



The USDA serving guide.

Food For Thought

What's on the school menu today? French fries, chips, or baked potatoes? Believe it or not, a battle is being fought over what is on your school lunch tray. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for creating nutritional guidelines for school lunches and wants to limit the amount of white potatoes and other starchy vegetables to one cup a week, or two servings. This proposal affects everyone from the potato farmer to the cafeteria worker to the students eating the tater tots. Not surprisingly, all of these people have differing opinions...

Eat Your Broccoli

Supporters of limiting potato servings argue that potatoes are often served fried or topped with high calorie items like sour cream, cheese, and bacon. They also worry that when students are given a choice between French fries or something like carrots or green beans, they too often choose the fries. Poor eating choices made early in life lead to obesity and numerous long-term health problems like diabetes and heart disease.



Did you know?

The school cafeteria is the largest restaurant in the country, serving over 31 million students every single day.

More Please...

Serving sizes in school lunches are based on grade level and age.



Would you like fries with that?

Opponents of the proposed change offer that potatoes are full of nutritional value, and aren't always served in unhealthy ways. Fries can be baked rather than fried, and baked potatoes can be topped with healthier alternatives, like salsa. They also argue that potatoes are a cheap and plentiful option for a vegetable serving and that limiting potatoes would increase school lunch costs across the nation.

Interested?

The people on all sides of this argument have an **interest** in the outcome of the debate. That just means they are interested or concerned with how things end up. People pay attention to things that will likely affect their lives.



How might limiting starchy vegetables like potatoes affect...

Students?

Potato Farmers?

Schools?

Interest Groups

Name: _____



How does individual interest in a debate lead to action? What if people with these interests have *other* interests (like working or going to school) and can't spend their entire day learning what is happening and doing something about it? Potato farmers and nutritionists have little time for marching in front of the USDA or making speeches to the public!

Grouping Interests

One way people can have their voice heard is to find others with the same concerns. **Interest groups** gather people and resources to support public policies that help their members. They work to persuade policy makers like senators and representatives to support government actions that help their members and oppose actions that hurt them. They also work to influence public opinion by educating the general public about their point of view. In this way, interest groups **advocate**, or promote, the needs and wants of the group. There are hundreds of interest groups in the United States working on many different types of issues.

Terms to Know

Public Policy: the stand the government takes about a problem or an idea for improvement

Public Opinion: the collection of opinions or attitudes of a population

Types of Interest Groups

Most groups can be divided into five different categories.

PUBLIC INTEREST	ECONOMIC INTERESTS	PROFESSIONAL GROUPS	IDEOLOGICAL GROUPS	SINGLE-ISSUE GROUPS
Focuses on topics that affect the general public like education, the environment, and politics	Promotes the economic interests of their members in business, labor, and trade organizations	Advocates for people in a particular profession, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers	Promotes policies based on a set of core political or religious beliefs	Focuses on one narrow topic, such as immigration or drunk driving

Taking Sides

In the school lunch potato battle, one group that supports the limits on starchy veggies is the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). The CSPI is a strong advocate for nutrition and food safety from a scientific perspective. On the other side of the discussion is the National Potato Council (NPC), which advocates for government policies that help U.S. potato growers prosper. Both groups work to inform the USDA and elected officials that *their* position on the issue is the correct one.



CENTER FOR
Science in the
Public Interest

Support

Or

Oppose

Think of two goals each group might have that would either support or oppose the new USDA limits on potatoes in school lunches.

1.

2.

Vs.

1.

2.



Support

Or

Oppose

Interest Groups

Name: _____

The Potato Problem. Follow the steps below to create your own interest group and participate in the debate.

Step One: Which group do you want to be a part of and represent? (Circle One)

Students

Potato Farmers

Schools

Nutritionists

Step Two: What is your position on the limitation of starchy foods in school lunches? (Circle One)

I think it is a great idea.

I think it is a bad idea.

Step Three: What do you want to name your interest group?

Step Four: What reasons can you give to support your position? Try for at least two! (Use your reading for ideas.)



Step Five: Inform the public! Create a poster telling people about your interest group's position on the "Potato Problem."

Step Six: Inform the government! Use this space to list three things you would tell your elected official about the "Potato Problem." Try to be convincing!