

Dr. Antonia Demas is on a mission to slim down and smarten up the National School Lunch Program. As founder of the fledgling Food Studies Institute, Demas wants to replace the artery-clogging grub that 25 million kids eat every day with low-fat recipes from around the world. Her vision includes teaching kids to cook and garden, as well as providing lessons on the origins of dishes ranging from curry to collard greens.

food fighter

A year into her campaign, six public schools have adopted Demas' curriculum. At E. J. Martinez Elementary School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, students have cooked East Indian *kalidaf* and rice pilaf. At New York City Public School 61, kids grow black-eyed peas, pumpkins and okra and illustrate a giant world map with the staple foods of various cultures.

Demas, a 46-year-old mother of two, began advocating healthier lunches when her son, now 26, first reported what he'd seen in his school's cafeteria. She went to Cornell to study for a Ph.D. in nutrition because, she says, "no one would listen if I was just a housewife from Trumansburg, New York."

Now Demas is challenging values that are almost as American as french fries. Teachers have been using work sheets and quizzes published by the meat industry since 1922. Last May, when the Department of Agriculture sought to force schools to serve more whole grains and vegetables, administrators rebelled: *Tabbouleh* was shot down. Meanwhile, more and more school children lunch on fast food. Currently, about 10 percent of all U.S. schools serve entrées from national chains like Pizza Hut and Taco Bell; such "contract feeding" is expected to flourish. Still, a mom can dream. Demas may even broaden her agenda to include cafeteria ambience. "The noise is like rush hour," she explains. "Kids could eat in their classrooms. They could listen to music." Groovy—but will food fights ever be the same?—Bill Donahue

