Factors Impacting Students' Milk Preferences and Milk Selection at School

Stellera English
Faculty Mentor: Carol Longley
Dietetics, Fashion Merchandizing, and Hospitality

Milk is an important component of the diet for growth and development of young children. Therefore, milk is a required component of school lunch programs across America, ensuring that all children are provided a serving daily. However, the dairy product does not provide any nutrition if the students are not actually drinking their milk cartons. The purpose of this study was to discover factors that impact students' milk preferences and ultimately their milk selection at schools. This project is part of a larger national study with this methodology established and test piloted by the granting agency. Four school districts in two states and two USDA regions served as a convenience sample for the study. Focus groups were held with elementary students, junior high students, and school nutrition staff. Additionally, behavioral observations were made at each school. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method in the development of themes. The results of this poster examine just the results of one district. Results indicated that taste is a major factor for their choices which were influenced by flavor, texture, fat content, mouth feel of the carton, and even the design of the carton. Alternatives to milk, such as juice or water, prevents many from getting their minimum amount of milk each day. Implication for practice: the study can be used to change the school's milk to match the preferences of student in order for them to drink more of the milk they are given and to develop into healthy adults.