

Good for Students, Good for Producers:

Rethinking the School Chips Ban



Amman, Jordan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry of Health's ban on chips in school canteens, published on 8 October 2026, is a step in the right direction. One in three Jordanian students aged 13–17 is overweight or obese, and in private schools the overweight rate reaches 42.5%. To last, the ban should be made more specific: tied to measurable nutrition criteria on the label, not to the word "chips".

The Jordan Chamber of Industry's concern for 40 factories and about 4,000 workers is legitimate. A similar ban was reversed in 2018 because it rested on a vague distinction between "natural" and flavoured chips. Clear limits on sodium, saturated fat, sugar and calories would protect students and give manufacturers a fair, objective target to meet.

ISDI proposes a transition, not a retreat:

- The Ministry of Health replaces the general ban on "chips" with nutrition criteria per 100 g, including a measurable sodium limit, so any snack that meets them can be sold, and any that does not is banned.
- Factories reformulate existing products or open new lines to make healthy snacks in Jordan: baked, roasted, air-fried or freeze-dried.
- JEDCO finances the new equipment, while existing freeze-drying capacity, such as Dar Abu Abdullah's, supports the first production runs.
- The government applies a reduced sales tax to approved healthy school snacks made in Jordan, with no price subsidy and no new spending.
- Factories source from Jordanian farms, giving growers a new buyer for surplus and grade-B produce.
- The Ministry of Health opens the parallel issue of popular restaurants so that food-related tax policy points in the same direction as health policy.

The new Ministry of Health decision

On 8 October 2026, H.E. Minister of Health Dr Ibrahim Al-Badour added chips of all types to the list of products banned from sale or circulation in school canteens. The decision took effect on its publication in the Official Gazette that day.

- Legal basis: clause 10 of Article 3 of the Health Requirements for School Canteens and Permitted and Prohibited Foods of 2012 and its amendments, issued under Articles 3 and 4/f of Public Health Law No. 47 of 2008.
- Scope: all types of chips. The minister confirmed the ban covers all private schools without exception, not only public schools.
- The wider list: the ministry's requirements also ban soft drinks of all kinds, energy drinks, and handmade or artificially coloured juices.
- Enforcement: joint committees from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and the Jordan Food and Drug Administration (JFDA) monitor canteens.
- Earlier steps: before the school year began, the JFDA reminded canteen operators that meat products (shawarma, burgers, sausages, and mortadella) and energy drinks are banned.

Why the ministry acted

The ministry acted on its Global School-based Student Health Survey for students aged 13–17, prepared with the Ministry of Education and supported by the World Health Organization. It found that nearly one in three students is overweight or obese.

Indicator (students aged 13–17)	Result
Overweight or obese	32.90%
Overweight	20.80%
Obese	12.10%
More than one hour of physical activity a day	12%
Did not take part in physical education classes	31.50%

Safwan Dababneh, director of the ministry's Non-Communicable Diseases Directorate, said these rates have risen compared with previous years.

Note: private schools stand out. *The survey found an overweight rate of 42.5% among private-school students, against 30.3% in public schools: 12.2 percentage points higher. That is why the minister's confirmation that the ban covers private schools without exception matters.*

What students eat shapes their health

What a student buys at school is not a side issue. For many students the canteen and the shops around the school supply a large share of the day's food, and that food has a direct, measurable link to body weight.

- Jordanian evidence: a University of Jordan study of 398 students aged 14–18 in Amman found a significant relationship between body mass index and the sugar and fat students took in from school canteens. Food from canteens and nearby markets made up a high share of intake and was high in fat, salt and sugar. The authors called for a national strategy to reduce unhealthy food in the school environment.
- What chips deliver: according to the Jordanian Food and Nutrition Association, chips carry about 500 calories per 100 grams, mostly from saturated fat and refined starch. They contain little or no protein, fibre, vitamins or minerals, and are high in salt and additives.
- Long-term risk: the association links these products to obesity, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, and to high blood pressure through their salt content. Dababneh warned that rising childhood obesity exposes children to chronic disease later in life.
- Learning and wellbeing: the association also links these foods to lower academic and sports performance and poorer psychological wellbeing.

