

Reduce Local Food Waste: Vak-Pak Frozen Foods in School Kitchens

Millions of pounds of plant foods go to waste from local farm harvests and school gardens. This can change if F&CS teachers and dietitians add freezing and vacuum packaging to their food & nutrition classes for teens, community members and cafeteria staff.

School cafeterias throughout the country can now freeze and vak-pak plant-based meal ingredients for school meals or for meal kits that go home with students once HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points) processing steps are approved by local health departments. Luckily a new vacuum packaging machine can be programmed with HACCP plans. Check out the programmable machines at www.vac-smart.com. Funding is available from USDA's Food & Nutrition division.

Visit the AAFCS webinar "Farm to Community: Harvest Freezing Strategies for School & Community Kitchens" recorded in November 2018 for a brief overview. Cafeteria funding is available from the USDA Food & Nutrition division.

The local food world needs all hands-on-deck reducing local farm food waste while creating healthy Freezer Meal Kits that teach people how to cook soups, stir fry meals, quick breads, veggie burgers, soaked whole grain breakfast cereals and more. Climate change requires creative local solutions. F&CS professionals have an important role to play.

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About Anna: I am a retired Family & Consumer Science teacher and farmer with fifteen years' experience freezing and vacuum packaging non-meat foods. A few grants helped me begin my research in an Ag. & Mkts. and Health Dept. inspected kitchen that I designed and built from the sale of the family farm. After fifteen years of experience, she has training materials available to share.