

Silver as Standard for Eden Foodservice

Eden Foodservice has recently committed to achieving the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark across all their primary schools – the first caterer to achieve Silver at this scale.

The Soil Association's Food for Life Catering Mark provides an independent endorsement that caterers and their schools are taking steps to improve the food they serve, using fresh ingredients which are free from undesirable additives and trans fats, are better for animal welfare, and comply with national nutrition standards.

By providing a tiered (Bronze, Silver, Gold) framework for improvement, the scheme engages food-providers and head teachers at the outset. Catering Mark meals are now eaten in 25% of English schools, with over 850,000 Catering Mark meals are being served each day in total.

This significant first sees Eden providing 39,000 Silver Catering Mark meals to 353 schools each day, across 7 contracts. Eden use free range and Freedom Foods certified eggs, British Red Tractor meat, MSC breaded fish, a range of LEAF Marque and Red Tractor certified fresh produce, organic yoghurt and in some contracts, organic vegetables.

Why Eden decided to go for the Catering Mark

Rachael Venditti MSc RNutr. (Development Manager) explains why the company decided to go for the Catering Mark at this scale, and outlines the challenges and opportunities faced in the process.

For a number of years we had been working on improving our standards in terms of cooking meals from scratch; using high quality, ethically sourced sustainable ingredients; promoting healthy eating; engaging with our schools; staff training and food safety. We felt that through setting the Silver Catering Mark as a minimum standard we could ensure continuity across all of our schools and also receive the recognition the Catering Mark provides – assisting us in communicating our standards to our staff and schools.

The key menu changes have been moving the entire business to:

- free range RSPCA Freedom Foods certified eggs (previously only included in certain contracts)
- introducing organic produce to contracts that did not already provide organic vegetables (daily Yeo Valley organic yoghurt)
- increasing the amount of MSC fish
- LEAF Marque and Red Tractor certified produce
- as part of our focus on using British ingredients, moving to British bacon (we had already been using Red Tractor meat).

Supplier support from Brakes

A real success story of our Silver Catering Mark initiative has been the strengthening of our relationship with Eden's key food supplier, Brakes. From the outset we have worked closely with James Mills, Sector Development Manager (Education) and Ruth Casson (Nutritionist), establishing a transparent and cohesive partnership approach which has facilitated our on-going success and compliance with the Silver standards. **We have worked closely together to ensure that new ingredients required to achieve Silver across all schools are available** such as British bacon and organic yoghurt. Due to Brakes' integrated supply chain and their relationship with their producers, we are able to obtain a huge amount of information on the ingredients we purchase. Together we have identified and established new working practices which have supported our large scale accreditation process, such as gaps in the supply chain for compliant ingredients and the provision of information on the accreditation and origin of ingredients.

"A number of Brakes' customers have been involved with Food for Life for a number of years, predominantly for specific schools or for certain contracts. Therefore when Eden first got in touch last year and said they wanted to take their whole business to Silver, we were impressed. However this level of accreditation also posed Brakes a number of challenges. A number of key education lines would need to be re-sourced from the UK, especially in the protein category, and detailed provenance would be required for the rest of the perishable categories such as eggs, dairy and especially fruit and vegetables. In such fast moving categories, where the location of suppliers can change with the seasons, this was a significant challenge and is a new way of working for Brakes. Working in partnership with Eden, we are now in a position to fully support their application for Silver across their whole education business. We now believe other customers will follow this trend, and the implications for the UK supply chain are exciting and dramatic."

James Mills, Sector Development Manager (Education), Brakes.

Communication with head teachers, pupils, parents and staff

The response from our staff has been extremely positive as they feel strongly about the quality of the food they serve to pupils. Many of them are parents so they feel excited and reassured that we are operating at the Silver standard across all of our schools.

We have always worked closely with our Head teachers to engage with them in the food offered to their pupils, and exploring how we can work together to create a positive food culture and promote healthy eating and food awareness. **Our Operations teams meet regularly with their Head teachers and we offer educational activities in schools which support the curriculum:**

- visits from our Nutritionists who run workshops and cookery demonstrations
- Smoothie Bike sessions (bikes fitted with a smoothie machine, powered by cycling - a great way to provide key messages around healthy eating and physical activity.
- a wide range of theme days, marketing and competitions.

We have developed a **Catering Mark Communications Toolkit for Heads**, which includes a briefing document, letter, an email with an electronic summary for use on their websites, and newsletters to let them know about our 'Silver as Standard' initiative. This provides them with key information on the Catering Mark, the benefits of Catering Mark menus, and the opportunity for them to now apply for the Silver Food for Life Partnership Award.

Telling parents and pupils about our food has been no less important. **Menu leaflets, newsletters and parents evenings for parents and pupils explain what the Catering Mark means.** More information will be included in our nutrition workshops for pupils, and we will display the Catering Mark posters and promotional materials in the schools to help communicate the benefits of the award to pupils.

We are continually looking at new ways to enhance the way we adopt the Whole School Approach. A good example of this is our new **Classroom Cooks initiative**, which uses pupils' enthusiasm as a vehicle to educate them about nutrition, food, cookery and healthy eating. This provides pupils with the opportunity to become mini menu developers for Eden. Every Eden menu now features a pupil developed dish each week which can be enjoyed by thousands of children across the country. Classroom Cooks has been shortlisted for the Cost Sector Marketing Award 2014.

To sum up

I would wholeheartedly recommend caterers applying for the award, but they must be able to fully commit to meeting the standards across their schools and see it as a long term initiative. The Catering Mark provides a very useful and simple framework for caterers to use in order to audit menus, establish changes to practices and procedures and highlight and document positive aspects of their service. It helps caterers to establish a plan of action to enable the Catering Mark to be implemented at scale without a significant negative cost implication.

Bristol's Mayor George Ferguson

[@GeorgeFergusonx](#)

Yes that's a brilliant result for [#Bristol](#) schools! Healthy food being one of most important aspects of growing up [@FoodBristol](#)