

Morgan Hill Unified School District



AT A GLANCE

Michael Jochner, Director of Nutrition Services

Morgan Hill, Santa Clara County, CA (suburban)

15 K-12 schools, plus an adult continuation school

9,022 students

36% eligible for free & reduced-price meals (FRPM)

373,961 lunches served (annually)

Food service model: On-site cooking; scratch-cooking; bulk purchasing; local and organic produce; waste reduction

Sources for organic foods: Daylight Foods, Goldstar and Sysco

Under the new leadership of Chef Michael Jochner, formerly the Executive Chef for Bon Appetite at Google, MHUSD's food service program has made significant changes to improve the quality of its meal service by transitioning from packaged meals to scratch cooking.

In 2019, MHUSD launched its "Fresh Meals" program, aimed at featuring more fresh fruits and vegetables, primarily through **salad bars and scratch cooking** offered at four of the district's eight elementary schools (the remaining schools plan to come on board in 2020-21). In order to meet their cooking needs, staff have dismantled much of the central kitchen's operations and shifted cooking to individual sites. Despite initial skepticism from some district staff, leaders, and parents, the program has been popular with students, as evidenced by their increased participation rates. In a short period of time, Chef Michael has greatly improved the district's finances — going from 64% of district sites operating at a loss, to more than 52% now breaking even. Even better, at least two of these schools began generating revenue.

Daylight 150 is a new program of Daylight Foods focused on helping customers source **organic and seasonal produce grown by local family farms** "in their backyard," within 150 miles of Daylight Foods.

After the first week of the salad bar program, student participation and enthusiasm for the fresh food increased significantly, and one school's custodian held up a single 55-gallon bag of trash and showed Chef Michael that, "this is all the trash...for the whole day!" Previously, that school had been producing 4-5 bags of garbage (mostly food waste) per day.

Marketing the program has been important to its success. In addition to using some of the marketing resources that Daylight Foods provides, Chef Michael creates individual acrylic sign holders to identify various produce items featured on salad bars and to familiarize students with new menu items — an effective marketing strategy he learned while working as a chef at Google. Chef Michael doesn't mention "organic" explicitly on these signs, as he feels that the term can be confusing. Marketing "fresh" food to students has been more inclusive and welcoming.

By increasing students' fresh food options and eliminating individually wrapped and served items, the district has **reduced waste, saved money and increased healthy food consumption**. Coupled with **purchasing in bulk**, the district has reduced its carbon footprint while increasing food quality and creating a positive, environmentally proactive food service program.

Chef Michael is most proud of having **trained and empowered his staff** to prepare fresh foods. The **organic food items are included in the new salad bars**, which have been the impetus for teaching scratch cooking and knife skills to his staff. He has also led the change to establish speed-scratch and scratch-cooked food operations for middle and high schools. Cooking alongside his staff, providing them with real chef's knives, cutting boards and support, he has helped create a lot of change in a short period of time.

Featured Organic Products: Fuji and Pink Lady Apples, Strawberries, Blueberries and Black Beans

Chef Michael has been happy to feature **organic Fuji** and **Pink Lady apples** on the menu, as well as **organic strawberries, blueberries**, and canned cooked organic **black beans**. When asked why he chose to feature organic Pink Lady apples, he shared that they taste amazing and look beautiful: "The pink color is exciting!"



"My advice is to start thinking more about how you cook at home—think more like a chef. I treat it all the same. I go to work to fight for our kids who deserve better food. I encourage directors to rethink and reimagine their labor."

— Michael Jochner,
Director of Nutrition Services

Why Organic?

Chef Michael is ambitious and goal-oriented, and believes strongly in the benefits of operating a quality food service program. He is committed to serving exceptional food and believes that if the food is fresh and good, more children will participate. He also believes he owes it to his students — the next generation — to give them clean and healthy foods, to have it better than he had it as a kid.

Key Partnership: LunchAssist

The support provided by LunchAssist to prepare the school district for its first administrative review was key to enabling Chef Michael to focus his attention on making meaningful changes to his school meal program. Digitizing his documentation and providing auditors with requested documents and records in real time relieved him from spending an overwhelming amount of time sifting through details and reports during a state administrative review. Software programs are now readily available to maximize data tracking and reporting and should be considered whenever feasible.

About **LunchAssist**: LunchAssist believes that school nutrition programs should be able to devote all their attention to feeding children well. Following the numerous rules and regulations is important work but can be challenging (and burdensome). LunchAssist's mission is to provide inspiration, support and guidance to school nutrition professionals so they can focus on what matters most. LunchAssist helps schools with various technical assistance pieces, including farm-to-school programming, procurement, menu planning and equipment grants, all of which can support organic food procurement either directly or indirectly.