



What's in My Lunchbox?

An Analysis of the Foods Parents Pack for their Toddlers

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Introduction

Previous Research

- Currently, 8.9% of children between the ages of 2 to 5 are obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017).
- During this age, children spend a large amount of time at a childcare center which often provide one third of daily nutritional needs for children in half-day programs and one half of daily nutritional requirements for full-day programs (Larson et al., 2011).

Why is this important?

- Child care centers that are enrolled in CACFP have strict nutrition standards they must adhere to that are set by the United States Department of Agriculture.
- For child care programs where the parents pack the foods to send with their children there are no nutrition standards implemented.

Objectives

The aims of this study are to:

- examine the foods served by parents in a childcare center
- determine if the foods served meet the updated recommended food groups for lunch in accordance with the new CACFP guidelines implemented on October 1, 2017

Methods

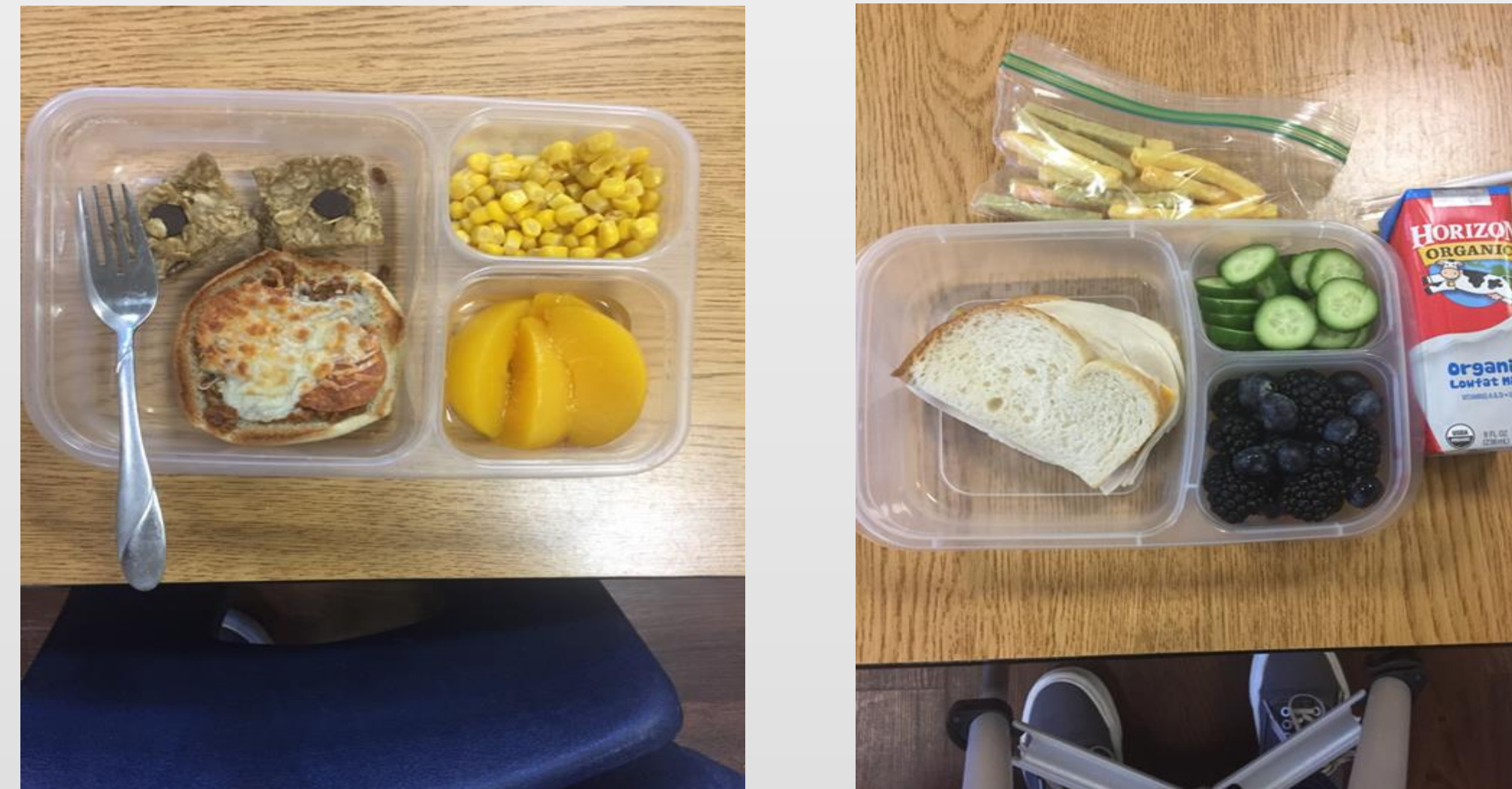
Participants

- Local childcare program in Lincoln, NE where parents pack the lunches of their toddlers.
- 28 lunches of children 1-2 years old with no food allergies

