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**K-12 school nutrition partners elevate healthier school meals at national summit with USDA and Action for Healthy Kids**

*School districts, advocates, and food industry examine best practices, discuss improvements in the nutritional quality of school meals*

**LAS VEGAS, NV (Oct. 1, 2024)** – As a part of the [Healthy Meals Incentives \(HMI\) Initiative](#), the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Action for Healthy Kids are bringing together over 700 leaders who are champions for school meals at the [Fall 2024 Healthy Meals Summit](#) in Las Vegas, Nevada from October 21-23. This gathering will be the largest federally-led event to date in support of school meals.

Studies have shown that improving nutrition in school meals leads to better outcomes in students' academic performance, emotional well-being and decreases school absences. Schools are already the source of the healthiest meals children receive, and this event provides the professionals responsible for feeding our students every day to learn about creative solutions and innovative best practices to further improve the nutritional value of school meals.

"This is USDA's largest investment ever to bring together school districts, states, school nutrition leaders, and other partners to learn from and support each other as they develop creative and practical approaches to making school meals even more nutritious and appealing, and meet USDA's [updated school nutrition standards](#)," said USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Cindy Long.

To kick off the Summit, keynote speaker, celebrity chef and author Curtis Aikens will host the School Meal Cooking Challenge, a competitive cooking event with teams of high school students from the Pro Start Culinary Arts program, paired with professional chefs from the Chef Ann Foundation. The winning team from this competition will be nationally showcased. Deonna Smith, a former educator and author, will also return to the Summit as a keynote speaker. Smith spoke about "Finding Joy in Your Work" at the [Spring 2024 Healthy Meals Summit](#).

"The Fall 2024 Healthy Meals Summit will be an opportunity to recognize and celebrate school nutrition professionals that have embraced opportunities to take their school meals to the next level," said Rob Bisceglie, executive officer and president, [Action for Healthy Kids](#). "We're excited for these schools to share their incredible success stories and inspire change."

Many attendees represent school districts that have either won an [HMI Recognition Award](#) or received an HMI grant to [improve meal quality in small and/or rural school districts](#) or to [spark innovation in the K-12 food marketplace](#). The HMI Recognition Awards spotlight innovative strategies that schools have used to improve the nutritional quality of meals, and the HMI grants empower schools, communities, and school food industry partners with the resources to improve school meal service operations and the marketplace.

Additional partners for the Fall 2024 Healthy Meals Summit include RMC Health and Chef Ann Foundation. Information on the Healthy Meals Summit and the HMI Initiative can be found at [www.healthymealsincentives.org](http://www.healthymealsincentives.org).

#### **ABOUT USDA'S FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE**

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service works to end hunger and improve food and [nutrition security](#) through a suite of more than 16 Federal nutrition assistance programs, such as the school breakfast and lunch programs, WIC, Summer Nutrition Programs, and SNAP. Together, these programs serve 1 in 4 Americans over the course of a year, promoting consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable food essential to optimal health and well-being. FNS also provides science-based nutrition recommendations through the co-development of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. FNS's report, "[Leveraging the White House Conference to Promote and Elevate Nutrition Security: The Role of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service](#)," highlights ways the agency will support the Biden-Harris Administration's [National Strategy](#), released in conjunction with the historic White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in September 2022. To learn more about FNS, visit [www.fns.usda.gov](http://www.fns.usda.gov) and follow [@USDANutrition](#).

#### **ABOUT ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS**

Action for Healthy Kids is dedicated to improving children's health and well-being by bringing together and mobilizing educators, families, and other key stakeholders to help children lead healthy lives. Through its core programming and family-school partnerships, Action for Healthy Kids has impacted more than 20 million children in 55,000 schools nationwide to address systemic challenges in underserved communities. To learn more about its growing network of volunteers and champions, visit [actionforhealthykids.org](http://actionforhealthykids.org).

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