

School Meals Coalition: Nutrition, Health and Education for Children

National Commitment of China

School meal program is an important social security mechanism worldwide. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 388 million children around the globe had access to one school meal per day. However, 370 million of them have lost such access due to pandemic-induced school closure in about 200 countries.

Experience shows that, school meals may reduce child hunger, poverty, and multiple forms of malnutrition, and have an important role to play in food system transformation. As they may add to the attraction of schools, school meals contribute to children's school attendance, long-term wellbeing and health. School meals support boys and girls in entering and finishing school and promotes gender equality. The scale-up and quality improvement of school meal programs can not only benefit children and their family, but also shore up food systems, markets and the economy since locally-sourced foods open up new opportunities for smallholders and local caterers.

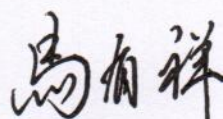
Of the 156 million students currently receiving compulsory education in China, over 95 million live in rural areas. The Chinese government is fully aware of how important school meals are to better and healthier diets of children. A nationwide scheme on rural school meal improvement, which was introduced in 2011, is receiving a higher subsidy of 5 RMB/student/day (originally 3 RMB/student/day) from the central government and steadily raising its coverage.

We hope that by 2030, more children could enjoy healthy and nutritious meals at school. To this end, we, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Education of China, jointly announce that, we are willing to support the School Meals Coalition and its objectives, especially in improving school meal projects worldwide to help achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, we will work together on the following:

1. Advance the nationwide scheme on rural school meal improvement. The scheme has benefited over 37 million children in nearly 1,500 counties of 28 provinces. To improve the nutrition status of rural students currently receiving compulsory education, the central government and local governments at all levels will fund school meal projects, improve their administration and coordination, and steadily scale up the scheme.
2. Explore new modalities for school meals. We will apply modalities tailored to local context, such as school canteen meals, procurement of catering services from qualified businesses, and provision of meal services for schools in remote

areas by household or self-employed businesses under strict quality control. Efforts will also be made to diversify food choices in school meals. We will encourage the sourcing of locally-produced food and boost local agro-product markets and farmers' employment through conducting centralized procurement and signing supply contracts with farmers.

3. Engage multiple stakeholders in the nutrition enhancement program and enhance its visibility. The government will engage and coordinate efforts of community-level organizations such as urban and rural residents' committees, and enterprises, foundations and charities to improve nutrition of school meals. Various media platforms will be fully leveraged to strengthen the coverage of policies on school meals. Advices and suggestions will be widely sought from the public to improve school meals.
4. Advocate food-saving behavior and healthy diets through school meals projects. We will call for actions to cherish food and prevent food waste, and help schools establish code of conduct in canteens to promote thrifty lifestyles among students. Nutrition and health education will be stepped up by teaching related knowledge in elementary and secondary schools to help students form healthy eating habits.
5. Strengthen research on school meal nutrition. We will encourage research institutes to conduct research on nutritious school meals and develop a guidance on meal preparation to improve school meal quality. We plan to joint relevant international research networks to learn best practices of other countries and share China's experience.
6. Advance international cooperation on school meals. We will work with WFP, FAO and other international organizations to offer assistance to school meals programmes within the existing South-South cooperation programmes. We will support relevant projects to enable the basic nutritional needs of affected children to be met during crises.



Ma Youxiang

March 30, 2022

Vice Minister

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, P.R.China