



KIDS RULE OK

THANKS TO CELEBRITY CHEF JAMIE OLIVER, ENCOURAGING OUR CHILDREN TO EAT HEALTHIER FOOD IS STILL MAKING THE HEADLINES. BUT WHAT IS THE REST OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY DOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE? SHEILA EGGLESTON REPORTS

When it comes to feeding children, it doesn't get any easier, and it still seems it's the children who hold all the aces.

But if you're not getting through to kids, then it's time to change tack and target the parents to re-educate them as to what their children should be eating and drinking at home as well as out of home.

That's the conclusion made by many suppliers who have taken it upon themselves to make 'house' calls.

Birds Eye, for example, which recently launched into foodservice, took its

development chef Peter Lack into schools to demonstrate its products in innovative ways and encourage the children to take them home to try with their parents.

Its healthy dining for kids comes under its Captain's Nutrition Mission initiative and includes products such as its omega 3 fish fingers, chicken dippers, chicken burgers and original beef burgers.

Foodservice marketing manager Phil Cumming explains: "The Captain's Nutrition Mission highlights our commitment to children's nutrition, using Captain Birdseye

as the face of our dedication. It takes our existing nutritional standards one step further – standards which include products that deliver no added MSG, modified starch or phosphates and are non GM."

McCormick says many children don't get a home cooked meal and while parents are told about school meal guidelines they aren't being told how to implement them in a straightforward way. Concept development chef Steve Love says: "It's great that children are now eating more healthily in school but without this following 44→



LEARNING TO MAKE PANCAKES



GETTING INVOLVED MEANS TASTING AS WELL

through to their food at home as well, things probably won't improve that dramatically."

Earlier this year he went to Charter Primary School in Coventry to demonstrate how easy it is to cook healthily showing dishes such as homemade pizza, spaghetti Bolognese, curry, and apple crumble. "We started from scratch and had parents and children involved in the cooking process, working together and talking about different ingredients and dishes."

For the second time Authentic Food Company's chefs visited Newall Green High School in Wythenshawe to spend a day giving interactive lessons based around British food, teaching them how to create dishes from scratch.

Chef Adrian Ratcliffe demonstrated how simple it is to cook healthy beef burgers at home that was tastier than their local fast food restaurant, while development chef Kris

Woods showed how to make pancakes and to experiment with different toppings. Woods says: "The day was a real success and the students enjoyed getting involved and making dishes. It is great to see such enthusiasm for food and cooking at a young age."

Nestlé Professional has developed its new online Maggi Menu Solutions 'education planning tool' that offers support to caterers who want to deliver quick and efficient menus that meet children's nutritional requirements. Marketing director Martin Lines says the tool works easily alongside other menu planning software, plus extra materials can also be accessed online, including poster templates and A5 recipe cards that can be sent to parents."

Marlow Foods, makers of Quorn, says children's food has been put under the microscope of late, particularly with the healthy eating legislation being brought into schools. "Parents are also asking more questions about the content of children's food when eating out," says commercial manager foodservice Tony Davison.

"It is important for operators to offer well balanced meals, but that doesn't mean they cannot also be fun. Children are visually drawn to food. They like food that is brightly coloured, formed into fun shapes."

He says these elements need to be taken into account and simple changes made to ingredients rather than food.

Unilever Foodsolutions marketing director Claire Sullivan says that caterers are under pressure to serve children nutritious meals when often all kids want is food that is tasty and fun. "Offering dishes aimed specially at them incorporating

different ethnic cuisines is a great way to do it. Oriental food is particularly popular among children as it has a sweeter taste and is often less spicy than other cuisines. Chinese food is almost twice as popular as Indian food among children aged seven to 10."

This view is echoed by Gayl Pickett from poultry product supplier Crown Foods: "Children are becoming a lot more expectant from food and modern trends are rubbing off at a younger age. Whereas 10 years ago we were serving more roasted meats for traditional dinners, we are now finding our products being used in noodle dishes, wraps and curries as well."

The importance of presentation was highlighted at John O'Gaunt Community Technology College in Hungerford, Berkshire, where the catering operation is run by Dolce, whose managing director Dan Curtis plans more investment in this area. "Presentation is so important," he

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APPETISING FLAVOURS THAT APPEAL TO CHILDREN

TOP TIPS FOR CHILDREN'S MENUS

- Offer portions the size of half an adult meal; children may feel overwhelmed when faced with too much food
- Keep decorative toppings such as fresh herbs to a minimum as children are often wary of foods that look unfamiliar
- Use garnishes to advantage – a swirl of single cream in the shape of a smiley face on top of a bowl of soup may increase interest in the food and encourage children to eat

Source: Unilever Foodsolutions



USING COLOUR TO INSPIRE KIDS

explains. "These young customers are sophisticated; they know they have options on where to buy their lunch; they eat with their eyes and if they don't like what they see they will take their business elsewhere."