Habits formed at school age tend to carry into adulthood. A child who learns to snack on fruit, nuts and roasted chickpeas is a healthier adult and a lower future cost to Jordan's health system.

The industry's concerns are real, but students come first

On 13 October 2026, the Jordan Chamber of Industry met chips manufacturers to discuss the ban's impact. The meeting included Amman Chamber president Eng. Fathi Al-Jaghbeer and food-sector representative Mohammad Walid Al-Jeitan.

The industry's case:

- Al-Jaghbeer said 80% of local factories' output goes to school canteens and called for consultation with industry before decisions that affect production.
- According to the Chamber, 40 Jordanian factories make chips, employing about 4,000 workers, mostly Jordanian, with a capital of about JD 20 million. Many would have to lay off staff if school sales stop.
- The Chamber added that most local factories meet international food-safety standards and asked for objective, consistent criteria for what schools may sell.

ISDI's position:

These concerns are valid. Jobs in Jordanian manufacturing matter, especially outside Amman, and clear, consistent product criteria are a fair request. The industry deserves a real transition path, not just a ban.

But the wellbeing of Jordan's students must be the first priority. A product is not suitable for children simply because it is made to standard, and job protection cannot be achieved by keeping an unhealthy product in schools. The answer to the industry's concern is to help factories make something else, not to reverse the ban.

With 80% of output going to canteens, the sector depends heavily on one channel, so the way the ban is defined matters. The Chamber's own request for objective, consistent criteria points to the solution set out in the next section: judge school snacks by their nutrition facts, not by their name.

From a ban on "chips" to clear nutrition criteria

This is not the first chips ban. In November 2018 the ministry banned locally made potato and corn chips from school canteens, and the decision was amended within days.

- 25–26 November 2018: the Jordan and Amman Chambers of Industry called on the ministry to reverse the decision. They argued that chips made from fresh potatoes and corn, without artificial flavours or colours, are safe and provide energy. A factory owner warned of production cuts, layoffs and closures.
- 28 November 2018: The Jordan Chamber of Industry welcomed the minister's decision to amend the instructions on selling potato and corn chips in school canteens.

The 2018 reversal turned on a vague distinction: "natural" chips versus flavoured ones. Neither the ban nor the exception was tied to anything measurable, so neither could be checked or defended.

The 2026 decision bans chips "of all types". This is clearer, but it still targets a product name rather than what the product contains. A baked, low-salt vegetable crisp and a deep-fried, heavily salted potato chip fall under the same word, while other unhealthy snacks that are not called "chips" are not covered. A ban defined by name is also easier to challenge and invites the same pressure for exceptions as in 2018.

ISDI recommends that the ministry make the decision more specific. Instead of banning "chips", the school-canteen requirements should set nutrition thresholds that every packaged snack must meet, whatever it is called. JFDA would check them against the nutrition facts on the label.

Example thresholds for packaged school snacks

The thresholds below are examples, developed by ISDI in consultation with Jordanian nutrition specialists, to show what a measurable standard could look like. ISDI recommends that the Jordanian Food and Nutrition Association support the Ministry of Health in setting the final thresholds.

Criterion	Example threshold	Note
Sodium (per 100 g)	500 mg or less for chips and crisps; 280 mg or less for nuts and seeds	Based on the WHO global sodium benchmarks for these categories
Saturated fat (per 100 g)	5 g or less	Limits unhealthy fats without penalising nuts and seeds
Unsaturated fat	No cap	Nuts, seeds and sesame are naturally high in healthy fats
Trans fat	No partially hydrogenated oils	WHO recommendation
Added sugar	None	Ministry of Health aim for school food
Additives	No artificial colours	Current canteen requirements on colourings
Energy per pack	100–120 kcal maximum	Single-serve packs sized by calories

Fats are not all equal. A threshold on total fat would treat a bag of nuts like a bag of fried chips. Nuts, seeds and sesame are high in fat, but mostly unsaturated fat, which is part of a healthy diet. The threshold should therefore target saturated and trans fats, not total fat.

