



*Child Nutrition Testimony March 26, 2003*



**Prepared Statement  
by  
Karen Caplan  
Chairman, Board of Directors  
United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association**

***Produce Industry Child Nutrition Reauthorization Recommendations***

**Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry  
United States Senate**

**April 3, 2003**

**United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association  
1901 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 1100 · Washington, DC 2006  
(202) 303-3400 · Fax: (202) 303-3433  
[www.uffva.org](http://www.uffva.org)**

**Table of Contents**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | 3  |
| <b>Core Objectives for Child Nutrition Reauthorization</b>                               | 4  |
| <b>Produce Industry Child Nutrition Recommendations</b>                                  |    |
| <b>National Expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program</b>                 |    |
| Background   |    |
| Policy Statement   | 6  |
| Policy Recommendations   | 6  |
| <b>Increasing Produce Consumption through School Meals Programs</b>                      |    |
| Background   | 6  |
| Policy Statement   | 7  |
| Policy Recommendations   | 7  |
| <b>School Breakfast</b>  |    |
| Background   | 8  |
| Policy Statement   | 9  |
| Policy Recommendations   | 9  |
| <b>Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children</b>                   |    |
| Background   | 9  |
| Policy Statement   | 10 |
| Policy Recommendations   | 10 |
| <b>Nutrition Education and Promotion Programs</b>  |    |
| Background   | 11 |
| Policy Statement   | 12 |
| Policy Recommendations   | 12 |
| <b>Commodity Distribution and Infrastructure Improvements</b>                            |    |
| Background   | 12 |
| Policy Statement   | 13 |
| Policy Recommendations   | 13 |
| <b>Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Research</b>  |    |
| Background   | 13 |
| Policy Statement   | 13 |
| Policy Recommendations   | 13 |
| <b>Miscellaneous Provisions</b>  |    |
| Policy Recommendations   | 14 |
| <b>Conclusion</b>  | 14 |
| <b>Attachment 1 – National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's CNR Recommendations</b> |    |
| <b>Attachment 2 – California WIC Fresh Produce Option Proposal</b>                       |    |

## Introduction

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Karen Caplan. I am President and CEO of Frieda's Inc., the nation's leading marketer and distributor of specialty produce. I come before you today as Chairman of the Board of United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, the industry's national trade organization representing growers, packers, processors, marketers and distributors of all varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables, working together with our retail and foodservice customers, and our suppliers. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee on behalf of the U.S. fruit and vegetable industry regarding the future direction of federal child nutrition policy.

Across the life span, proper nutrition is critical in promoting health, preventing disease, and improving quality of life. Over a decade of research has revealed the health benefits of increased fruit and vegetable consumption in reducing the risk of cancer and numerous other serious illnesses including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. According to federal government statistics, better nutrition could reduce the cost associated these diet-related diseases by a minimum of \$71 billion each year, enough to fully fund the entire USDA. Therefore federal nutrition policy and assistance programs should support incentives and key strategies that help Americans reach national health goals.

With obesity reaching epidemic proportions in the United States, greater attention must be focused on increasing produce consumption as a public health solution. The fruit and vegetable industry has the good fortune to offer consumers a healthy and nutritious product that is increasingly recognized as critical to the prevention of chronic diseases and maintaining overall good health. Therefore, increasing federal support and funding to promote fruit and vegetable consumption for chronic disease prevention and to reduce obesity should be a top priority for the nation.

Over the past several years, the fruit and vegetable industry has become immersed in child nutrition policy. Previously, our industry had little involvement with child nutrition reauthorization efforts, leaving this process mostly to those who had a more historical association with these important programs. Frankly, we have been surprised with what we've learned. Despite the best efforts of many on this Committee and in the Congress, the nutritional health of our nation's children has in far too many cases been secondary to other considerations.

- When states don't have adequate refrigeration or distribution systems, we still feed kids from 10 pound cans of soggy beans, instead of offering fresh vegetables they might like.

