



TWO ANGRY MOMS TAKE ON SCHOOL LUNCH

FIGHTING FOR THE HEALTH OF AMERICA'S KIDS

BY / AMY KALAFI

What's happening to our nation's kids?

We read news stories about an epidemic of obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. You may think this doesn't apply to your children, but did you know that behavioral issues, learning disabilities, asthma, allergies, childhood depression and anxiety-related disorders have all been linked to nutritional imbalances?

As an organic farmer, health advocate and mom, I've been angry about the state of nutrition in this country for a long time. This past year, I was a student at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Over the course of the year, my family and I experimented with our diets. We all got healthier, and I decided to move forward with a project I've been incubating for the past 20 years.

Two Angry Moms is a documentary film about the diet and health of America's school children, from preschool through college.

I've met and interviewed angry moms from all over the tri-state area. Recently, I was introduced to Dr. Susan Rubin, HHC, who has been advocating for better school food in Westchester County for the past nine years. She's agreed to work with me, so the camera will be following Susan (and sometimes me) as we meet with school boards, parents, food service employees, vendors, legislators and USDA officials across

the nation. The film will document communities struggling to create change, as well as the success stories that have made headlines. Additionally, Professor Kelley Brownell, PhD, chair of the Yale Department of Psychology (author of "Food Fight") has generously offered to conduct a research study on a sample group of students in the film, to determine the impact of eating a high-quality school lunch.

Why focus on school food?

Here are some facts: The National School Lunch Program was started in 1946. It's a



model of federal democracy in action. Created to nourish a nation of school children who's families had suffered diseases of malnutrition like rickets and pellagra prior to and during the Great Depression, the program has been wildly successful. Several generations of American public school students have been nourished with government surplus grains, dairy and other produce.

So, what has gone wrong?

The overall quality of the American food supply has changed. What we have gained in abundance has been offset to some degree by a loss of nutritional value. Overuse of chemicals that artificially induce higher yields and more uniform crops has stripped the nutrients from our soils. Consumption patterns have changed. Packaged, processed, sweetened and denatured foods used to be the exception in most of our diets. Now they have become the norm. The overeating that many experts attribute to a lack of will power



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and discipline is, in many cases, a habitualized craving for substantial nutrients missing in these foods. Many of our nation's school children suffer from malnutrition in the form of empty calories, toxic buildup, vitamin and mineral imbalances that cannot be compensated for with supplements and power bars.

What can you do?

- **Get Informed!** You don't have to read nutrition textbooks. Here are some great websites with simple, clear information:
www.Stonyfield.com/menuforchange
<http://www.sustainabletable.org/schools/>
www.thematrix.com/
<http://www.storewars.org/flash/index.html>
<http://www.thewaytoeat.net/content?page=314&cat=0>
<http://www.betterschoolfood.com>

- **Act Locally!** Form or participate in a school health advisory committee. Some districts are more open to change than others, but most need information and then pressure from informed parents before improvements will take place. I know one angry mom who lobbied her district for months over changing half the bread on the school's PBJ sandwich from white to multi-grain. She finally won. Sometimes the symbolism of a small victory makes for a good story.

- * **Get Students and teachers Involved!** There's lots of ways to teach kids about healthy food – science, math and social studies class can all be fertile ground for exploring topics in food and nutrition. Some dis-

tricts now have students involved in menu planning and sampling.

- **Say yes to healthy snacks!** Ask your school to replace sugary snacks and soft drinks with better choices. Stonyfield Farms, makers of yogurt and dairy snacks, has a pilot program that provides a cool vending machine and a list of items that have been kid-tested and comply with California's new school food guidelines. The program is so popular that although they only have 30 machines on-line, there's a waiting list of over 1000 schools!

- **Contact your legislators.** Connecticut's Governor Rell recently vetoed a bill that would have banned the sale of soda in school vending machines statewide. This issue will be back on the agenda next year, so let her know how you feel. The state of Arizona, one of the most affected by childhood obesity, has banned the sale of junk food during school hours. Seattle, Philadelphia and San Francisco all have created stringent nutritional guidelines for vending machines and snack foods, and the state of Texas has just banned fried foods and sugary foods from all its school lunchrooms.

- **Speak Out!** Talk to other parents, write letters, and don't be shy. Visit your school cafeteria and see what your kids are really putting on their lunch trays.

The Two Angry Moms plan to gather two million angry parents, grandparents, kids and friends as they travel the nation. We are not just making a film - we are creating a movement! You can help. Your kids will be happier, healthier and smarter. Go to our website at angrymoms.org to find out more. *W*

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