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Foodservice

United Fresh tackles legislation for salad bars

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With \$100 million dedicated to school cafeterias in February's stimulus bill, United Fresh Produce Association is promoting salad bars in schools.



The Washington, D.C.-based association is working with senators and representatives on legislation that would not only promote salad bars in every school, but also provide incentives and training through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"We certainly hope to have a bill in before September," said United Fresh president Tom Stenzel. "Everybody says it's a good idea, but it's going to take some effort to get it through."

Cafeteria equipment, such as refrigeration units and salad bars, earned \$100 million in the stimulus bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Schools are already starting to use the money, and Stenzel said the association is calling each state individually to encourage them to use the money for salad bars. The schools have their choice of equipment to purchase with the stimulus funds.

"We're certainly encouraging them to go for salad bars," Stenzel said. "It's one of our strategies — to get kids that choice. And it doesn't have to be huge, just 10-15 items to choose from."

New Jersey schools were putting in orders in June, with 95 school districts and individual schools in New Jersey ordering equipment with their grant money. The state was awarded more than \$1.8 million for cafeteria equipment.

Stenzel said the association is also trying to compile information from schools about what they end up using the grant money for.

Schools must be part of the National School Lunch Program to receive the funds, Stenzel said, and priority is given to schools in which more than half the student population qualifies for reduced price or free lunches.

"It's really trying to be need-based," Stenzel said.

The Food Service Equipment Assistance Grants were one-time only, and should be used by the time any legislation could be passed.

The proposed legislation should be front and center at the association's annual Washington Public Policy Conference Sept. 9-11 in Washington, D.C., because the association hopes legislators submit a bill by then. Other items on the agenda include opposition to the Employee Free Choice Act and promotion of a food safety policy.

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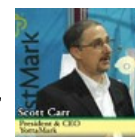
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