding from the Department of Health and Human Services and Public Health- Seattle & King County.
Appendix 1. Food Safety Protocol – For Safe & Fun Classroom Taste Tests –

SERVING FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES in a SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher:</th>
<th>School:</th>
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- No one who is helping is sick with a communicable disease, with symptoms such as coughing, sneezing, runny nose, diarrhea, fever, or vomiting.
- Any wounds or cuts on hands or wrists are covered with a bandage and gloves.
- Clean surfaces
  - Wipe surface
  - Sanitize with a solution of 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 gallon of water.
  - Let the solution stand on the surfaces for a few minutes; then air dry or pat dry with clean paper towels.
- Wear clean aprons
- Wash hands before beginning
- Use only clean clothes to wipe hands or serving surfaces
- Wash hands after using bathroom, after touching body parts or unclean surfaces
- Clean equipment and utensils used for serving
  - Wash in hot soapy water
  - Rinse
  - Sanitize with sanitizing solution
  - OR run through a commercial dishwasher with adequate heat and sanitizing solution
- Servers are wearing gloves and changing them if they touch unclean surfaces
- Food is served with tongs or by washed hand with gloves on
- If possible, assign a volunteer holding a food handler’s card to be in charge (ideal, especially for settings like Summer Food Service Program sites)

If produce preparation happens in schools:

- Wash fruits and veggies (gloves aren’t needed)
  - Remove any dirt with veggie scrubber and water
  - Wash thoroughly under running water
- Remove any rotten or damaged produce
- Clean equipment used for chopping, prepping or storing
  - Wash in hot soapy water
  - Rinse
  - Sanitize with sanitizing solution
  - OR run through a commercial dishwasher with adequate heat and sanitizing solution

X__________________________ (name) supervised this activity and completed checklist.

References: Willamette Farm and Food Coalition’s Farm to School Program Food Safety Protocol; and Public Health – Seattle & King County Food Safety Fact Sheets available at URL: http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/ehs/foodsafety/factsheets.aspx
Taste Test in the Classroom

Appendix 2. Taste Test Ballots (Adopted from VT FEED “Individual Voting Ballots for Taste Tests Parties”)

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Appendix 3. Classroom Taste Test Slips (Adopted from VT FEED “Classroom Taste Test Summary Sheet”)

Classroom Taste Test

>> Teachers, please complete below for item shown <<

School: 
Date: 

Teacher/Grade: 

# of students present: 

Item:

1. How many students tried the snack? 

2. How many students liked the snack? 

3. How many students would eat it again? 

Classroom Taste Test

>> Teachers, please complete below for item shown <<

School: 
Date: 

Teacher/Grade: 

# of students present: 

Item:

4. How many students tried the snack? 

5. How many students liked the snack? 

6. How many students would eat it again? 

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