

School Feeding Programs in Colombia

Dr. Beatriz Londoño, General Director Colombian
Institute for family welfare - ICBF

Background

State-run nutritional services for students started in Colombia in 1941, by regulation of the National Education Ministry, when the national government established the general guidelines for creating the *Restaurantes Escolares* throughout the country. From that year on, state efforts to improve the alimentary and nutritional services for students have used different variations in its funding sources, the amount of students receiving the service, days of service per year, menus, administration and contracting methods and responsible institutions.

Since 1955, in cooperation with the U.S., the national government created the *CENDAS* program, which aimed to improve nutritional standards both among students and their families. It consisted in distributing meals such as cheese, soy milk and bread.

In 1968, President Carlos Lleras Restrepo created the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF), which among other duties replaced the former National Nutritional Institute and its *alimentary education* and *nutritional protection* responsibilities at primary public schools nation-wide. Since then, national school feeding programs' orientation and financing have been ICBF's responsibility.

In 1974, ICBF started producing *Bienestarina*, a vegetable mixture flour containing a high nutritional value at a low cost, which was introduced into school feeding programs as a daily component until these days.

Throughout time, several different combinations have been used: breakfast, mid-morning meal, lunch, glass of milk, rural scholar voucher, and several others. Today, according to the region, ICBF serves breakfast, mid-morning meal or lunch. In 2004, ICBF will serve more than 2.5 million children along 120 working days, investing more than USD 52 millions in almost 31.000 school restaurants all over the country.

Currently, Colombia priorities this service for public schools students (6 to 11 year old), who live in poverty conditions according to the national vulnerability survey *SISBEN*. Nevertheless, since an individual selection can be sometimes difficult, the school's location is also used as an indicator for determining the priorities in coverage.

Municipalities play an important role in Colombia's school feeding programs. By national legislation, they have to use a fixed percentage of their national budget to

help improve students' nutritional standards.¹ This participation makes the coverage reach 790.000 more students yearly.²

Traditionally, parents used to help financing this program out of their already small income, by paying a daily fee called *participation fare*. It was recently found out, that this fare (USD 0.10 in average) was causing even more exclusion, since the poorest families could not even afford paying it, and their child (or children) was being excluded from the service. Thus, since 2004 this fare has been abolished in order to prevent further mistreatment for the most needed population.

Over the years, school feeding programs had a nutritional purpose; it aimed for improving nutritional standards of the children. Nevertheless, experience and studies carried out worldwide showed that the real outcome of this kind of programs, and what their ultimate goals should be are both increasing and promoting school attendance and short term malnourishment treatment.

These goals are currently Colombia's school feeding programs' drive.

An important initiative that is greatly complementing our program is WHO's *School Health* strategy, which is guided by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. The aim of this strategy is to carry out health promotion activities, directly or indirectly related to nutrition, inside schools. Among the strategies there are: health education, alimentary services' reorientation, healthy school environment, physical education, recreation and sport for the academic community. Furthermore, the program aims for the promotion of the access to health and nutrition services for the students and their families.

Nutritional components of a regular school meal

Table 1 shows the nutritional values that ICBF requires to its contractors:

Table 1. Menu for the breakfast and lunch variations

Groups of aliments	BREAKFAST	
	Frequency	Net Weight/ serving (g-cc)
Milk and Bienestarina	3 days Bienestarina 2 days milk	Bienestarina : 25 g Milk: 200 c.c.
Cheese, Egg and Fruits	2 days cheese 2 days egg 1 day fruit	Cheese: 30 g Egg: 1 item Fruit: 80 g (complete/juice according to fruit)
Cereals y by-products	Daily	40- 50 g
Sugar	Daily	Sugar: 20 g Chocolate: 14g

¹ "Districts and municipalities must guarantee the restaurant service for students in their jurisdiction; they must run school feeding programs with the resources destined for it (...) regardless of what ICBF or other agency invests in this kind of programs" L.715/01

² Figures until June 30th/04

	LUNCH	
Milk, its by-products and Bienestarina	2 -3 days Bienestarina 1-2 days milk and one of its by- products	Bienestarina : 25 g Milk or by-product 200 c.c.
Meat, cheese, legumes and eggs	Daily	Cheese: 30 g Egg: 1 item legumes: 40 g
Vegetables and fruits	Vegetables: 3 days Fruits: 2 days	Vegetables: 40 g, Fruits: 80 g (complete/juice according to fruit)
Tubers and Plantain	Daily	70 g
Rice and oil	Daily	Rice: 35g (raw) Oil: 15 c.c.
Sugar	Daily	Sugar or sugar cane 20 g

Table 2 shows the nutritional values of the Bienestarina

Table 2: Bienestarina's Nutritional Facts			
Serving Size: 30 g			
Amount per serving			
Calories	110		
Fat Calories	10		
		% daily value*	
		Babies (breastfeeding)	Children
Total Fat, g	1		
Saturated Fat g	0		
Cholesterol mg	0		
Sodium mg	10		
Total Carbohydrates, g	19		
Fiber g	0,4		
Sugar g	0		
Protein, g	6	22	16
Vitamin A UI	600	30	23
Vitamin C mg	14	45	45
Riboflavin mg	0,18	36	23
Vitamin B6 mg	0,27	45	21
Folate (Folic Acid) mcg	48	80	24
Vitamin B12 mcg	0,42	42	21
Thiamine mg	0,15	50	25
Niacin mg	2,2	38,0	22
Iron mg	4,2	53,0	53
Calcium mg	210	38	47
Phosphor mg	165	46	21
Zinc mg	2,5	50	25
* The daily value is based in a 1520 calories' diet for children and 860 calories for babies (breastfeeding) Its daily value can be higher or lower depending on the calories needed.			
Recomended daily servings: babies 2, children 3			
Calories per gram :			
Fat 9	Carbohydrate 4	Protein 4	