



# Taste Test Toolkit:

## A Guide to Tasting Success

### Why do Taste Tests?

Students are often reluctant to try new foods. Taste tests introduce new menu items in a way that raises awareness about healthy food choices, involves the school community, and builds a culture of trying new foods. Research has shown that children (*and adults!*) need to try new foods multiple times (*up to twelve times!*) before integrating them into their diet. School taste tests of Vermont Harvest of the Month products give students an opportunity to try locally produced and in-season foods each month. They may not like kale as kindergarteners, but providing regular opportunities for students to try it in various forms (*chips, salads, smoothies, etc.*) throughout their school years can lead to a whole new generation of kale lovers!

### When and where should Taste Tests take place?

**When:** Taste tests work best when implemented on a regular schedule. We suggest a monthly school-wide taste test highlighting the current Harvest of the Month product. (*See scheduling documents in the appendix for more information.*)

**Where:** Taste tests can be run successfully in either the classroom or the cafeteria. Each school has its own unique circumstances, schedules and infrastructure, so be sure to take these into consideration when deciding where to implement your taste tests.

- *Classroom Benefits*
  - Teachers can integrate lessons from the HOM | Educator flyer
  - Data is collected in more controlled environment
  - Ambassador classrooms can serve as leaders within the school
  - Taste tests can be prepared by cafeteria staff or within each classroom (depending on the recipe, and availability of cooking carts)
- *Cafeteria Benefits*
  - Cafeteria staff or other school staff can integrate lessons from the HOM | Cafeteria flyer
  - Data is collected in a central location
  - No classroom or instruction time is required



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### How do I run a successful Taste Test?

Below are some helpful tips for successful taste tests at your school:

1. **Have a regular schedule.** Commit to taste tests on a certain day each month; this aids planning and makes taste testing a predictable part of the school culture.
2. **Choose appropriate recipes.** The best recipes are simple and inexpensive to make, so they can be easily added into the regular meal program.
3. **Use local ingredients.** When possible, this is a great way to include more local food in your school's meals and generate enthusiasm for local eating.
4. **Involve students.** When students are involved in preparing, serving, and surveying other students during a taste test, they will be more willing to try the new foods. Work with teachers to create a schedule for classes to participate in preparing and sharing the taste tests.
5. **Recruit volunteers.** Parent volunteers can also be helpful during taste tests, especially for serving or helping to prepare food. Place a note in your school newsletter asking for parents interested in helping out.
6. **Advertise.** Generate excitement for your taste tests by announcing them in the school newsletter, take-home letters, bulletin boards and morning announcements.
7. **Use the right materials.** If you're doing a taste test in the cafeteria, talk to your food service director about whether you can simply serve a sample right on to each child's tray. Consider purchasing reusable sample cups for the total approximate number of students you plan to engage in taste tests.



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8. **Don't Yuck My Yum!** Remind students that we do not say negative things about how something tastes because it might offend someone and discourage others from trying something new. If a student tries something that she or he does not like, request that they quietly spit it out in a napkin so other students have an opportunity to taste it and form their own opinions. Encourage students to use respectful language like "I don't care for it." Remind students that sometimes it takes trying new things 10 times before you begin to like them.
9. **Send home copies of the recipe.** Students love to share what they have done and learned at school with their families. One taste test can easily turn into four or five!
10. **Share the harvest!** Post photos, results, student comments or recipes to the Vermont Harvest of the Month Facebook page.



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### How should I collect feedback from students?

Getting feedback, both formally and informally, from the students is an important part of the taste test process. There are many ways to gather this feedback, and the size, scope, and context of your taste test will determine which approach is best.

Here are three suggested methods of capturing feedback:

#### ***Anonymous Ballot Boxes:***

- Set up a table in the cafeteria with three containers labeled to indicate a “Like” “OK, I’d try it again” and “Dislike” option. The ballot boxes could display the words or symbols such as smiley/frowny faces or thumbs up/down. Have a container of small objects such as dry beans or slips of paper ready for students to use to cast their votes.
- After the kids have tasted the food, encourage them to cast their vote in the box that corresponds to their opinion.
- This method is interactive, fun, and allows them to record their opinion anonymously. Students might also be more apt to vote in accordance with their own opinion, rather than being influenced by what their friends’ reactions are.

#### ***Visual Count, Tally:***

- In a large group you can walk around the room and keep a tally for every “like” “sort of like” and “dislike” as each child tells you their opinion about the taste test.
- Count and keep a tally. An example tally sheet follows.

#### ***Paper Survey:***

- Casting a paper ballot can be fun, and it has the same advantage as an anonymous ballot box: the secrecy can encourage students to vote in accordance with their own opinion.
- Create a simple paper ballot asking students to circle their preference: Like, Sort Of, or Dislike.
- Set up a ballot table and remind students to cast their votes after trying the taste test.



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### What do I do with the data once it is collected?

Food and nutrition education has both cross-curricular and extra-curricular applications. Below are a few ideas:

- **Curriculum Connections.** Taste test votes provide a wonderful set of data to work with in mathematics lessons about statistics, graphing or percentages. See the monthly *HOM Educator Flyer* for more curriculum ideas.
- **School Garden Connections.** If a taste test item is particularly popular, contact your school garden coordinator(s) to see if it would be possible to grow it right there on the school grounds.
- **Share your results.** Submit the results of your Taste Test to our statewide database! Visit: [www.VermontHarvestOfTheMonth.org](http://www.VermontHarvestOfTheMonth.org) and click on the Taste Test button.



