

National Programme of Nutritional Support in Government Primary and Upper Primary Schools: A Case Study of Jharkhand



Best Practices Adopted in Mid-Day-Meal Scheme

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I. Demographic Profile of the State, Jharkhand

Jharkhand is carved out of the erstwhile Bihar state in the year 2000 with 24 districts. The total area of the state is 79,714 sq. km. with 212 blocks and 32615 villages.



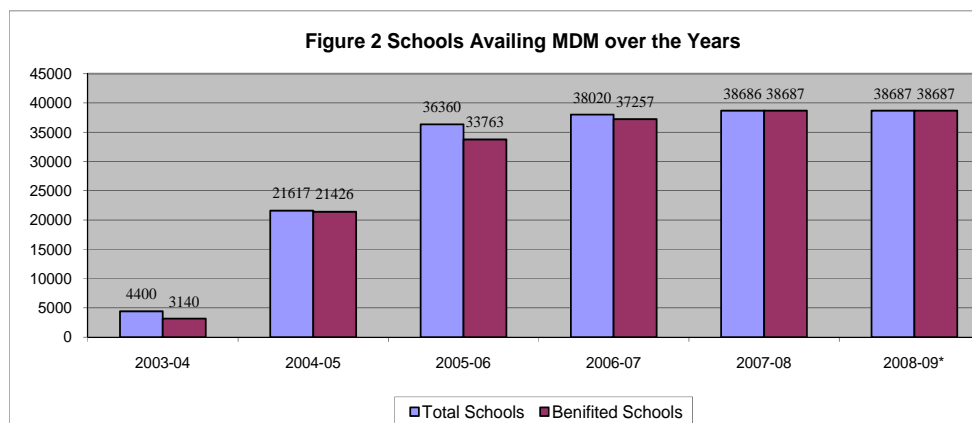
According to the census 2001, the total population of the state is 2.69 crore out of which 1.38 crore are male and 1.30 crore are female. The sex ratio in Jharkhand is 941 females for 1000 males. The total population of the 6-14 age group children is 64.59 lakh, of which 33.80 lakh are boys and 30.79 lakh are girls. The rural population is very poor. 40.3 percent people are below the poverty line. The socio-economic factors and lack of awareness due to illiteracy have been the main factors responsible for low literacy in

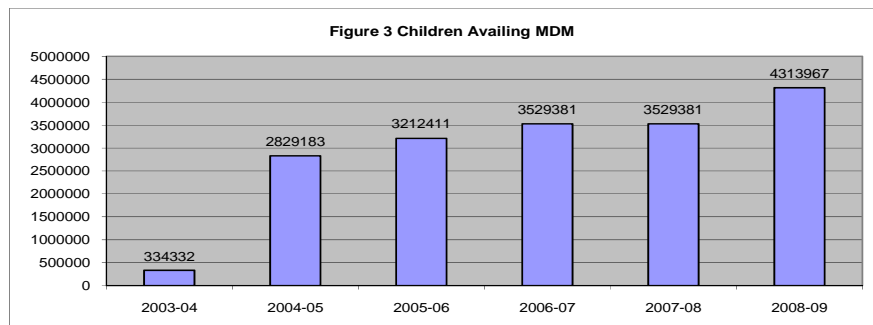
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Jharkhand. Literacy rate is 54.13 percent, well below than the national literacy rate (65.38 percent), of this male literacy is 67.94 percent and female literacy rate is 39.38 percent.

I.1 Coverage:

In the state total population of the age group 6-14 is 64.59 lakh children; out of it 43.14 lakh children are enrolled in the 38687 primary and upper primary schools. The Year wise coverage made in the state under this scheme is depicted in the Figures 2 & 3. Over the years Figure 2 shows an increasing trend for number of schools that are availing mid-day meal facility. In 2003-04 out of 4400 schools only 3140 schools were availing the facility that increased to 21426 schools during 2004-05. In 2005-06 along with primary schools, government aided schools also came into the purview of mid-day meal scheme. By 2007-08 up to middle level all the government, government aided, madrasas, EGS and AIE were covered under the Scheme (Annexure III). During the year 2008-09 the total number of schools under the banner of mid-day meal scheme was reached to 38687. It is definitely a great achievement of the state government that all the children enrolled in these schools are availing the mid-day meal facility. Similarly, Figure 3 shows the number of Children benefited under mid-day meal scheme. During 2003-04, only 3.34 lakh children were the beneficiaries and the number increased to 43.14 in 2008-09.