We ask school officials to offer healthy meals, but low reimbursement rates encourage them to sell unhealthy competitive foods to break even on the business.

Our supplemental benefits program to pass on surplus commodities from American agriculture is a free-for-all among commodity groups to fight for sales, leaving kids high-fat, poor quality products that often wouldn't move through mainstream supermarkets.

- When the Congress for the past two years has asked USDA to add fruits and vegetables to the WIC program, we find out that WIC is more of an entitlement program for entrenched commodities, than for citizens who need a healthier WIC package.

It is clear that with obesity, diabetes and other nutrition-related chronic diseases at epidemic proportions in the United States, something has to change. Mr. Chairman, we submit that child nutrition programs must put public health first, and guarantee that school lunches, breakfasts, after-school snacks, and WIC become part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Congress must develop legislation that makes healthy meals, a healthy school food environment, and a healthy start for WIC recipients our nation's top priority in child nutrition programs.

So, how can we do that? As you review all the testimony before the committee – from the school foodservice people, the anti-hunger people, the consumer groups, and more – you’ll find that the one common goal of every group is increasing the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in child nutrition programs. It doesn’t matter whether we’re talking about school lunch or WIC, the Committee should keep one overriding principle in mind as you write this bill: *What are we doing to increase fresh fruits and vegetables in this program?*

### **Core Objectives for Child Nutrition Reauthorization**

Increasing federal support and funding to create greater awareness of the benefits provided by fruit and vegetable consumption with respect to disease prevention and intervention efforts is a top priority of the produce industry. Overall the produce industry strongly supports the development of nutrition policy that helps increase awareness and understanding of the benefits provided by fruits and vegetables with respect to disease prevention and intervention. Ultimately, we believe the goal of any nutrition policy developed by Congress, the Administration, and interest groups should ensure federal child nutrition feeding programs support and encourage the health and well being of all Americans. Simply stated, the produce industry’s supports the overall nutrition policy goal:

*Federal nutrition policy should be developed which ensures the increase of produce consumption by focusing efforts to reshape national nutrition policy to anchor fruits and vegetable at the “center of the plate.” In turn, the federal government should elevate its financial investment into nutrition program priorities to better address the significant role fruit and vegetables play in health promotion and disease prevention for all Americans. Ultimately, the goal of federal nutrition policy should be to extend, expand and enhance policies that recognize and would directly encourage fruit and vegetable as critical to promoting health and preventing an array of chronic diseases.*

Within an overall commitment to increasing fresh fruits and vegetables in these programs, let me highlight several core priorities for you this morning.

We support the recommendation of the American School Foodservice Association to increase reimbursement rates with the concept of a 10-cent per meal “healthy children supplement” to be devoted to improving the quality and healthfulness of school meals. Without greater funds, schools will continue to be forced to buy the lowest quality, cheapest, and least fresh product available.

We support increased school breakfast programs, including expansion of the program to all children at no cost, and increased provision of commodities under the breakfast program.

We support a new “Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids Initiative,” to provide \$10 million annual for grants to states and school districts for innovative projects such as salad/garden bars, healthy vending programs, cold storage and other creative ways to increase fresh produce.

We support expansion of the DOD fresh program from \$50 million annually to \$100 million annually. This critical program is oversubscribed each year as it is the most practical way schools can receive frequent small deliveries of fresh produce under USDA programs.

We support national expansion of the Farm Bill pilot program that provides fresh fruits and vegetables to kids in schools. Concurrent with this hearing, the President of our Association is meeting in Indianapolis with over 150 nutrition and education leaders who have worked on this pilot program, and I can assure you, the results have been overwhelming. When we’re lucky enough to find a simple program that works, let’s not keep reinventing the wheel but simply go forward aggressively to make this a national program.