Curtis decided to use Primeware products: "We needed a durable product that helped make our servery bright and up to date. Our bain maries have been converted to solid tops with Primeware's hot tiles that simply slot into our counters in seconds. Food is presented on the tiles or in ceramic dishes that come in five colours and can be used to identify dishes for the children or used to enhance the food display."

To prepare for secondary school meal standards coming into effect in September 2009, the Potato Council has given its website a new look and more information about potatoes.

It says the new rules state that an average school lunch should provide 30% of the total daily energy requirement and at least half of this should come from carbohydrates. Along with a type of bread with no added fat or oil, a starchy carbohydrate such as potatoes must be provided every day.

New products designed to appeal to children include Campina UK's new recipe Yazoo milkshake in new packaging. Available from last month, it covers the whole range and includes 200ml kids' lunchbox size and a new 300ml bottle.

Managing director John Lee says: "It is already low in fat, with less than 5% added sugar and no preservatives, artificial sweeteners or nasty colours, so it's one of the few drinks which meets tough UK Government regulation for use in schools. By moving to a combination of natural flavours and real fruit juice we can help retailers add that all important 'healthier' dimension to their soft drinks offering at a sensible price."

One of the UK's leading child experts, Annabel Karmel, has teamed with Noon Products to launch World Foods for children from four years old that initially will include nutritionally balanced variants from Italian, Chinese and Indian cuisines. She says it's important to expand the taste buds of children to prevent them from becoming a fussy eater statistic – now a worrying eight out of 10 children. "These subtle yet appetising flavours and spices such as coriander and mild curry will expand the variety of food that children enjoy eating."

For these minor diners, a series of specific menus have been launched this year. Whitbread for example teamed with Wiltshire based Pure Organics to supply its restaurant chains with organic offerings for its children's menus that included favourites such as meatballs and pasta, sausage and vegetable casserole and macaroni cheese.

In Lancashire, Alistair Tasker, head chef at Lancaster House Hotel in Galgate, teamed with nutritionist Sarah Garton to produce grown up meals for kids such as salmon, broccoli and pasta bake, and mini chicken Kiev filled with Lancashire cheese and leeks.

MAKING IT BETTER

Obesity in kids is still a concern but one sector where the 'O' word isn't as big an issue is in the healthcare sector where nutrition counts to build up strength while undergoing treatment.

Sodexo Healthcare says nutritional requirements of children in hospital can vary according to age, gender and the treatment they are receiving. In some cases, it may mean serving finger food such as chicken goujons for youngsters and more contemporary meals like wraps and homemade burgers for teenagers, says marketing director Jeff Brades.

He says cost is an issue but if companies took a more holistic view rather than just the cost of the meal, which shows how improved dining affects a hospital stay, this will bring benefits.

Sodexo says food should be made fun for kids such as its 'smiley salad' that uses vegetables to form eyes, ears and a smiley mouth to persuade them to eat fruit and vegetables each day, and its high energy snack boxes mean children who have been admitted late or who have missed the last hot meal can snack on quick fixes such as vegetable crudités, sandwiches, fruit, yogurts, fruit crisps and chocolate treats. Special cutlery for smaller hands, brightly coloured plates and colourful menus in large print, also help to encourage children to eat the food.

But when it comes to educating them young, a restaurant in the US has gone one step further. Pomme Bébé in Newport Beach, California, serves only organic baby and toddler meals prepared fresh in its kitchen such as apple cranberry purée and autumn stew. Its tiny tot customers can sample free from its tasting bar which has high chairs while the grown ups have a sit down lounge. Now that's a thought.

SUPPLIER CONTACTS

Authentic Food Company	0161 495 4000	www.theauthenticfoodcompany.com
Birds Eye Foodservice	0800 028 9997	www.birdseyefoodservice.com
British Potato Council		www.potatoesforcaterers.co.uk
Calypso	01978 668484	www.calypso.co.uk
Campina UK	01403 273273	www.yazoo.co.uk
Marlow Foods	0870 607 0182	www.quorn.com
McCain Foods	01723 584141	www.mccain.co.uk
McCormick Flavour Group	01844 292930	www.schwartzforchef.com
Nestle Professional	0800 745845	www.nestleprofessional.com
Noon Foods	0208 571 1866	www.noon.co.uk
Primeware	0207 995 1119	www.primeware.co.uk
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