

Birds Eye Foodservice partner with Hertfordshire schools

Hertfordshire County Council is extremely proud of their school menus, and rightly so. The team responsible for menu development dedicate a significant amount of time, money and resource to ensure the food served to Hertfordshire school children is healthy, tasty, and appealing to school children – no easy task.

“When planning our school menus we need to do far more than just comply with the Government’s nutrient and food standards,” explains Tracie Bere, Marketing and Business Development Manager for the Council.

“Nutrition is certainly one of the most important drivers behind the food served, but we also believe in using as much local and sustainable produce as possible. For example, the chicken breast fillets we use come from British reared birds, our tomatoes have been grown in greenhouses powered by a local beet factory, and most of our beef and pork is sourced from a local farmers consortium.”

With menus also designed to deliver at least 2 or more of a child’s recommended ‘5-a-day’ fruit and vegetables it’s hardly surprising parents in the area are thrilled with the Council’s forward-thinking approach.

Part of this approach involves working extremely closely with their suppliers – including branded names – to ensure the quality of their ingredients is second-to-none. And it was with this in mind that Tracie approached Birds Eye Foodservice.



a fresh approach

When Birds Eye started their Foodservice operation back in September 2008, Tracie jumped at the chance to attend the company’s launch event to understand exactly what was on offer.

“I’d been waiting for someone like Birds Eye to develop a catering range for years,” she says. “The Birds Eye name is synonymous with quality, and I knew the brand name could be a key selling point for us, helping to demonstrate our commitment to healthier catering for children.”

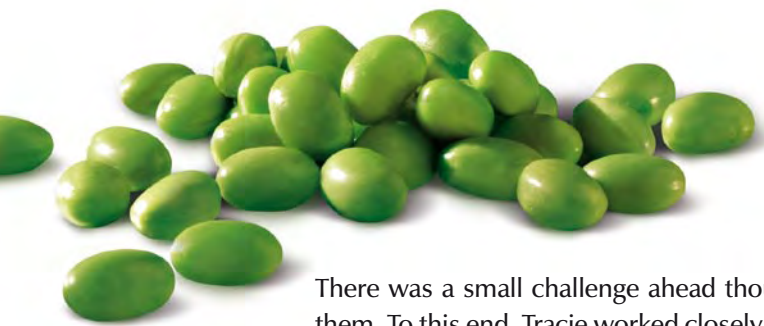
After initial discussions between Tracie and Birds Eye Foodservice, it became clear to her that two products in particular would prove a perfect fit for their menus.

“Everyone loves fish fingers – whether they’re children or adults. The fact that Birds Eye had developed a fish finger rich in natural Omega 3 was hugely appealing to me, and I knew it would instantly work on our menus. And it also suited our CSR policy – as they use fish that comes from a fishery certified to the Marine Stewardship Council’s environmental standard for a well-managed and sustainable fishery.”

They’re now scheduled as a Friday menu choice, served once every 3 weeks as part of the Authority’s rotating menu. And while fish fingers are certainly a natural choice for school menus, Tracie was also keen to push the boundaries by introducing something completely new.

“I was immediately stuck by the Soya Beans that Birds Eye Foodservice had developed,” she explains. “I knew they were a natural source of vitamins and protein, and understood the benefits of fast-freezing them within a short period of picking to retain their flavour and nutritional benefits. I became genuinely excited at the prospect of being the first Local Authority to serve them.”

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There was a small challenge ahead though – getting the school children to eat them. To this end, Tracie worked closely with Birds Eye Foodservice’s nutritionist and development chef as well as her own development team to create a ‘Beanie Hot Pot’ – an appetising mix of different beans which are lightly spiced to increase their appeal.

However, just developing and introducing these new dishes isn’t enough. In Tracie’s eyes, communication is essential to making the menus work, and each term she sends out a ‘Good School Food Guide’ to 92,000 parents in the area, highlighting the term’s new menu, as well as featuring information on key suppliers, such as Birds Eye Foodservice.

It’s marketing tools like these that Tracie believes can really make a difference to parents’ perception of school food, and – being a self-confessed brand girl – she knew the Birds Eye name would deliver instant credibility.

Justin Burbage, Birds Eye Foodservice Director is delighted with the work carried out by Tracie and Hertfordshire County Council, and believes it underlines the genuine benefits the products can deliver within this sector.

Explaining their immediate appeal to school caterers he comments: “Not only do our children’s products look and taste great, they all carry the ‘Captain’s Nutrition Mission’ – as a sign of our commitment to children’s nutrition. In essence, it stands for the fact that our entire children’s range contains no artificial colours, flavours or preservatives, no hydrogenated vegetable oil, and deliver just 20% or less of a 5-10 year old’s GDA for fat, saturated fat and salt per recommended serving. They also all meet FSA 2010 Salt Guidelines, in relation to salt content – making them a great addition to a balanced school menu.*”

The full Foodservice range covers four core product categories of fish, poultry, vegetables and red meat, and includes Chicken Burgers, Peas and Soya Beans and Beef Burgers – as well as their best-selling Omega 3 Fish Fingers.

* Food Standards Agency Voluntary Salt Reduction Targets, published March 2006



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Highlighting their continued dedication to school catering, Justin continues: “We’re also able to supply full nutritional information for menu planning tools such as Saffron and Nutmeg. It’s vital we work closely with Local Authorities such as Hertfordshire County Council to develop more products in line with FSA and SFT guidelines, to ensure they can meet the demands of governmental bodies, teachers, parents, and – of course – the children.”

With this firmly in mind, Justin is looking forward to working closely with Tracie to understand how their Fish Fingers and Beanie Hotpot go down with both the caterers and school children in Hertfordshire schools, and combine that with learnings from other Local Authorities listing Birds Eye Foodservice products to ensure they constantly deliver and exceed all expectations in school catering.

With pioneers like Tracie at the helm though, it seems they’re already destined to make waves in school catering.

For more information, great school recipes and to arrange a visit call +44 (0)20 8918 3200 or visit: www.birdseyefoodservice.com



For Sales and other information:

Birds Eye Foodservice

T:+44 (0)20 8918 3200 F:+44 (0)20 8918 3478

e:Caterer.information@birdseye.co.uk