- We support making USDA commodity purchases for schools conform to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It makes no sense to take high-fat or excess commodities and give those to schools. Let's make sure to provide commodities in the proportion called for in the Dietary Guidelines.
- We support a major research and education agenda at USDA to reflect its new commitment to the National 5 A Day Partnership. This program traditionally led by the national Cancer Institute has been expanded to multiple branches of government and public private partners. We commend Under Secretary Bost and Secretary Veneman for signing a Memorandum of Understanding with HHS supporting the 5 A Day Program, and now we need to see this successful program grow. Specifically, we support the USDA appoint 5 A Day coordinators in each state to work with state and local partners, as well as designated a permanent 5 A Day office within USDA to provide national leadership.

Finally, on WIC, we strongly support the science-based revision of the WIC packages to increase fruits and vegetables offered to recipients. On April 24, 2000, USDA published, in the Unified Agenda section of the *Federal Register*, a notice about a rule FNS was developing to revise the WIC food packages to add nutrient-dense leafy and other dark green and orange vegetables to food packages for women and children. The time line contained in that notice indicated that a proposed rule would be published in September 2000. You know the rest – even after several years of direction from this Committee to publish the revised WIC package proposal, USDA has failed to do so. While USDA now seeks to have yet another study of the WIC program, the Congress should direct USDA to publish a proposed final rule within 120 days of this legislation's enactment so that further delay is not allowed.

In the meantime, we strongly urge Congress to direct the USDA to allow an innovative and health-oriented pilot program proposed by the California WIC Association to move ahead. USDA has thus far rejected the request to conduct even a pilot program prepared by those closest to what WIC recipients need in a food package today. We have attached a copy of the California WIC proposal to our written testimony, and urge the Committee to reinforce this very day that USDA should listen to the very WIC program managers and do all it can to support and move forward with this pilot program under current law.

Mr. Chairman, this is not an exhaustive list, but gives you a sense of the clarity and specificity of the recommendations contained in our full testimony.

Today, I am submitting written testimony that includes 31 specific legislative recommendations covering seven key issue areas. In addition, as a member of the Steering Committee of the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, I am submitting child nutrition recommendations supported by 250 different public health, nutrition, consumer, and public groups. I ask that these recommendations be entered as part of the record.

### **Produce Industry Child Nutrition Recommendations**

#### **National Expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program**

##### Background

In the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress authorized a \$6 million Fruit and Vegetable Pilot program in FY03 to provide free fruit and vegetable snacks to students in 25 schools each in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Iowa, and seven schools in the Zuni Nation in New Mexico. In record time, USDA organized a basic pilot program and sent an announcement to the states, wondering whether many schools would volunteer to participate. With over 800 schools coming forward, USDA was hard pressed to select just 107 schools to participate in the program.

Beginning in October 2002, the pilot program has already produced an unprecedented success story changing the lives of children and the healthy food environment of every school participating. On March 25-26, USDA and the National Cancer Institute, supporter of the National 5 A Day Program, co-hosted a conference in Indianapolis of teachers, food service personnel, principals, school nurses, parent-teacher organizations, education administrators and more to report preliminary results of the program. While USDA will soon submit its quantitative report to Congress, the anecdotal reports from participants in the conference are overwhelming.

*"In my 32 years of teaching, I've never seen a program make such a tremendous difference in the lives of our kids." Teacher*

*"If we don't have the fruit and vegetable snack program next fall, I'm not coming to school the first week because the kids would kill me." Foodservice Director .*

*"Visits to our nursing office are down, and the kids are missing less school due to sickness." School Nurse*

*"Kids are trying new fruits and vegetables and then asking their parents to buy them at home." Teacher*

*"We didn't expect it, but kids are actually eating more fruits and vegetables from the regular school lunch, and our overall sales are up." Foodservice Director*

#### Policy Statement

*The Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Snack Program works! It works to immediately and drastically change children's fruit and vegetable consumption to improve their health, and it is transforming the school environment for healthy food choices. Congress and the Administration have an unparalleled opportunity to make a real difference in prevention of childhood obesity and development of related diseases, and must act now.*

#### Policy Recommendations

Congress should authorize a National Fruit and Vegetable School Snack Program as a permanent part of child nutrition programs.

