

# Convenience Drives Choice in School Lunch Rooms: A Salad Bar Success Story

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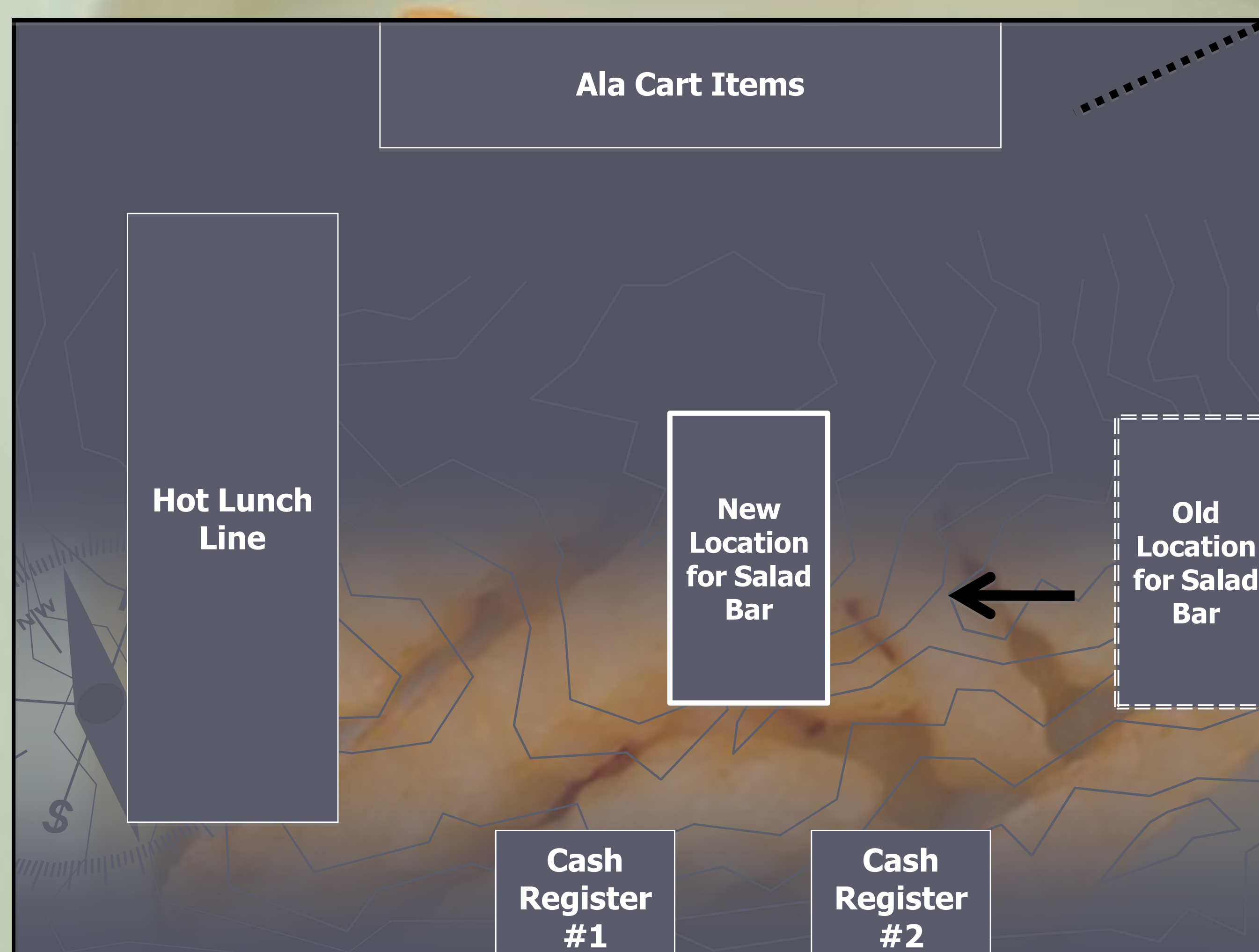


## Background

Environmental changes in the arrangement or placement of food in a school cafeteria can have a huge impact on what foods children will purchase and consume. Previous research has shown that placing chocolates 6 feet away from one's desk reduces consumption from 9 chocolates a day to 4 chocolates per day (Wansink, 2004). These same principles can be applied to encouraging healthier food consumption in school cafeterias (Just, Wansink and Mancino, 2007). This field study tests whether changing the physical location of a salad bar will increase consumption and school lunch participation.