Sodium is the most important single threshold. A measurable ceiling, rather than a blanket ban, gives manufacturers a target to reformulate to and gives inspectors a number they can check. It can be lowered in steps over time. The WHO published its global sodium benchmarks in 2021 and released an updated second edition in April 2024; the final thresholds should follow the latest WHO values.

A single serve should be defined by calories, not grams. Each pack should provide no more than 100–120 kcal, so pack weight depends on how energy-dense the product is. At around 500 kcal per 100 g, this means a chips-type pack of about 20–24 g; nuts, at around 600 kcal per 100 g, about 17–20 g; and freeze-dried fruit, which is far less energy-dense, a larger pack. This keeps every snack a snack, whatever it is made of.

In practice, products fried in oils high in saturated fat, or sold in large packs, would not meet these thresholds. Baked, roasted, air-fried and freeze-dried products, in calorie-sized packs, can.

Companies can adapt: the Singapore example

Singapore is an example of how flexible manufacturers can be when health targets are clear and of how such targets can serve the community without harming the industry.

- In 2017, Coca-Cola and six other leading drinks companies, accounting for about 70% of pre-packaged sweetened drinks sold in Singapore, pledged to cap sugar at 12% across their drinks by 2020.
- Coca-Cola reformulated rather than withdrew: its new Sprite contains 4.6 g of sugar per 100 mL, down from 9 g, and the company says more than 85% of its Singapore portfolio now carries the government's Healthier Choice Symbol.

The products stayed on the shelves, the companies kept selling, and consumers got healthier options. Jordanian snack manufacturers can do the same if the thresholds are clear and the timeline is known.

A transition path for factories

Chips factories already have what a healthy-snack industry needs: packaging lines, a distribution network to canteens, and relationships with schools. They can convert existing lines or open new ones.

Production methods: baking, roasting, air-frying and freeze-drying are the practical ways to meet the nutrition criteria. Many factories already have ovens and roasters, so baked and roasted products can start quickly, while freeze-dried lines follow as financing arrives.

Products that could be made in Jordan:

Product	Method	Main Jordanian inputs
Vegetable crisps	Freeze-dried, baked or air-fried	Tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, carrots
Fruit pieces	Freeze-dried	Strawberries, apples, figs, stone fruit
Dates and date bites	Natural or lightly processed	Jordan Valley dates
Roasted chickpeas	Roasted	Chickpeas
Packaged lupini (ترمس)	Prepared and packed	Lupini
Unsalted nuts and seeds	Roasted	Nuts and seeds
Khabeesa fruit rolls (خبیصة)	Traditional, fruit-based, with or	Grapes and other fruit, nuts, sesame

Khabeesa deserves particular attention. It is a traditional Jordanian sweet with a local identity; imported snacks cannot copy it. It can be made plain or enriched with nuts, sesame (simsim) or other seeds, which add protein and fibre, and it gives grape growers a new buyer.

Product standard: every product must meet the nutrition criteria above. Khabeesa must be made from fruit, with nuts, sesame or seeds if desired, without added sugar and in small portions, so it does not become candy in another form.

Step 1: JEDCO financing for new equipment

The Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO) is the natural first channel for equipment. Its Industry Modernisation Program reportedly offers grants of up to JD 100,000 per project, with technical advice, to help manufacturers upgrade equipment and adopt new technology. In January 2026, JEDCO reported deploying JD 6.3 million to support 206 SME projects. A dedicated window for healthy school-snack lines would use an existing channel, with no new budget line.

Step 2: Existing capacity for early production

Factories do not need to wait for new machines. Jordan already has freeze-drying capacity. Dar Abu Abdullah, a non-profit active in cultivation, processing, export and local distribution, has been testing freeze-drying. It already grows strawberries, tomatoes, peppers, zucchini, broccoli and okra in greenhouses, and exports frozen strawberries and tomato paste. Other operators in Jordan also have freeze-drying equipment. Factories could contract this capacity for their first production runs while their own lines are financed and installed.

