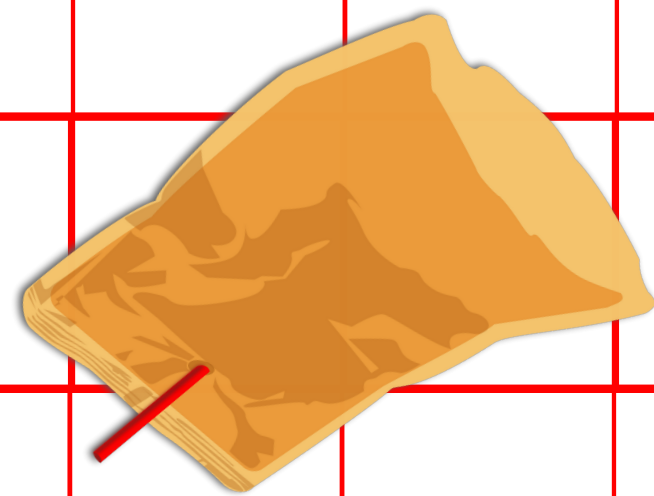


LEFT OVER



EPISODE 4

"Their Job is Not to Make Kids Healthier"

40 billion dollars. That's how much the "Big Three" food service contractors—Aramark, Sodexo, and Chartwells—earned in the United States in 2019. Many public school meal programs are run by private companies with a documented history of cutting employee wages, reducing food quality, and pocketing incentives meant for schools. Reporter Jessica Terrell details how corporations profit off the public school lunch system, and talks to a few of the people who have worked to hold them accountable.



"Food corporations are not social service agencies. They're not public health agencies. Their job is not to make kids healthier. **Their job is to sell products and make profits for their stockholders.**"

-Marion Nestle

DID YOU KNOW

Manufacturers provide rebates, sometimes also called "kickbacks", to food service management companies when they purchase large quantities of food. These rebates come in the form of money paid back to companies after the purchase is made—and can be worth millions of dollars.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH PRIVATE FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT COMPANIES?



For school districts overwhelmed by the NSLP's regulatory requirements or hoping to cut costs, private food service management companies offer an appealing solution. These companies (the three largest being Aramark, Sodexo, and Chartwells) handle school lunches from ingredients to service, sourcing ingredients and hiring employees to serve students. However, private contractors like the Big Three have also drawn criticism for prioritizing low costs over food quality, cutting worker wages and benefits, and pocketing sometimes millions of dollars' worth of rebates from food manufacturers that are meant to be passed on to schools. Research has also cast doubt on the assertion that private food contractors save school districts any money at all.

These companies have a significant footprint in the US's school food ecosystem. The USDA does not keep track of how many districts work with private food management companies, so our production team submitted public records requests to all 50 states and crunched the numbers. Eight states—including Texas, California and New York—either didn't respond or said they don't track that information. There are six states that don't have any school districts using private companies: Louisiana, Alabama, Hawaii, Kentucky, West Virginia, and North Dakota. For the remaining 36 states, we calculated that around 25% of public school district meal programs are managed by corporations.

In episode 4, Jessica Terrell speaks with Angel Gonzalez and Carrie Frazier, two people who were involved in holding the meal contractors in their communities accountable—Angel at his high school in Chicago, and Carrie in her son's school district in Oregon. We also hear from Colette Mattzie, a lawyer involved in two multi-million dollar settlements in which Sodexo and Chartwells were accused of keeping the settlements they received from the New York City and DC public school systems. Finally, Jessica explores Good Food Purchasing Programs, one movement pushing large organizations to improve their food acquisition practices.

How People Push Back



Community Organizing

by groups like Carrie Frazier's Kid Food Matters in Eugene, Oregon push contractors to source local, more nutritious food. In some cases, they also advocate for dropping private contractors in favor of district-run programs that have more control over what students are fed.

Good Food Purchasing Programs

provide metrics to encourage large institutions to direct their buying power toward five core values—local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare and nutrition—instead of prioritizing the lowest-cost vendor for food.

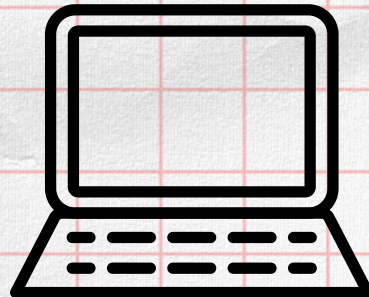


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Listen

[Listen to Carrie Frazier's full StoryCorps interview with researcher Sarah Riggs Stapleton](#)

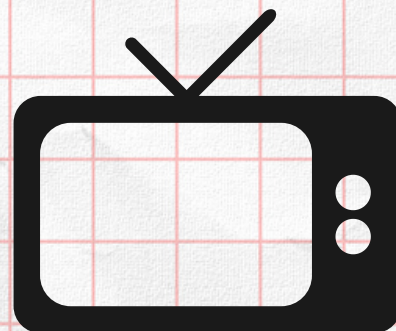


Explore

[Explore and read Food Politics, a long running blog by Marion Nestle](#)

[Learn about—and join—the Good Food Purchasing campaign.](#)

[Read "Cafeteria Kickbacks", an investigative feature on the school lunch kickback system by Lucy Komisar for In These Times](#)



Watch

[Watch the CBS "Whistleblowers" episode on the Chartwells settlement with DC public schools](#)

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