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### Ambassador Classrooms

Whether your taste tests occur in the classroom or the cafeteria, designating an “Ambassador Classroom” (AC) for each month is a wonderful opportunity to promote leadership, and to share the responsibility of managing the taste test program. One classroom may opt to take on the responsibility for the whole year, or multiple classrooms may sign up for their turn throughout the year. At the beginning of each school year, fill out the **Ambassador Classroom & Taste Test Schedule**<sup>1</sup> at the beginning of the year.

### ***Ambassador Classroom Roles:***

- ***1-2 weeks before taste test:*** If conducting classroom-based taste tests with food prepared by the cafeteria and/or AC, present the **Classroom Taste Test Delivery Sign-Up Sheet**<sup>2</sup> at a staff meeting at least a week in advance of taste test day. This form allows teachers to indicate their preferred time-slot to receive cafeteria-prepared taste tests. If taste tests are being prepared in classrooms, this is not necessary.
- ***Week of taste test:*** AC teacher distributes **Taste Test Reminder**<sup>3</sup>, **Classroom Taste Test Survey Form**<sup>4</sup> (*if appropriate*) and current HOM | Classroom flyer in each teacher’s mailbox
- ***Day of taste test:*** AC students can help prepare taste test with cafeteria staff (*if appropriate*).
  - ***For classroom taste tests:*** AC students deliver portioned-out taste tests to each classroom; Receive tally sheets from each classroom, and compile school-wide results; Submit results on HOM website
  - ***For cafeteria taste tests:*** AC students pass out taste tests during lunch time to all interested students; Collect data on **Cafeteria Taste Test Survey Form**<sup>5</sup> and compile **School-Wide Results Sheet**<sup>6</sup>; Submit results on HOM website

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix D

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix E

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix F



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### Appendix A: Ambassador Classroom & Taste Test Schedule

<b>Month &amp; HOM product</b>	<b>Taste Test Date</b>	<b>Ambassador Classroom</b>
September   <i>Apples</i>		
October   <i>Broccoli &amp; Cauliflower</i>		
November   <i>Kale</i>		
December   <i>Winter Squash</i>		
January   <i>Parsnips</i>		
February   <i>Cabbage</i>		
March   <i>Beets &amp; Rutabagas</i>		
April   <i>Dry Beans</i>		
May   <i>Mixed Greens</i>		
June   <i>Herbs</i>		
July   <i>Berries</i>		
August   <i>Tomatoes</i>		



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## Appendix B: Classroom Taste Test Delivery Sign-Up Sheet

Date of Taste Test:

Featured Harvest of the Month:

Taste Test Recipe:

Ambassador Classroom:

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*Teachers, please sign-up for your preferred delivery time by entering your grade level & name in the appropriate time slot.*

### **Classroom Taste Test Delivery Schedule**

Time slot 1:	Time slot 2:	Time slot 3:	Time slot 4:
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Thank you for your help!  
You'll receive a reminder in your mailbox the week of the taste test.





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### Appendix C: Taste Test Reminder

Date of Taste Test:

Featured Harvest of the Month:

Taste Test Recipe:

Ambassador Classroom:

**Grade/Teacher:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Your classroom's taste test delivery is scheduled for:**

\_\_\_\_\_

(time)

#### **Other Reminders:**

- Please see the attached HOM | Educator Flyer for lessons and activities related to this Harvest of the Month!
- Please fill out the attached Classroom Taste Test Tally Sheet and return it to the Ambassador Classroom once the taste test is completed.

Thank you!



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## Appendix D: Classroom Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's recipe: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # Students: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Reminders for Teachers or HOM Volunteers:

- Please remember to share fun facts from the *HOM Classroom Flyer* with your students. This is a great opportunity for students to practice reading out loud.
- Pass out the taste test samples, then, ask for a show of hands to complete the survey below. Thank you!

### SHOW OF HANDS SURVEY

<b><i>RAISE YOUR HAND IF...</i></b>	<b><i># of students</i></b>
I tried it.	
I like it a lot. (Thumbs UP)	
I like it a little. (Thumbs SIDEWAYS)	
I don't like it yet. (Thumbs DOWN)	
I'd eat it again at school.	

*Thank you for helping collect this data.*

***Please return this form ASAP to:*** \_\_\_\_\_

*(HOM Coordinator or Ambassador Classroom)*



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## Appendix E: Cafeteria Taste Test Survey Form

Harvest of the Month Item: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's recipe: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # Students: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



### Reminders for Cafeteria Staff or HOM Volunteers:

- If the environment permits, share fun facts from the *HOM Cafeteria Flyer* with students.
- If there is a voting station, make sure it is clearly marked.

## TASTE TEST RESULTS

Total # who TRIED IT	
Thumbs UP (I Liked it!)	
Thumbs SIDEWAYS (I like it a little.)	
Thumbs DOWN (I don't like it yet.)	
Total # who would TRY IT AGAIN	

### Comments:

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*Thank you for helping collect this data.*