Authorize USDA to develop additional pilot programs in all 50 states in FY04, leading to a national program open to all public schools in FY05 based on the success and lessons learned in the pilot programs.

The current pilot program funded schools at a rate of approximately \$100 per student for the school year, or 55 cents per day per student in a 180-day school year. This minimum standard should be used as a benchmark in developing a national program. Direct USDA to develop plans to ensure efficiencies, economies, and controls in a national program, while allowing the flexibility for local school choices that has been a cornerstone of success thus far.

### **Increasing Produce Consumption Through School Meals Programs**

#### Background

Fruit and vegetable consumption is an important component of a balanced diet consistent with the *Dietary*

*Guidelines for Americans* and the Food Guide Pyramid. Unfortunately, as children get older, the quality of their diets steadily decreases. Furthermore, habits established in early childhood generally carry on throughout adulthood. National surveys point clearly to the fact that most children have diets that need improvement and many children have diets that are considered poor. For instance:

- Less than 13% of school-aged children met the target for fruits; with older school-aged children consuming particularly low amounts.
- On any given day, 45% of children eat no fruit, and 20% eat less than one serving of vegetables.
- The average 6 to 11 year old eats only 3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, achieving only half the recommended 7 servings per day for this age group.
- As children get older, their overall diet quality declines
- For males 15 to 18 years old, only 6% have a good diet
- These figures are even worse for African American children across all age groups.

With the implementation of the Federal Government's School Meals Initiative underway, the quality of the reimbursable school meal has improved, with meals now meeting key components of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans such as 30% or less calories from fat, and 2 fruits and/or vegetables must be offered.

However, many students, especially in the middle and upper level grades, have access to a wide variety of food choices and with more access to snack bar type foods, they consume fewer servings of fresh fruits and vegetables. More importantly, findings from the CDC School Health Policies and Programs Study confirm that foods sold outside of the school meal program provide students with a variety of options that may interfere with their ability to choose a healthy diet.

Fortunately, research has shown that schools with salad and fruit bars offer a significantly wider range of fruit and vegetable categories than other schools; items offered include green salads, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, canned fruit, and dried fruit. In addition, making a single healthy substitution in a day can make a big difference in a child's nutritional intake. For example:

If a child ate a medium banana instead of a 1-ounce mix of salty snacks such as potato chips, they would get 12% less fat, 10% more fiber and 13% more potassium.

If broccoli and carrot sticks were eaten at lunch instead of French fries, fat intake could be lowered by 14% and beta carotene intake increased by 216%!

With this in mind, it is critical that the child nutrition reauthorization legislation for 2003 be used as a tool to combat obesity in children and promote policies which look for ways to provide incentives for schools to expand the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and increase produce consumption.

#### Policy Statement

*Promote policy recommendations that help increase fruit and vegetable intake among school children such as salad/garden bars, farmers markets, pre-packaged salads, salads in a cup, exotic fruit cups, innovations in vending and other creative ways used by schools to market and promote fruits and vegetables. Make healthy choices the easy choices at school.*

#### Policy Recommendations

- Provide \$10 million for grants to states or school districts for the Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids Initiative (for educational/promotional materials, salad/garden bars, prepackaged salads and fruit cups, innovative vending options, cold storage and other infrastructure, and other creative ways to help schools provide and encourage children to consume more fruits and vegetables).

Expand the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program up to \$100 million annually to help improve the quality of produce available to schools.

Require USDA commodity purchases to be more in line with national nutrition and dietary guidance contained in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.

Develop an incentive-based pilot project whereby school districts are rewarded when they offer more fruits and vegetables.

Provide a 10-cent per meal “healthy children supplement” to be devoted to improving the quality and healthfulness of school meals. Supplemental increase to the school meal reimbursement rate to be used specifically for the purchase of fruits and vegetables.

Support increase of reimbursement rates for Summer Food Service Program to provide for additional purchases of fruits and vegetables.

