Cost of New Nordic Diet school meals

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to conduct economic evaluation of a school meal programme based on principles of a New Nordic Diet (NND) by assessing the costs of the NND lunch, compared with packed lunch from home, and investigating potential effects of adjusting the NND principles underlying the school meals on the costs and on the rate of food waste. Design/methodology/approach - The analysis combines recipes, dietary records and food waste data from a school meal intervention with collected price data within an economic optimization framework. Findings - A New Nordic School meal programme consisting of a morning snack and a hot lunch based on fixed seasonal menu plans and with 75 per cent organic content is 37 per cent more expensive in terms of ingredient costs than corresponding packed school meals. This cost differential can be almost halved by introducing more flexible scheduling of week plans and reducing the level of organic ambition to 60 per cent. Reducing portion sizes could reduce the cost differential by an extra 5 per cent, which would also reduce food waste by about 15 per cent. Originality/value - Higher costs and food waste in a restrictive ingredient sourcing school meal programme can be reduced by increased flexibility in meal scheduling, reduction in organic content and reduced average portion size.

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