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Healthy School Meals Act of 2010

Adult Diseases in Children: The Importance of Federal Nutrition Policy

The health of children should be paramount. Today children are increasingly affected by obesity and related conditions. Child health also sets the stage for adult health. Current trends are disastrous for our society, our community, and our economy. In the past 20 years, while adult obesity rates have doubled in the United States, the prevalence of overweight in children ages 6 to 19 has tripled. Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and cancer—all chronic diseases once associated with older adults—are now being found at alarming rates in children and adolescents

Federal nutrition policy plays a critical role in the health of children. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2009 (CNR) presents an opportunity to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity and related diseases. Almost 30 million children receive lunch and breakfast through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program authorized in the CNR. These programs represent the most direct way that federal policy impacts what American children eat.

Numerous scientific studies have shown that a low-fat, high-fiber, plant-based diet is the healthiest way to eat. Plant-based diets are promoted for chronic disease prevention by the American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association, the American Cancer Association, and the American Institute for Cancer Research. These and other organizations are calling on the federal food assistance programs to emphasize vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, and nondairy vegetarian foods. Entirely plant-based meals are lower in total fat and saturated fat than commonly served lunch foods that rely heavily on animal products such as milk, cheese, and meats.

All schools face economic challenges in providing healthful foods. However, a strong federal investment in good food for children pays off for many years to come. All students have a right to have healthful meals available in their schools.

The purpose of this act is to improve the health of America's schoolchildren by raising the nutritional quality of food through the promotion of plant-based meals and healthful dairy alternative beverages in schools.

Legislative Actions

1. The USDA shall conduct a pilot program in which the secretary shall provide to selected school food authorities, at no cost to the school food authorities, plant-based alternate protein products and substitute for fluid milk products for use in the schools served by those school food authorities. The USDA shall conduct an evaluation of the pilot program and shall be allocated an amount of \$500,000 for program implementation.
2. The USDA shall include the purchase of plant-based alternative protein products and substitute for fluid milk products in the commodities purchase program and provide training materials regarding nutritional benefits and preparation of these products.
3. Schools that provide a plant-based entrée as a menu item on each daily school lunch menu shall receive supplemental commodity assistance of 25 percent of the total commodity assistance and shall be used by the recipient to purchase plant-based commodity foods.
4. Lunches served by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program shall offer students a substitute for fluid milk that meets nutritional standards established by the secretary, which shall include fortification of calcium, vitamin A, vitamin D, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin, and vitamin B12 to levels found in fluid dairy milk, and no less than 5 grams of protein per 8-ounce serving.