



# UPLAND UNIFIED

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## PRESS RELEASE

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## Upland Unified School District Cultivates Fresh Thinking with Farm-to-School Program at All School Sites

**UPLAND** – Upland Unified School District is transforming school meals from the ground up with a robust, innovative farm-to-school program that connects students with fresh, healthy, and locally grown produce, straight from local farms and gardens at each of the District's 14 campuses.

Every school site in the District now features a regenerative garden, maintained with the help of student interns from federally funded agriculture programs, Upland Unified students, and volunteers. These spaces serve as more than just gardens; they are outdoor classrooms and community hubs that foster hands-on learning, sustainability, and healthy eating habits.

"We're not just feeding students, we're empowering them with hands-on learning, better nutrition, and a stronger connection to the food they eat," said Nutrition Services Director Cassidy Boardman.

Each harvest season brings new offerings. This summer alone, the District harvested around 300 pounds of potatoes, tomatoes, squash, and plums. The plums were blended into refreshing plum-carrot smoothies for taste testing by students. Produce from the gardens is featured daily in school salad bars and cooked-from-scratch meals, an approach that now accounts for 40% of the District's food offerings, in keeping with goals set forth by the state of California.

Any surplus produce is bagged and made available for students that participate in weekly garden clubs to take home, extending the benefits of fresh, whole foods beyond the school day.

Professional chef Sam Kowal, a Brigaid chef with 12 years of experience and formal training from the Culinary Institute of America, leads the District's recipe innovation efforts thanks to funding through California's Kitchen Infrastructure and Training funds. Chef Kowal works closely with student feedback and advisory councils to design full meals that reflect student tastes and cultural diversity. Her recent creations include Thai-inspired dishes, a Peruvian bowl, and California sushi bowls, developed in response to student requests for sushi-style offerings. She is currently working on a hearty, homemade pizza recipe to replace the current restaurant-style version.

Other student favorites include breakfast strawberry banana smoothies and a growing lineup of globally inspired, plant-based meals.

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Nutrition Services staff are also investing in continuous learning through partnerships with national organizations like Friends of the Earth, joining plant-based recipe development and organic procurement cohorts to stay on the cutting edge of sustainable school nutrition.

In addition to student interns, the gardens serve as host sites for California Climate Action Corps fellows and local college students earning service hours through their educational programs, expanding the gardens' role as intergenerational learning spaces.

"Our farm-to-school approach reflects Upland Unified's enduring commitment to wellness, sustainability, and innovation," said Superintendent Lynn Carmen Day. "It's not a passing trend, but a cornerstone of how we engage students and nurture a healthier future."

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS**

**UUSD\_NutritionServices1:** A vibrant harvest from a school garden showcases the fresh, seasonal produce that will be featured in student meals. Each of Upland Unified's 14 schools maintains a thriving garden, reinforcing the District's commitment to wellness, sustainability, and hands-on learning.

**UUSD\_NutritionServices2:** A student favorite at Upland Unified is the scratch-made "Walking Taco," created by Chef Sam Kowal. This fun, portable twist on nachos is served in a chip bag, perfect for flavor and convenience.

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