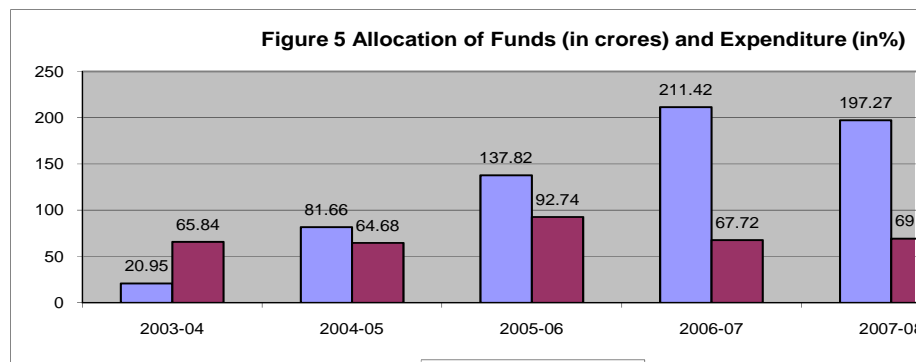
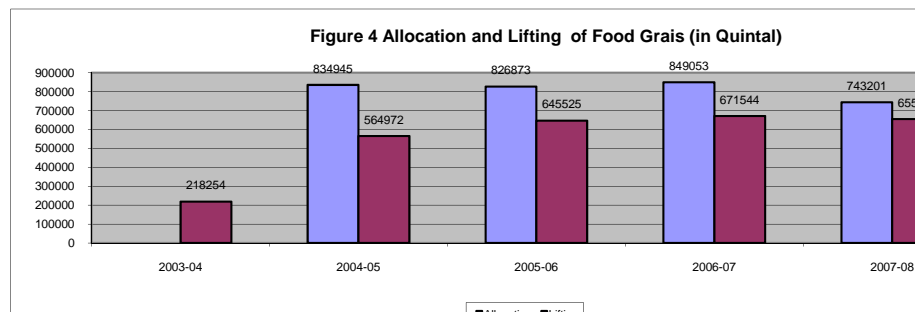


I.2 Implementation of Mid-Day Meal Scheme in the State

In Jharkhand the scheme has important implications as around 59 percent of the children are malnourished and 21.45 lakh children who are of the age group 6-14 years continue to be out of school. The drop out rate is very high, particularly for dalits and adivasis. In the state (united Bihar) the Mid-Day meal programme commenced in August 1995 as a National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education. 3 k.g. dry food grains per student per month was being distributed to the students of primary stage (class I to V) of the government schools. The basic aim was to prevent malnutrition that was widely prevalent among the growing children. It not only gives rise to morbidity and mortality, but also prevents a child from developing into healthy adult. In addition it also adversely affects the universalization of elementary education. By 2001, a few states thought of providing cooked meal as a better proposition, but in Jharkhand schools preferred to provide only monthly 'dry rations' of food grains to school children up to primary level. With the Supreme Court order (dated 28th November 2001), to provide cooked mid-day meal (MDM) in primary schools, Jharkhand started providing MDM from 2003 on a pilot basis in 3140 government primary schools in 19 districts and 3.34 lakh children availed the facility. In a phased manner it has been extended to all the government primary schools, EGS centres and government aided schools including minority schools and AIE centres.

In 2006, as a follow up of Supreme Court of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Department of School Education and Literacy, Government of India issued an order to revise the norm of MDM. According to the revised norm schools should provide MDM with minimum 400 calories and 12 grams proteins (as compared to