## Methodology

Salad bar was moved from location against wall to the middle of the lunchroom directly in front of the cash register. The change was made at the end of April 2006. All offerings remained the same. Participation records and salad sales were monitored.



**Abstract**  
Efforts to improve food choice in high schools and middle schools often focus on either taxing or on eliminating less healthy alternatives, both which could drive students away from the school lunch program. Building on the premise that two influences on school lunch decisions are salience and convenience, a field study was conducted in a middle school. The objective was to make the salad bar more salient and convenient to students. Instead of being placed parallel to a lunchroom wall, it was moved 4 feet in front of the cash registers. Depending on the specific items, the resulting salad sales increased 200 to 300 percent compared to year-to-date figures. Additionally, these sales occurred with an increase in overall participation. A variety of additional "healthy-foods-made-more-convenient" opportunities are suggested as next-step interventions worthy of investigation.

## Results

- School lunch participation rates increased 6 percentage points after the salad bar was relocated to its current position (P=0.028).
- Total school lunch enrollment increased after the salad bar was relocated (P=0.009).
- Salad bar sales increased approximately 200-300 percent depending upon the specific item.
- Qualitative data indicates that children were more aware of the salad bar after it was relocated. It also indicates children enjoyed the salad more.

**Table 1. Changes in participation before and after salad bar relocation**

	T	Df	P value	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation
Total	71.799	1	.009	423.37620	8.33919
Free	61.425	1	.010	148.72910	2.42120
Reduced	12.886	1	.049	57.13394	4.44056
Paid	56.099	1	.011	217.52035	3.87745
Percent Participation	23.000	1	.028	69.000000	3.00000



Figure 1. Enrollment Change in School Lunch Participation after Salad Bar Movement

