

Introduction of School Lunch Program in Japan and Korea

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School lunches were extended to all elementary schools in Japan in 1952, and with the enactment of the school lunch law, to junior high schools in 1954. Today, 99% of elementary school students and 82% of junior high school students eat school lunches in Japan. The food is grown locally, is almost never frozen and barring dietary restrictions, is the same for every student. Children in most districts cannot bring their own meals to school until they reach high school, nor do schools have vending machines. Instead, children are taught to eat what they are served.

However, the daily lunches are designed by nutritionists, working especially to appeal to picky or unhealthy eaters. Japan's system has an envious payoff—its kids are relatively healthy. According to government data, Japan's child obesity rate is always among the world's lowest. Japanese children will live on average to 83, longer than those in any other country, according to the World Health Organization.

Mealtime is a scene of communal duty. In both elementary and middle schools, students wear white coats and caps and serve their classmates.

Though Japan's central government sets basic nutritional guidelines, regulation is surprisingly minimal. Funding for lunches is handled locally, municipalities pay for labor costs, but parents are billed monthly—pay for the ingredients, about US\$3 per meal, with reduced and free options for poorer families.

Americans are amazed at the success of the Japanese school lunch program. In February 2013, CBS had a special report on this. In Japan, its school lunches are a point of national pride.

In Korea, with the enactment of the School Meals Act, school lunches were provided to all elementary schools in 1997, to junior high schools in 1999, and to high school in 2003. As of 2010, 99% of 11,396 schools provided lunches for students. Among the 7,263,000 students nationwide, 98.8% students ate school lunches every school day.

Contract management companies were allowed to operate school lunch service since the School Meals Act was amended in 1996. But a large scale of food poisoning

in contract-managed school lunch service in 2006 prompted the School Meals Act to be renewed. Thus many schools adopting contract-management switched their lunch service to self-operation based on the requirement of the law. In 2010, 94.6% of the schools self-operated their lunch service. Among these, only 5.4% of schools contracted their lunch service with management companies.

In Korea, the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) provides its food supply to schools. In 2012, the turnover reached KRW602 billion, with 21% of that market in Korea.

In Japan and Korea, the central government sets basic nutritional guidelines on their school lunch programs. In Korea, in addition to quantitative nutritional standard, the following are stated to be considered in the process of menu planning of school lunches: (1) Succession and development of traditional dietary culture; (2) Various kinds of foods such as grains and starches, vegetables and fruits, fish, meat and beans, milks and dairy products; (3) Salt, oil and fats, simple sugar or food additives should not be overused; (4) Natural and seasonal foods should be used as much as possible; (5) A variety of cooking methods should be utilized. The food is grown locally and almost never frozen. Succession of traditional dietary culture is practiced. School children grow up eating rice as the staple food. The students are healthy. In this way, the movements called “Consume Local Agriculture” and “Farm and Urban are One” become a daily reality.

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