



# WHAT IS QUALITY FOOD?

The quality of food begins on the farm and is affected at each link of the food chain, and through the food flow in our school kitchen.

Our nutrition program develops product specifications that identify quality standards for each ingredient. This is **quality of products as purchased** and **quality of products when delivered to our kitchens**. BUT if we don't take care of the foods properly, we may not have a final quality menu item.

For example, we may purchase Choice Quality Beef patties, but if we cook at too high of a temperature or for too long, or if we cook and hot hold for a long period of time, the product's appearance, temperature, and texture will decline.

Quality characteristics of menu items are based on our senses: **appearance, aroma, temperature, texture, and taste**. Think of it as **2A's + 3T's!**

**APPEARANCE** is important because we eat with our eyes first, so presentation does matter. Presentation of the environment also matters – **we have to keep in mind what it is our primary customer, the students, see when they come into the dining room**. So, before each meal service – **take a look at the line from the students' view**. Walk around the front of the service lines and make sure there is a **welcoming feel** (i.e. Silverware, trays and napkin containers full; no trash on floor or spills on counters). Better yet, have someone responsible for completing the **What Do Your Students See, Smell and Taste? Checklist**, modified from the Institute's **No Time to Train – Quality Standards**, before each meal.

**AROMA** can be a merchandising tool – who doesn't love the smell of fresh baked whole grain rolls? **Scheduling batch cooking of menu items to coincide with service schedules** means students can smell **"fresh out of the oven"** goodies! And we know that "fresh out of the oven" means the hot food will be hot and not held so long that the texture is mushy.

**TEMPERATURE** makes a difference in **perceived quality, and safety**. Cold foods need to be kept cold. We can organize production schedules to pre-prepare cold food entrees and sides, and keep cold until service. **Service in individual containers** can be one way to improve presentation and increase speed of service. **Self-service bars** are another way to provide students with choices. But these should be **monitored at all times and kept fresh**. **Utensils should be replaced** each service period. **New pans** of product should be used **rather than combining pans** (old with new). **Use smaller pans if needed**.

**TEXTURE** of foods can be affected by storage temperatures and improper handling. **Bruising, or overcooking and extended hot holding** of vegetables will result in a mushy product rather than one that is crisp and tender.

**TASTE** refers to the sensory aspects on the palate. Our taste buds can identify, sweet, sour, salty and acidic. **Following recipes ensures the proper proportion of ingredients** are used to create the identifying taste for the menu item.