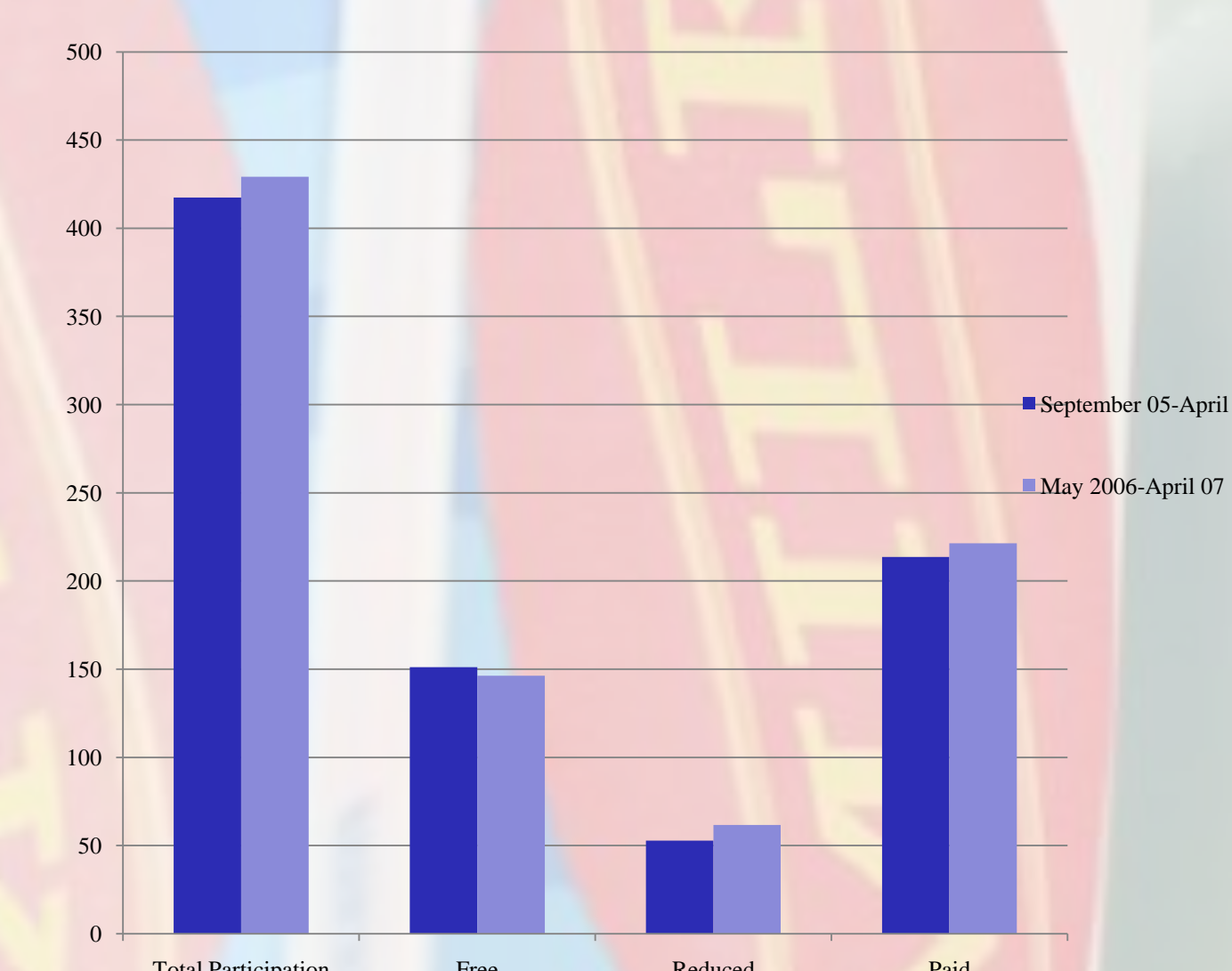
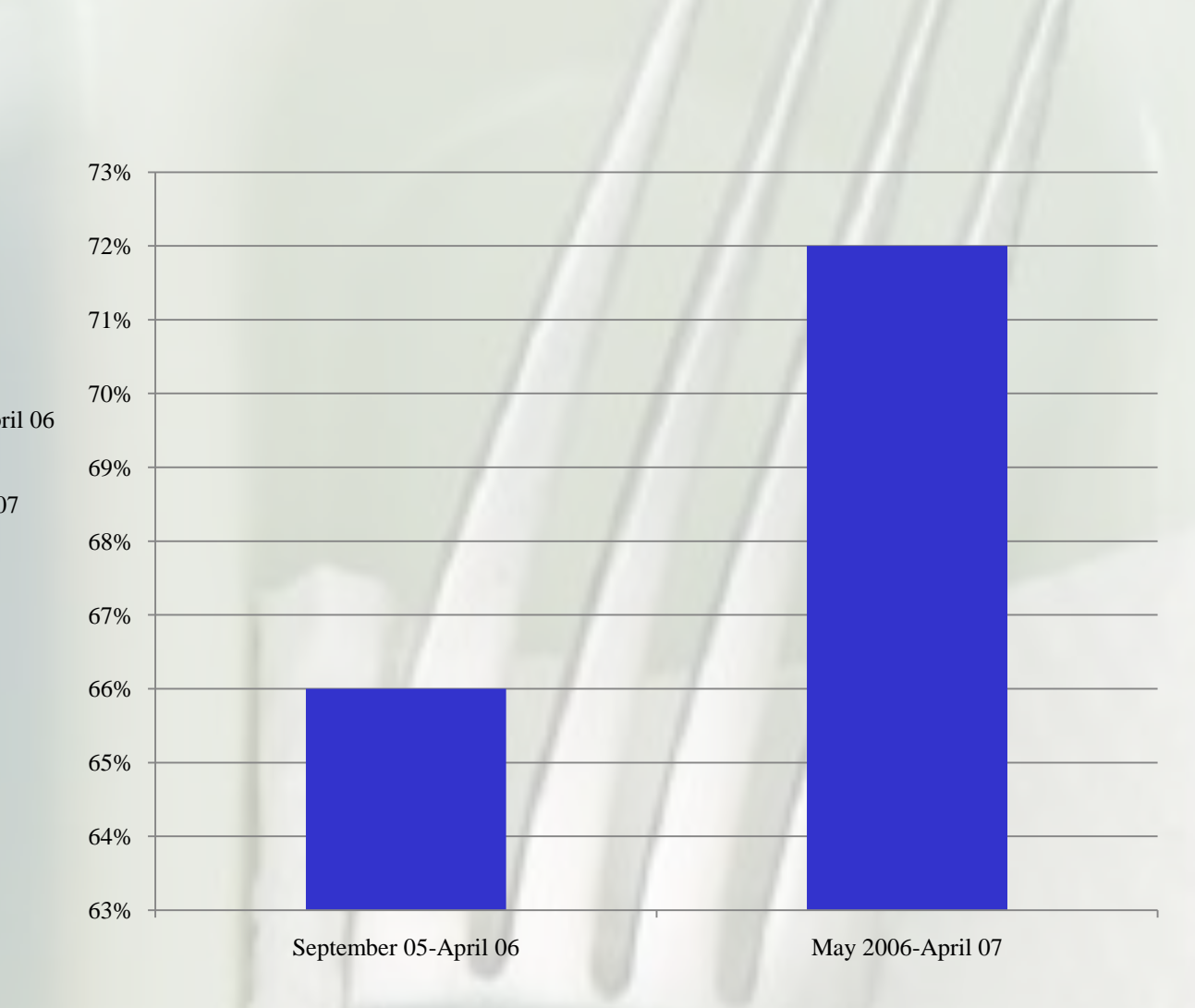


