



Society for Nutrition Education Public Policy Legislative & Regulatory Bulletin July 2003

This newsletter highlights key legislative and regulatory news about nutrition education issues in Washington, D.C. This report is prepared by SNE's Public Policy Consultant, Waterman & Associates.

Congressional Hearing Conducted to Improve Child Nutrition Programs

On Wednesday, July 16, 2003 the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Workforce, Education Reform Subcommittee conducted a congressional hearing entitled *Food for Thought: How to Improve Child Nutrition Programs*. The hearing, chaired by Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE), examined issues surrounding childhood obesity, nutrition programs for children and families and school meal programs.

"There is general agreement on the importance of good nutrition for everyone, especially children," said Chairman Castle. "Proper nutrition is essential for children to achieve full physical development and long-term health, but questions remain about how the federal government can best provide lower-income children with access to healthy, affordable meals."

Reauthorization of the *Child Nutrition Act of 1966 and the National School Lunch Act* is an important objective for SNE and the House Education and Workforce Committee during the 108th Congress. The committee's Web site states that it is an important opportunity to improve the current system and fix problems in existing programs that have a negative impact on children. The House Education and Workforce Committee is the congressional committee that oversees Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), SNE's #1 member-identified public policy issue. Reauthorization, which occurs every five years, encompasses several federal child nutrition programs which include the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These programs, up for reauthorization this year, represent a \$12 billion yearly commitment by the federal government.

Several witnesses testified at the hearing including:

- **Eric M. Bost**, Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture;
- **Vice Admiral Dr. Richard H. Carmona**, U.S. Surgeon General;
- **Dr. Tom Baranowski**, Professor of Pediatrics (Behavioral Nutrition) at USDA Children's Human Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas;
- **Gaye Lynn MacDonald**, President, American School Food Service Association and Manager of Food Services, Bellingham Public Schools in Bellingham, Washington;
- **Betsy Clarke**, Director, Women Infants and Children, Minnesota Department of Health; and
- **Dr. Debbie Frank**, Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University Medical School.

The witnesses made a variety of recommendations on improving the child nutrition programs. Eric Bost, the primary individual responsible for administering USDA's child nutrition programs, suggested streamlining programs and promoting a healthy school environment. He called for a unified effort to promote good nutrition, saying "As we prepare to reauthorize the child nutrition programs, we are mindful of the critical contribution they make to life-long eating habits and good health. But the federal

government cannot – and should not – do this job alone. Meeting this challenge requires all of us – parents, family members, our schools, our communities, local and national organizations, industry and all levels of government, state as well as federal.”

Surgeon General Richard Carmona discussed the growth of childhood obesity and suggested increasing awareness among parents and children of how to prevent obesity by making healthy food choices and increasing physical activity. Betsy Clark testified how the WIC program can work to meet six goals outlined by GAO in a 2001 report, but expressed her belief that the WIC program’s resources are stretched thin. Dr. Tom Baranowski covered the issue of childhood obesity and what behavioral and nutritional changes would reverse the epidemic. And Dr. Deborah Frank talked about the issue of child hunger and food insecurity.

For more information on what the House Education and Workforce Committee is doing for child nutrition programs and the upcoming reauthorization, go to their Web site at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/index.htm>, and for further information on the hearing, the press release can be found at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/press/press108/07jul/childnuthrg071603.htm>.

SNE Sends Support Letter on Pedestrian and Cyclist Legislation

In July, SNE submitted letters to U.S. Representatives Don Young (R-AK) and Thomas Petri (R-WI) in support of the Pedestrian and Cyclist Equity Act of 2003 (PACE). The PACE legislation (H.R. 2568) was introduced by Congressman James L. Oberstar (D- MN) on June 18, 2003. This bill would create a National Safe Routes to School Program and would send \$250 million dollars per year to states to create safer streets around schools and encourage bicycling and walking. Other elements of PACE provide grants to increase physical activity and build three model communities. In the letter, SNE encouraged building a database of proven effective community interventions that encourage children and families to be more active. The letter also supported the allocation of funds to evaluate the effectiveness of PACE grants and the model communities.

New FDA Rule Requires Trans Fat Labeling on Foods

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has ruled that manufacturers must list trans fatty acids (also known as trans fat) on the nutrition facts panel of food products and certain dietary supplements. Officials at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) contend the rule will provide consumers with more information so they can make healthier food choices and lower their consumption of trans fat as part of a heart-healthy diet.

"We are empowering Americans to make healthier choices about the foods they eat," said Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson. "By putting trans fat information on food labels, we are making it possible for consumers to make better educated choices to lower their intake of these unhealthy fats and cholesterol. It's just one more way we're helping consumers lead healthier lives."

The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend a limited intake of saturated and trans fat. Food and food products where trans fatty acids are most commonly found include vegetable shortening, some margarines, crackers, candies, cookies, snack foods, fried foods, baked goods, salad dressings and other processed foods.

This regulation marks the first significant change in the Nutrition Facts panel since its establishment in 1993. Food manufacturers have until Jan. 1, 2006, to list trans fat on the nutrition label. Total fat and saturated fat content are already listed on food labels, and consumers will find the trans fat amount listed directly under the saturated fat listing. FDA estimates that by 2009, trans fat labeling will have prevented 600 to 1,200 cases of coronary heart disease and 250 to 500 deaths annually.

More information on trans fat and the new rule can be found on FDA’s Web site at

<http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/transfat/>. To view the HHS press release, go to <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2003pres/20030709.html>.

FDA Issues New Process for Qualified Health Claims on Food Labels

As part of an initiative within the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on better resources to guide nutrition choices, the agency unveiled a new process to offer more science-based, FDA-regulated information on product labels about the health consequences of foods and dietary supplements. This process will improve consumer awareness on dietary health benefits and will encourage product manufacturers to compete based on scientifically demonstrated health benefits of their products.

"Protecting consumers by helping them get better nutrition information is among FDA's top priorities, because the choices that Americans make about their diet have a great impact on the health of the public. This new initiative will better protect consumers from making uninformed or misinformed choices about their diet and nutrition, by giving consumers better information about the health consequences of those choices," said FDA Commissioner Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. "The FDA review process for making qualified claims, when combined with our strong enforcement work, will reward companies that make healthier products while more aggressively enforcing the law against companies that appeal to consumers through false and misleading health claims."

The Consumer Health Information for Better Nutrition Initiative has as its central focus the twin goals of making available better, easily understood, up-to-date scientific information about how dietary choices can affect health, as well as encouraging companies to compete based on health and nutrition consequences, in addition to such non-health-related features of products like taste and ease of preparation. Proponents of the initiative say a better-informed public - aided by science-based health information - would be able to choose foods that are more nutritious, potentially addressing such public health problems as the rise in obesity.

For a more detailed outline of FDA's new process, go to their Web site at <http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2003/NEW00923.html>, and additional information about FDA's "Consumer Health Information for Better Nutrition" initiative is available online at www.fda.gov/oc/mcclellan/chbn.html.

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