Government support: reduced sales tax and JEDCO, not subsidies

The government's role is to make the healthy option cheaper to produce and sell, without spending new money.

- Reduced sales tax on healthy snacks made in Jordan and sold in school canteens that meet the approved nutrition criteria.
- No price subsidy and no new spending. The government gives up a limited amount of revenue on a narrow, verifiable product category.
- JEDCO equipment financing through its existing grant and loan programmes, as set out above.

A reduced rate helps keep healthy snacks affordable for families. It also follows the logic Jordan already applies to staples: bread and sugar are exempt from sales tax, while much fresh produce is taxed at a reduced rate.

What this means for Jordanian growers and households

The transition turns a health ban into an agriculture and jobs policy. Healthy snacks can be made from a wide range of Jordanian produce.

For growers:

A new, steady buyer: factories sign seasonal offtake contracts with farms and cooperatives, giving growers guaranteed demand and factories a stable supply.

Value for surplus and grade-B produce: freeze-drying, baking and fruit rolls suit produce that is fine to eat but hard to sell fresh, such as cosmetically imperfect fruit, end-of-season strawberries and tomatoes, or fruit that is too ripe. This reduces food loss and supports farm income when gluts push prices down.

Reach across governorates: dates from the Jordan Valley, grapes and stone fruit from the highlands, and vegetables from Mafraq and the Valley.

For households:

- *Children have access to healthy, affordable snacks at school, with the reduced sales tax helping to contain prices.*
- *Families of farm and factory workers keep their income.*
- *Over time, lower childhood obesity means lower spending on chronic disease for families and for the public health system.*

For workers and factories:

The jobs the Chamber of Industry says are at risk stay in Jordan, in factories that now buy more from Jordanian farms.

Aligning policy: popular restaurants

The Ministry of Health should also open the issue of popular restaurants (المطاعم الشعبية) so that school-food policy and food tax policy point in the same direction.

Popular restaurants are exempt from the 16% sales tax in return for selling at reduced prices fixed jointly by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply and the Income and Sales Tax Department. The aim, easing costs for low-income households, is sound, and the exemption should stay. But today it applies equally to fried food, sweets and soft drinks, while a salad or grilled meal at a regular restaurant carries 16%.

Recommendation: keep the exemption and add two conditions.

- A required low-price salad, vegetable side and fresh fruit on every fixed price list.
- Sweets and soft drinks are taxed normally, even inside popular restaurants. The exemption covers the meal, not the dessert.

This keeps affordable meals for families and adds no new tax on staple dishes. It makes the healthy option available at a popular price, and it stops a poverty-relief measure from subsidising sugar.

Recommendations:

Recommendation	Lead
Replace the general ban on "chips" with nutrition criteria per 100 g for all packaged school snacks, applied by label, with no vague exceptions	Ministry of Health
Set final thresholds, with the support of the Jordanian Food and Nutrition Association: a measurable sodium limit following the latest WHO benchmarks, lowered in steps over time; limits on saturated fat (not unsaturated fat) and added sugar; and single-serve packs of no more than 100–120 kcal	Ministry of Health, JFDA
Open a JEDCO financing window for healthy school-snack production lines	JEDCO, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply
Connect factories with existing freeze-drying capacity, such as Dar Abu Abdullah, for early production	Chamber of Industry, JEDCO
Apply a reduced sales tax to approved healthy school snacks made in Jordan	Ministry of Finance, Income and Sales Tax Department
Encourage seasonal offtake contracts between factories and Jordanian farms and cooperatives	Ministry of Agriculture, Chamber of Industry
Add a salad, vegetable side and fresh fruit to popular-restaurant price lists, and tax sweets and soft drinks normally there	Ministry of Health, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply, Income and Sales Tax Department

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