



FARM TO INSTITUTION TASTE TEST GUIDE

WHAT IS A TASTE TEST?

A taste test is a small sample of food offered to introduce the flavor, texture and smell of the new food. The food being tasted could be slices of South Carolina grown peaches, a small bowl of watermelon mint salad or a freshly prepared citrus green bean bake! After the sample has been tasted, the taste test participants can vote on how much they liked it or if they would be willing to try it again.

WHY DO A TASTE TEST?

People can be predictable in their eating habits and the foods they choose, but our taste buds change every seven years! It is important to taste new and different foods in order to experience foods that may be outside of our comfort zone. It can take up to ten times to determine if a new food is liked or not. First time taste tests are a great way to introduce new foods in a fun, pressure-free environment.

Institutions that are looking to implement and promote healthy changes to their menu benefit from conducting taste tests. Taste tests provide participants with the opportunity to try new foods and prevent excess food waste. Introducing staff to new foods with taste tests can help ensure that an item is marketable before it is offered on the menu. Best of all, staff can experience new flavors in a small sample.

Before taste testing can begin, there are three steps to consider when planning and implementing a taste test activity at your site:

1. Develop a taste testing committee. The committee can decide how often taste tests should occur, in what format, the environment, what foods to try, and how to fund the foods being tested. They can also analyze taste test results.
 - Find supportive staff outside of the committee; your best allies are the people who interact with your staff.
 - Meet with food service personnel (if applicable at the site) to communicate the committee's thoughts on how to use local food on the menu.
 - If you plan to use food from local farmers, consult resources from SC Farm to Institution, such as the SC Farmer Profile.
 - The SC Farmer Profile helps find a farmer in the area who can supply produce to the taste test program. The farmer may also be able and willing to speak to a group the day of the taste test.
2. Set goals for the taste test program. Before doing a taste test, establish some goals that are easy to communicate. Below are few questions to consider:
 - Will the taste test expand people's food choices?
 - Will the taste test encourage healthier snack or lunch choices to be brought from home or purchased on site?
 - Will the site's food offerings be expanded?
 - How will local foods be introduced?



3. Remember the details. Details are an important part of any program. Meet and thoroughly plan with your taste test committee to ensure that the smallest details of the program have been discussed. Some questions for the committee to think about are:
- What food will be featured first? Will there be a theme?
 - Where will food be purchased from? How will the food be ordered?
 - Which recipes will be tried?
 - How much with the ingredients cost?
 - Does the kitchen staff have adequate equipment to prepare the food? Who will prepare it?
 - If everyone likes the new food, can the recipe be incorporated into the site's cafeteria (if applicable)?

Below is a sample timeline for coordinating and implementing a institution-wide taste test.

2-3 weeks prior to the taste test:

- At the committee meeting, decide which food will be tested. Make certain that the foods chosen fit into the institution's program and align with the committee goals.
- Consider seasonality because produce tastes best when it's fresh and in season.
 - Refer to the South Carolina Harvest Finder, SC Produce Availability Table, and other resources from the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to determine which produce is available.
- Find a group that is willing to prepare and serve the food, clean up, and conduct a survey afterwards.
 - This can be divided among tasks or done on a rotational basis to prevent one person or group from doing all of the work.
- If purchasing from a farmer, contact them be sure the product is available.
- Optional: Prepare nutritional information about the food.

One week prior:

- Check with taste test committee to make sure everyone is prepared; reserve a conference room or other available space for the taste test.
- Make sure the taste test food has been purchased and will be delivered promptly.
- Prepare a taste testing survey. Refer to the end of the document for sample evaluation guides to use.
- Advertise the taste test to staff with the newsletter, website, and/or emails.

Day of the test taste:

- Remind staff of what time the taste test is with a morning email and signs.
- Take pictures and notes to report in your newsletter and for the evaluation team.
- Have a person designated to ensuring food safety, whether it is a member of food service or another staff member at your institution. Ask this person to explain food safety when preparing foods; allow time for everyone to wash their hands and put on hairnets or hats.

Tips for a Successful Taste Test

- Wash hands well!
- Ask about food allergies and have other options provided so that everyone is included.
- Sit down while tasting.
- Offer hands on experience, but also provide samples that are already prepared.
- Provide facts about the food being tasted, such as location and health benefits.
- Refer to the South Carolina Harvest Finder, SC Produce Availability Table and other resources from the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to determine which produce is available.
- Try foods that are or could be served in the institution's cafeteria, if there is one on site.
- Experiment with recipes, dressing and/or dips so people can taste the same food item in different ways.
- Do not forget to clean up!

- Use separate cutting boards for produce and meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Use hot and soapy water to wipe down surfaces used to prepare food.
- Cough or sneeze into elbow, not into hands.

Day after:

- Send an email to staff describing the taste test, the food tasted, and a recipe to try at home.
- Share a brief summary of the results from the evaluation sheets.
- Share any pictures of quotes from participants.



This document was adapted from VT FEED Vermont Farm to School: A Guide to Taste Testing Local Food in Schools March 2010.

<http://www.vtfeed.org/materials/guide-taste-testing-local-foods-schools>

For more information on food safety, refer to:

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/shared/PDF/Kitchen_Companion.pdf?redirecthttp=true

SAMPLE TASTE TEST EVALUATION FORM

Today I tried: _____
(Name of food)

Directions: Check one rating for each of the following: Appearance, Flavor, Texture, Smell, and Overall Acceptability on a scale from 1 to 9, 1 being "like extremely" to 9 being "dislike extremely."

	1 Like Extremely	2 Like Very Much	3 Like Moderately	4 Like Slightly	5 Neither Like nor Dislike	6 Dislike Slightly	7 Dislike Moderately	8 Dislike Very Much	9 Dislike Extremely
Appearance									
Flavor									
Texture									
Smell									
Overall Acceptability									

Other notes: _____

Adapted from: http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Taste_Testing/Sensory_Evaluation_Form.pdf