the earlier norm of 300 calories and 8-12 grams proteins) (Annexure IV). The additional quantity of calories and proteins are to be provided through addition of vegetables or other ingredients. This is being sincerely followed in Jharkhand schools. In the financial year 2007-08, the scheme has been extended up to upper primary level. Norm was fixed to provide with 700 calories and 20 grams proteins in the MDM for upper primary schools. As on September 2008, 43.14 lakhs children were getting benefit of the scheme in the state; out of which 35.75 lakh children were enrolled in primary schools and 7.39 lakh children were enrolled in upper primary schools. Figure 4 shows that timely lifting of food grains from the FCI godowns to Block godowns are not taking place. 743201 quintal was allocated in 2007-08 only 88 percent was reached to Block godowns. In addition, utilization of funds allocated for MDM is also a matter of concern. There is a huge gap between allocation and utilization of funds. The Figure 5 shows that in 2003-04, 65.84 percent of cost that was allocated (by the state government) for MDM and it was fully utilized. From 2004-05 both centre and state government allocated for MDM. The 92.74 percent funds were utilized in the year 2005-06. In 2006-07 the utilization of funds dropped to 67.72 and again in 2007-08 the utilization of funds for MDM was slightly improved and it went up to 69.41 percent.



2. The Process:

2.1 Regularity of Mid-Day-Meal

In Jharkhand, Human Resource Development Department is particular in ensuring the timely supply of food grains to schools. Food grains are allotted by the state to districts. The Deputy Commissioner of the concerned district allots the food grain on the basis of enrollment to blocks. District Rural Development Authority (DRDA) is the nodal agency for lifting and transportation of food grain. State Food Corporation (SFC) lifts the monthly-allocated food grain from FCI godown and transports it to the block godown. Food grain is then lifted by School through Saraswati Vahini / Village Education Committee from block level godown and stored at School level.

Efforts are being made to ensure timely lifting of food grains from FCI godowns and further timely transportation to Block godowns and schools. However this chain is affected on many occasions when the quality of food grains being made available by the FCI is below the fair average quality (FAQ). Though instructions have been given to all districts not to lift food grains below FAQ however, this non-lifting is not an effective solution. As during 2007-08 only 88 percent food grains were lifted from the godowns. There is no other alternative regarding availability of food grains.

During the visit to schools it was found in spite of less lifting of food grains (Figure 4) from FCI godowns over the years, all the schools have a sufficient amount food grains. During interaction with the heads of schools they mentioned that they never faced shortage of food grains and on time food grains reached to their schools.

2.2 Timely Disbursement of Funds

One of the objectives of the department is timely disbursement of funds for MDM programme. Therefore the department pays special attention to the disbursement of funds to the schools. Funds are allotted by state to all Deputy Commissioner at District Level @ Rs 2.50 per child per working day. Funds are withdrawn from District Treasury on the basis of actual number of student enrolled in schools. The drawn amount is transferred

directly in the Bank account of Saraswati Vahini through Bank Transfer/Demand Draft/Cheque Annexure VIII).

2.3 Community Involvement through Saraswati Vahini

In implementation of mid-day meal programme, community initiative is worth mentioning in the state. The community participates through school children's mothers association called Saraswati Vahini. Out of the total mothers of children enrolled in the school, two mothers are nominated as Sanyojika, who are active and can do the cooking and other activities effectively. The remaining members of Saraswati Vahini on roster basis supervises the cooking and distribution of meal. The Sanyojikas are given the responsibilities to procure grains and keep it in place; to make arrangements for hygienic upkeep of kitchen; procurement of cooking ingredients required for MDM like pulses, dal, cooking oil, fuel, etc; to open account in nearest bank and withdraw cash required for MDM; proper storage of utensils, gas stove and other items as well as have coordination with Block Office for cooking gas supply; to make available nutritious food to children; and to submit the utilization certificate to the BEEO by giving daily attendance.

As mentioned earlier that for the opening and operation of Bank Account of MDM president of Village Education Committee (VEC) is involved The Account of MDM can be operated only through joint signature of VEC President and Sanyojika. Generally community's involvement helps in improving the condition of school.

During visit it was observed in one of the 'Government Middle School' of Gumla district, that president of VEC happens to be ex-student of the school. He has special love and care for the school. He is a regular visitor of the school and helps the school in monitoring and supervising the teachers as well as student absenteeism. The students, whose attendance are irregular he goes to their homes and convinces their parents to send their children regularly.

