

Despite economy, SUDIA remains leader of 'New Look of School Milk'



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The number of schools participating in SUDIA's New Look of School Milk (NLSM) program, which aims to place more milk in the hands of more students in convenient, recyclable bottles and a variety of delicious flavors, now stands at 2,642.

SUDIA continues to lead the country in the number of schools that have converted from serving milk in boxes to single-serve plastic bottles. SUDIA's schools represent 25 percent of the national total for all NLSM schools and about 18 percent of all national school districts.

The NLSM program has boosted the consumption of milk among students across the Southeast. Schools that participate in the program have seen milk sales soar, by more than 30 percent in some

instances, where students have embraced the new look and taste of milk in plastic bottles.

According to recent studies, milk tastes colder, fresher and better when served in plastic bottles, which makes it more appealing to children. It is expected that more school districts will join the program in the coming year.

"Our participating schools continue to see milk sales increase," said Molly Szymanski, SUDIA's assistant manager of school nutrition. "Nearly every school that has switched from cardboard to plastic packaging has seen an increase both in meal participation as well as total milk sales, and we expect more will join the program in the months ahead," said Szymanski.

The program began in 2003 with a pilot test that included 75

schools, and has grown exponentially since. As part of the program, schools agree to purchase their mainline milk in plastic, resealable bottles.

In turn, they receive equipment grants and expertise from SUDIA staff to improve their milk merchandising capabilities.

SUDIA expects to increase the number of schools participating in the New Look of School Milk to more than 3,000 by the end of 2009. Children that have a positive experience with milk are more likely to become life-long consumers, which will continue to increase dairy sales in the future. "We are increasing milk sales today, but we're also giving the younger generation a positive experience with milk that we hope will stay with them for years to come," Szymanski said.