Figure 1. Percent Change in School Lunch Participation after Salad Bar Movement



## Implications:

Our research suggests that convenience and salience can have a large impact upon children's food choices in a school cafeteria. Environmental changes such as relocation of healthier foods to more convenient locations may increase consumption of these healthier foods. In addition, providing a convenient vegetable may increase reimbursable lunches and overall participation rates. A variety of additional "healthy-foods-made-more-convenient" opportunities are suggested as next-step interventions worthy of investigation.

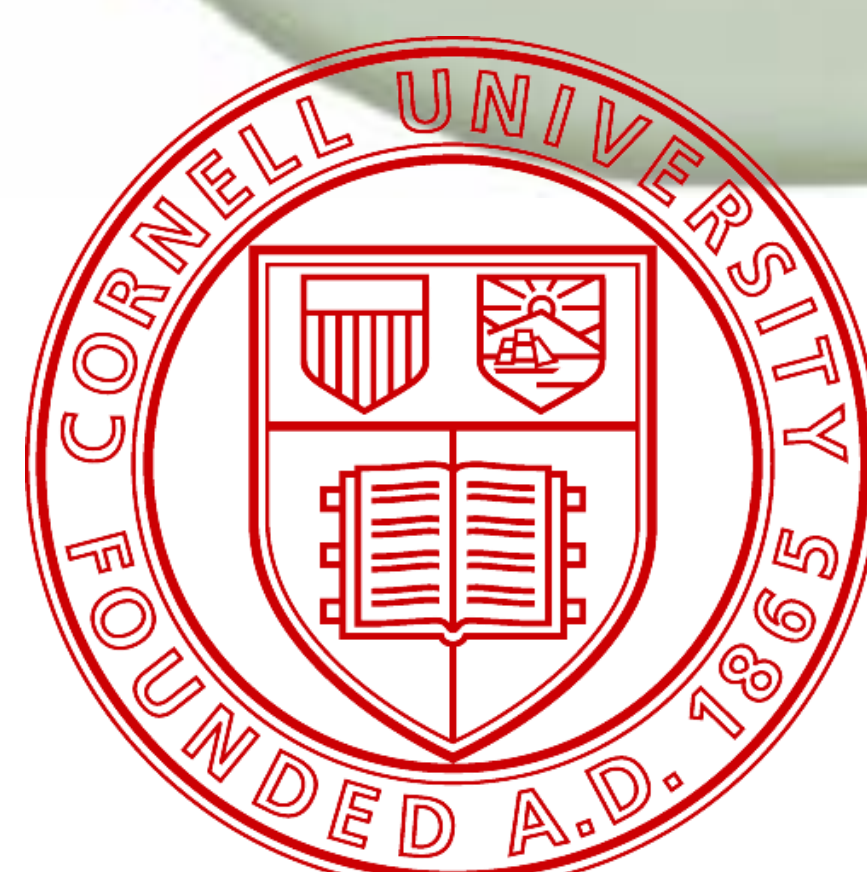
## References:

Wansink, Brian (2004), "Environmental Factors that Increase the Food Intake and Consumption Volume of Unknowing Consumers," Annual Review of Nutrition, 24, 455-479.

Just, David R., Lisa Mancino, and Brian Wansink (2007), "Could Behavioral Economics Help Improve Diet Quality of Nutrition Assistance Program Participants?" Economic Research Service Number 43, ERS -- Washington DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, June.

## For More Information:

For more information contact Laura Smith at Cornell University. les36@cornell.edu , or visit [www.smarterlunchrooms.org](http://www.smarterlunchrooms.org).



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