2.4 Bank Account

The state department has tried to decentralize the functions of MDM to reduce the burden of teacher and to avoid any predicament in managing the finances. For example for purchase of cooking ingredients like fuel, condiments, etc funds are required and a Bank Account is opened in the name of Village Education Committee and Sanyojika of Saraswati Vahini. The payment for purchase of MDM is made from the amount available in the account of VEC and Sanyojika of Saraswati Vahini. With their joint signature they can withdraw money. However most of the Sanyojikas are un-educated, they can not perform the task rightly. Therefore they take help of teachers. Though teachers are not involved in purchase of kitchen items (condiments), but they are involved in other work of MDM like maintaining the records of purchase, availability of food grains, attendance of students, hygiene of cooks, cleanliness in the premises of kitchen, monitoring Bal Sansad, sitting arrangements of students during meal, etc.

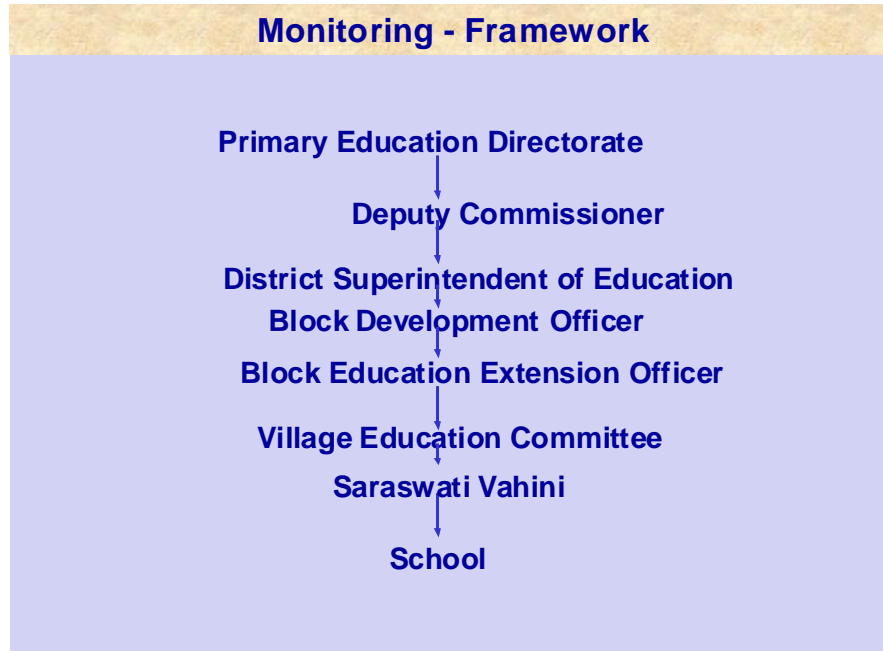
2.5 Students Involvement (Bal Sansad)

Students are involved in the state for managing MDM. 'Bal Sansad' are formed in each school, the Health Minister of the Bal Sansad has been given the responsibility for monitoring mid-day meal programme in a manner, whether children are washing their hands and plates before and after meal, sitting in proper posture, standing in queue, cooks are properly wearing apron, etc. This practice inculcates leadership qualities in the students.



2.6 Supervision and Monitoring of the Programme

The state has made elaborate arrangements for monitoring MDM for which monitoring cum steering committees have been formed at State, District, Block, village and School level. Following Monitoring System is in place for monitoring of Scheme:



Authorities from the department keep a strict vigil on the quality of food served to children. From time to time proper circulars/instructions are sent to the district, block offices for supervision of the schools and monitoring the mid-day meal programme (Annexure V).

In Jharkhand now it has become mandatory for officers at the District and Block levels to visit every month fifteen schools to see children are getting nutritious and hygienic food. Every week they have to submit the report to the state department with self attested form through Fax that they had inspected the schools (Annexure VI, IX & X).

During visit it was observed that adequate quantity of meal is provided to children. And also for the safety of the children, members of Saraswati Vahini who are present there and teachers have to taste the food at least fifteen minutes before serving the meal.

2.7 Management Information System

In the state proper management information system is in place at school/village/gram panchayat, block, district and state level. In all the schools data related to institution, student, beneficiaries, availability of funds, food grain, allotment of fund, infrastructure are maintained in the same format prescribed by the state government. This information is collected by Block Education Extension Officer from School Level. The School level information are compiled at block level. Similarly the block level data /information are compiled at district level by District Superintendent of Education and sent to State to Primary Directorate on monthly basis

2.8 Transparency

During visit we observed that transparency and openness in all aspects of programme implementation is being maintained by the state. Food grain management, ingredients procurement, cooking and serving, appointment of cooking staff, construction of kitchen shed, and procurement of cooking devices is being maintained systematically at the school level.

