School district alliance to procure antibiotic-free chicken

The Urban School Food Alliance, a coalition of the largest school districts in the U.S. — including New York City; Los Angeles; Cal.; Chicago, Ill.; Miami-Dade, Fla.; Dallas, Texas, and Orlando, Fla. — announced last week it would establish a uniform standard for companies to follow when supplying chicken products to its schools. Serving nearly 2.9 million students daily, alliance members procure more than $550 million in food and supplies annually.

The coalition aims to use its joint purchasing power and influence to help drive down costs nationwide while setting higher standards for the quality of food served in its schools. “The standards we’re asking from the manufacturers go above and beyond the quality of the chicken we normally purchase at local supermarkets,” said Jason Marshall, the chief executive officer of school support services for the New York City Department of Education. “This move by the alliance shows that school food directors across the country truly care about the health and wellness of students.”

The alliance’s latest action focuses on chicken because it is one of the most popular items served at cafeterias across the country. “We are a Super National Chicken Council president of communications, agreed that “chicken is the most nutritious, versatile and affordable protein available, especially for growing, school-aged children. In growing instances, school breakfast and lunch might be the only opportunity for kids to eat high-quality protein during the day.”

Working with suppliers, nonprofit partners and government agencies, the alliance has committed to requiring all chicken products to be produced under a U.S. Department of Agriculture Process Verified Program that includes compliance with the following:

1. No animal byproducts are used in the feed;
2. Chickens are raised on an all-vegetarian diet;
3. The birds are humanely raised, as outlined in the National Chicken Council’s “Animal Welfare Guidelines,” and
4. No antibiotics are administered ever.

If a food company cannot supply the full volume of “no antibiotics ever” chicken during procurement, the supplier must submit a written plan as to when it will be able to meet the above standards. In the meantime, the supplier must have the capacity to supply USDA Process Verified (third party) for Therapeutic Use Only chicken, as defined in the National Resources Defense Council’s December 2013 “Support for Antibiotic Stewardship in Poultry Production” or in the School Food Focus/The PEW Charitable Trusts’ September 2014 “Purchasing Guidelines That Minimize the Use of Antibiotics in Poultry Production.”

The Urban School Food Alliance was formed nearly two years ago to use its purchasing power to continue to drive quality up and costs down while incorporating sound environmental practices.