

Current drought in Cape Town urges Peninsula School Feeding Association (PSFA) to change menu

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Drought dries up school feeding

The current drought and resulting water crisis have started to impact school children in a very direct way; their school feeding. Instead of their usual hot cooked meal for lunch, over 25,000 youth in over 140 primary, high schools and tertiary educational institutions are now receiving a sandwich for their lunchtime meal. Level 6B water restrictions were implemented on 1 February, limiting Cape Town water users to only 50 liters each. This necessitated Peninsula School Feeding Association (PSFA) to be pro-active and reduce the usage of water for their cooking.

For the past few months schools in the Cape Peninsula have experienced water interruptions which resulted in preparers being unable to access water for cooking of school meals. This further impacted on the stock piling of ingredients like samp, beans, rice and soya mince. These ingredients are used in the daily menus which included meals such as fish, rice and butternut or samp and beans with fresh fruit.

About a decade ago PSFA has developed a cooked menu with the assistance of nutritional experts from the Department of Education to provide for 30% of a child's daily recommended dietary intake (RDI) of nutrients. "While we cannot match the balanced nutrition of the cooked meal, we adapted our new 'dry' lunch menu to include as much nutritional value as possible," explains Amelia Koeries, operations manager of PSFA. Contrary to rumours that children will be having jam, PSFA is having none of that. "We have sourced a baker to especially bake a brown bread for us. This will be served with toppings such as baked beans, alternated with pilchards, high in omega oils."

PSFA has been keeping a watchful eye on the serious water crisis in the Western Cape. "We have done our research on how much water it takes to prepare our meals in schools and have come to realise that over 200,000 litres are used monthly in the preparation of lunch meals in the 147 schools on the PSFA scheme alone," says Petrina Pakoe director of the association. PSFA is, however, also the service provider under tender for the Western Cape's department of education to provide school feeding in a further 459 schools and educational institutions as well as 54 early childhood development centres (EDCs).

Although their water-less lunch menu is saving water, PSFA is not serving a waterless menu as it is continuing with a cooked fortified maize-meal porridge served for breakfast. "We are certainly using 'less water' in our 'water-less' menu, but PSFA needs to remain true to its objective - to reduce short-term hunger. We have to make sure that no child is going hungry during this drought as you can't teach a hungry child," concludes Pakoe.

*PSFA has been feeding school children since 1958 and is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2018. They feed over 290,000 children daily. Apart from the 25,000, also some 260,000 youth are fed as part of the tender, providing meals to selected schools and learners under a quintile system. The schools or learners falling outside the quintile system for the tender are fed with fundraising efforts from PSFA, including the annual Blisters for Bread fun run as well as donations from individuals and companies.