The implementation of the scheme at the school level has been assigned to Saraswati Vahini a group of parent mothers functioning as a sub-committee of VEC. The task of cooking meal and distribution of cooked meal has been assigned to a group of active parent mothers identified from amongst the member of Saraswati Vahini.

Daily consumption of food grain is maintained in a separate register. District officers have been directed to make roster of one or more mother to supervise the preparation of cooking and feeding every day. The work of proper maintenance of the records, cash book, stock register and other related papers is being done by the chairman and secretary of VEC and convener of Saraswati Vahini.

2.9 Kitchen Devices

Kitchen utensils, gas connections or stove/chullah, serving dishes for children have been provided to all the schools. Some schools are provided with gas chullhas, but still meals were prepared with fire wood as it was cheap.



2.10 Impact on Enrolment and attendance of MDM

Both the teachers and community members reported that the attendance has particularly increased after introduction of MDM in the schools. However there happens to be considerable seasonal as well as day to day variation in the attendance. The data of enrolment of last one month was seen and found that girls enrolment has increased in comparison to boys. The reduction of enrolment of boys can be due to multiple reasons that includes opening of private schools in neighbourhood, better and regular classes in nearby schools, opting jobs, etc. The interaction with one of head of schools revealed that it can be because of multiple enrolments of the same child in government as well as in private schools.

During visit to the schools it was observed that enrolment in the schools was only 60 percent to 70 percent. In two schools enrolment was found to be only 45 percent. Teachers attributed the reasons for absence, to festivals. Tribals celebrate many festivals throughout the year and during that they have community gathering. Therefore parents prefer children to accompany them instead of sending them to the schools.

2.11 Monitoring of Out Come Indicators

To examine as to the level of supplementation MDM is providing to the children, to help in improving their health, weighing machines has been provided to all schools to monitor the outcome of MDM Scheme. During the visit we discussed with the children and found that meal is one of the incentives for coming to the school. They get sufficient food which gives them satisfaction. We also observed that schools are methodically keeping progress of record of weight of all the children. In the same way measure of Height of children has been identified as another outcome of MDM Scheme. Schools had painted scale on the prominent wall of the school and teachers keep a record of height of all the children systematically. The records showed that height and weight of the children were improved in comparison to when they were admitted and after six months.

2.12 Display of Information

During visit we observed that in all the schools records were well maintained in terms of food-grain and funds received and expenditure incurred, attendance of students, purchases for condiments, etc. The schools were neat and clean. The classrooms were having charts, and other relevant flash material. Notice board display information about the children enrolled and attendance and about many social and cleanliness issues.



Menu as prescribed by State Education Department is painted on prominent place in all the schools. The Menu is designed in such a manner that balanced diet is provided to

children and no item is repeated in a week. However, the State Education Department has given the permission to the districts to change the menu according to the taste and need of the children if they feel. Proper care has been taken by deciding the Menu chart by the State Education Department that there should not be any repetition of food every day (see Annexure 1).



2.13 Ensuring Cleanliness

Observations were also made to understand the discipline and hygiene levels maintained during the serving and eating of food. In all the schools children took meals in queue. Mostly class I children were served food first. Mid Day Meal Scheme is implemented in all the government schools of the districts. The state department has given necessary instructions to all schools to give utmost importance to cleanliness so that hygienic food is cooked and served to students (Annexure X).

During visit we observed that all the cooks (Sanyojikas) follow norms of food safety with security measures in the provision of hygienic cooked food. The school authorities ensure that each cook use apron at the time of cooking, children sit on jute mat and they wash their hands before and after meal. Also they clean their plates before and after meal. As children are mostly from tribal area they use their hands for taking meal, but now in schools to maintain hygiene they are encouraged to have meal with spoons and spoons are provided to all the children.



2.14 Sitting Arrangement

To break the social and sex barrier amongst children, a proper sitting arrangement is followed in each school. We observed that in all the schools we visited no discrimination was observed in serving of the food between communities and gender.



2.15 Food Distribution

Food distribution is made either by Sanyojikas or teachers. Students make queue and one by one food is distributed to them.