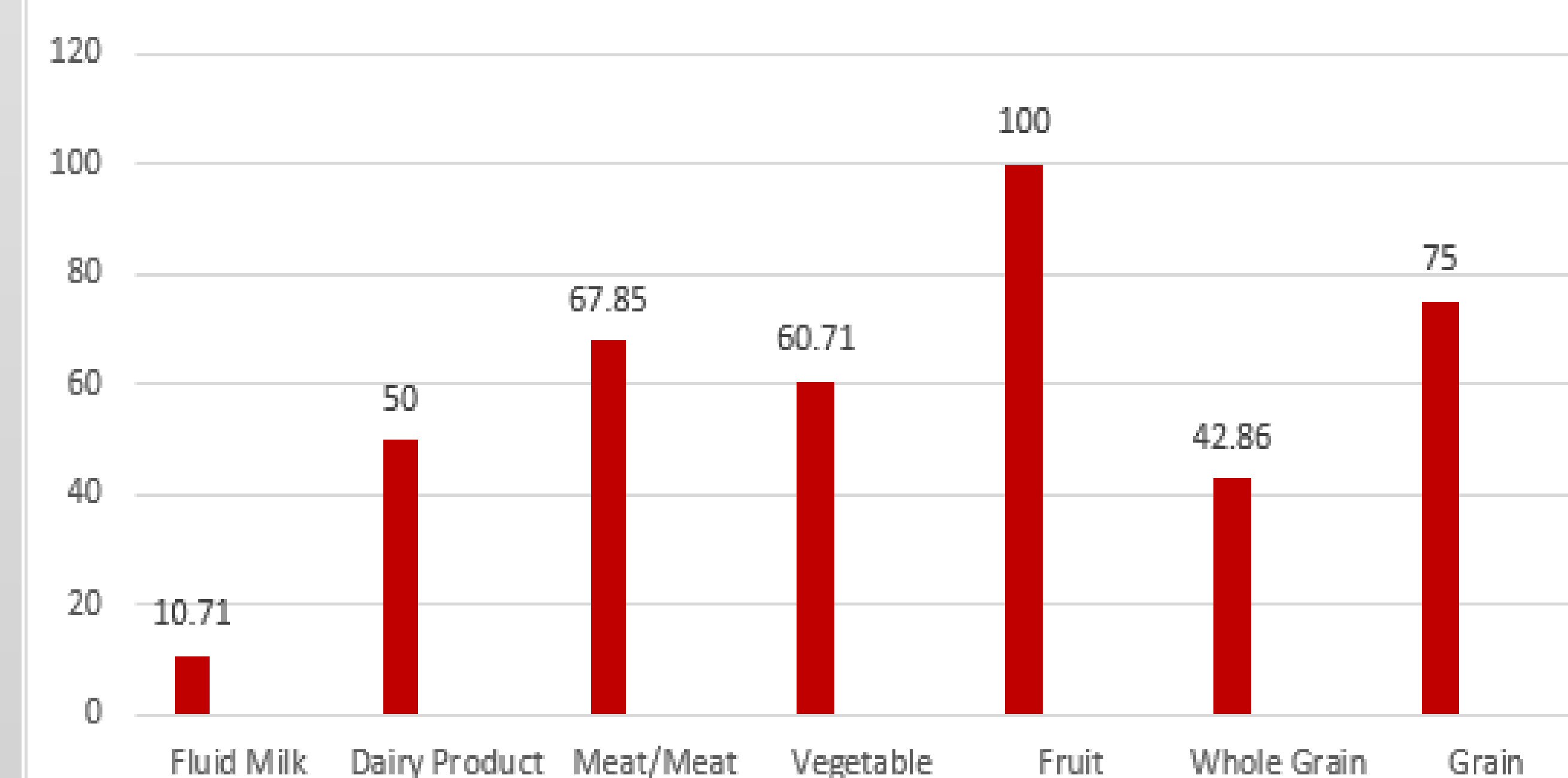
Procedure

- The teacher unpacked the lunches of toddlers including removing lids and unwrapping food items.
- A document review of the Parent Handbook was performed in accordance with the Environment and Policy Assessment and Observation (EPAO) (Ward, Hales, Haverly, Marks, Benjamin, Ball, et al., 2008).

Results



Percentages of Food Groups Packed



Nutrition Information Provided	Example of Information
USDA Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Food groups that should be packed (fluid milk, fruits/vegetables, grains/bread, meat/meat alternate)Serving size of each food group by age
Food Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send healthy snacks such as snap peas and triscuitsFamilies are asked not to send sweets and high-sugar content foods
Nutrition Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Childcare providers attend nutrition training course once a year that covers topics such as (food safety, portion sizes, healthy snack options, and food suggestions)
Nutrition Written Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Covers fruits and vegetables, beverages, meals and snacksSupport for healthy eatingNutrition education
Physical Activity Written Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Covers active play and inactive time and the play environment

Implications for Research

- Future studies should examine the parent's knowledge of CACFP recommendations and nutrition knowledge which could further explore the need to educate parents about the recommendations provided by the USDA.
- Future studies should also examine dietary intake of the children in addition to the foods packed.

Implications for Policy

- Childcare program should provide nutrition information and guidelines/suggestions about food groups and healthy food items for parents which may encourage them to pack healthier foods and in accordance with CACFP guidelines.
- Childcare programs should have written policies about foods and drink items that are allowed which may impact parents to pack more nutritious foods.

Implications for Program & Practice

- Childcare classrooms should include a parent board where they post nutrition information and guidelines for parents to view.
- Childcare programs should provide nutrition training workshops for providers and parents to learn about CACFP guidelines and food packing suggestions and tips.

Selected References

- CDC. (2017, January 25). Childhood obesity facts. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/facts.htm>
- Larson, N., Ward, D., Benjamin-Neelon, S., & Story, M. (2011). What role can child-care settings play in obesity prevention? A review of the evidence and call for research efforts. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 111(9), 1343-1362. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2011.06.007>
- Full references are available upon request from the first author. Email jsmith127@unl.edu.