Require schools and school districts that utilize the Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) or Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (ANSMP) approach to menu analysis, to provide a fruit or vegetable (no-fried) offering as part of the reimbursable meal. (Currently, required meal components include the entrée, fluid milk, and a side dish)

Remove bonus commodities from the 12% requirement for commodities.

## **School Breakfast Program**

### Background

The School Breakfast Program was established by Congress — first as a temporary measure through the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 in areas where children had long bus rides to school and in areas where many mothers were in the workforce; then with permanent authorization in 1975 — to assist schools in providing a nutritious morning meal to children.

The School Breakfast Program provides per meal cash reimbursements as an entitlement to public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions to cover the costs of serving breakfast to students. The School Breakfast Program provides children with one-fourth or more of their Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) for key nutrients. Research has indicated a link between participation in the breakfast program and educational attainment. Low-income children who participate in school breakfast programs achieve higher standardized test scores than low-income children who do not participate in the program. The program is also associated with reductions in tardiness and absenteeism among participants.

In the 2000-2001 school year, 7.9 million children and 71,930 schools participated in the School Breakfast Program; 6.5 million of the children who participated in the School Breakfast Program in the 2000-2001 school year were from families with low incomes. Over 75 percent of schools serving lunch also serve breakfast. Over 42 percent of the low-income children participating in school lunch receive a school breakfast. In FY 2001, the federal government appropriated \$1.49 billion for school breakfast.

Unfortunately, up to 83 percent of children do not eat School Breakfast in schools where the meals are offered. More importantly, for children who participate in the School Breakfast program, they consume 0.4 more servings of fruit than nonparticipants for breakfast and are associated with higher intakes of food energy, calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin C. It is critical that a comprehensive School Breakfast program be established under the child nutrition reauthorization process with the goal of increased access for all students who wish to participate.

Policy Statement

*Breakfast is a critical meal for children and provides the nutritional necessities which prevent symptoms such as headache, fatigue, restlessness and sleepiness from competing with educational outcomes. Increasing the availability of school breakfast for all students is essential for increasing learning opportunities.*

Policy Recommendations

Make school breakfast programs more broadly available to all children in elementary schools through a universal school breakfast program.

Establish a commodity purchase program for school breakfast at the rate of 5 cents per meal.

**Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children**

Background

Established as a pilot program in 1972 and made permanent in 1974, WIC is administered at the Federal level by USDA's Food Nutrition Service. A wide variety of State and local organizations cooperate in providing the food and health care benefits, and 46,000 merchants nationwide accept WIC vouchers.

In most WIC State agencies, WIC participants receive checks or food instruments to purchase specific foods each month, which are designed to supplement their diets. Federal regulations include seven food packages designed to target specific nutrients known to be limited in participant diets. WIC food is high in one or more of the following nutrients: protein, calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C. WIC foods include iron-fortified infant formula and infant cereal, iron-fortified adult cereal, vitamin C-rich fruit and/or vegetable juice, eggs, milk, cheese, peanut butter, dried beans or peas, tuna fish and carrots. Special infant formulas and certain medical foods may be provided when prescribed by a physician or health professional for a specified medical condition.

State agencies are responsible for identifying specific foods, in accordance with federal regulations, to develop individually tailored food prescriptions. Local WIC agencies staff identify food preferences and prescribe the food prescription which best meets the needs of the participants.

**Eligibility** – Pregnant or postpartum women, infants, and children up to age 5 are eligible. They must meet income guidelines, a State residency requirement, and be individually determined to be at "nutritional risk" by a health professional. To be eligible on the basis of income, applicants' gross income (i.e. before taxes are withheld) must fall at or below 185 percent of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines.

**Participation** – More than 7 million people get WIC benefits each month. Average monthly participation for fiscal year 2001 was approximately 7.31 million.

Children have always been the largest category of WIC participants. The average monthly WIC participation for FY 2001 was approximately 7.31 million people - of that number, nearly 3.6 million were children, over 1.92 million were infants, and nearly 1.78 million were women.