2.16 Kitchen Shed

Kitchen Shed is one of the important requirements for MDM. During the visit it was found that in most of the schools kitchen sheds with a small store were constructed. In the store two or three day's requirement of grains and condiments are kept. In most of the schools in the absence of store, food grains are kept in the class rooms.



In the state government has planned to give financial assistance to build the kitchen cum-store in all the schools. In 8036 schools construction of kitchen sheds have been completed. In remaining 2322 schools it is yet to start. However there is still need of separate storage place as well as containers for safety of the food grains. In the absence of the separate storage place, grains in many schools were kept in the class room itself. In some of the schools the storage place happens to be house of 'Sanyojika'. This leads to doubts of pilferage.

Community participation was also observed in constructing kitchen shed. During visit we observed that in one of the 'Government Middle School' in Gumla district, construction of 25'-9" feet kitchen shed was being constructed, instead of 14'- 8" feet (as per norm) with the help of Gram Shiksha Samiti, teachers and head. While discussion they mentioned that norm based kitchen size is very small, so financially they are helping the school.

2.17 Utensils

In all the schools utensils have been purchased for cooking and serving the meals. It is worth mentioning that state government had allocated sufficient funds for purchasing utensils. This year state government has provided spoons for eating the food for hygienic purposes. According to the number of students cooks were provided Karahi/ Dekchis for cooking. While discussion with the teachers they reported that number of thalis was adequate therefore all the children present are able to have meal together.

2.18 Kitchen Garden

In 'Rajkiya Upgraded Madhyamik Vidhaya, Raidh block' we observed that the school is situated in very interior area. It is difficult to buy vegetables as there is no market near by. So, head of the school developed own kitchen garden in the premises of the school. The head of the school with the help of sanyojikas and students maintains the kitchen garden.



3. Recent Initiatives

1. To keep a strict vigil on quality of food served to children, all officers at the District and Block levels have to visit every month fifteen schools to observe the mid-day meal programme and see children are getting nutritious and hygienic food. Every week they have to submit the report to the state department with self attested form through Fax that they had inspected the schools;
2. Before serving the meal to children, it should be tasted by VEC member, Head of school and Sanyojika;
3. Children should be asked to wash their hands with soap before taking meal;
4. To increase the access and retention of children of the age group 6-14, the state government has made provision of giving chance for 'Glider Udan' for 10 children from each class. The minimum requirement is at least 80 percent of the attendance (Annexure VII).
5. For managing the programme more effectively and efficiently and as it is a large scale programme, the state government is planning to create separate department for MDM.

4. Concluding Observations

In Jharkhand the nutritional programme in Jharkhand has been well received and is a successful endeavour. The basic aim of the state for mid-day meal is to prevent malnutrition that was widely prevalent (59 percent) among the growing children. It not only gives rise to morbidity and mortality, but also prevents a child from developing into healthy adult. In addition the scheme helps in bringing all the children in the purview education thus serving the purpose of national goal of universalization of elementary education.

At the system level initiatives have been taken for the regular and timely supply of food grains. Food grains are provided timely and the utilization by the school is also done efficiently. Funds are released on time. Various structures are involved in managing the MDM programme like Government of India, Government of Jharkhand, Food Corporation of India, authorities at the district, block level, teachers, community, etc.

Therefore managerial problems are quite natural, even though in all the schools the programme is going on without break. This is a great achievement for the Central as well as for State government.

The programme has been enthusiastically accepted by the community in the state. More girls have started coming to schools. Their attendance and retention has increased over the years. The rise in enrolment may be due to various interventions and the initiatives in recent times by the government in SSA. The availability of teachers has improved; there has been considerable training of teachers and recruitment of regular and para teachers as well as special drive for enrolment. However MDM, to a certain extent has increased enrolment and retention. It has worked as incentive especially in the areas with food insecurity and hunger and endemic poverty and expected to complement the other initiatives for universalization of elementary education. No discrimination was observed in serving of the food between communities and gender. The coverage is very large.

Children's involvement in the form of 'Bal Sansad' is appreciative. They learn many managerial skills during monitoring the implementation of programme.

Another significant feature observed in Jharkhand is involvement of community in the name of Sanyojikas who cook as well as monitor the quality of food regularly and with interest.