**Food Package Review** – Since 1978, FNS has conducted one major review of the WIC food prescriptions and solicited comments regarding availability of culturally appropriate foods and the

existing federal 6-gram sugar limit for WIC-eligible adult cereals. Due to the extensive number of comments received on the sugar limit proposal, FNS decided to expand the review to all components of the WIC food prescriptions. In 1998, USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion undertook a review of the WIC food packages. Major findings from that report are highlighted below:

- All WIC women exhibit nutrient shortfalls in their diets. WIC pregnant women do not meet 100 percent of the RDA for four of the five target nutrients and for the four other nutrients of concern.
- Problems with the dietary intake of WIC pregnant women are lower energy intakes, lower nutrient density, and higher percentage fat intakes than recommended. Although the WIC package is very low in added sugar, the overall intake of added sugar by pregnant women exceeds recommendations.
- A WIC group at particular nutritional risk appears to be non-breast-feeding postpartum women who may not be consuming their WIC packages.
- Protein intake is well above recommendations for all WIC participant groups as well as the WIC-income-eligible nonparticipating, and the total sample groups.
- All groups of women and children studied consume more than the suggested daily intake of added sugar (from the Food Guide Pyramid), with the exception of nursing mothers. The contribution of the WIC package to added sugars in the overall diet is very low, coming from added sugars in peanut butter and ready-to-eat cereals.

With the exception of the special food package for exclusively breastfeeding women and for homeless participants, no significant changes to the food prescription have been made since the inception of the Program in 1974.

**Efforts to Enhance the WIC Food Prescriptions** – On April 24, 2000, USDA published, in the Unified Agenda section of the Federal Register, a notice about regulations currently under development at the agency. The unified agenda contained information about a rule FNS was developing to revise the WIC food packages. Specifically, the notice stated that the proposed rule would amend regulations governing the WIC food packages to, among other things, add nutrient-dense leafy and other dark green and orange fruits and vegetables to food packages for women and children. The time line contained in the unified agenda notice indicated that a proposed rule would be published in Sept. 2000, with a final rule being published in Sept. 2001 (effective date Sept. 2002). The agency has yet to publish a proposed rule.

### Policy Statement

*The current WIC food packages are designed to maximize general nutrition and health benefits and safeguards the health of pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and infants, and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk because of inadequate nutrition and income. The produce industry is concerned that WIC food prescription packages have changed little since 1974 and does not reflect current nutrition research and are not consistent with the Federal Dietary Guidelines. Therefore, the produce industry strongly supports policy recommendations which will ensure that a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables are available under the WIC food packages.*

### Policy Recommendations

Require the USDA to publish its proposed rule improving the nutritional quality of the WIC food packages within 120 days of bill passage.

Modify WIC food package to include more nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables.

Provide a more targeted approach to WIC nutrition education efforts with a focus on fruit and vegetable intake

Allow for WIC farmers markets coupons to be redeemed at grocery stores or at stores inside federal empowerment zones.

Initiate a pilot program to implement the California WIC Fresh Produce Option

Bonus or supplemental payments to states where WIC program participants increase fruit and vegetable intake

Provide bonus/surplus commodities for WIC program recipients

Authorize farmers markets as WIC vendors if vendors are not available

### **Nutrition Education and Promotion Programs**

#### **Background**

The nation's investment in nutrition assistance has been a critical tool in fighting undernutrition and related health problems. Today, it is well established that good nutrition is fundamental to proper growth, development, health and performance. Diet is widely recognized as a central component of health promotion and disease prevention.

But while the United States has made progress in promoting food security and fighting hunger, we face a continuing challenge in improving the quality of the American diet. Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity account for 300,000 deaths per year, second only to tobacco as a cause of preventable mortality. The economic cost of poor nutrition contributing to coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes—four of the ten leading causes of death—is now \$71 billion per year, and the growing childhood obesity epidemic is likely to result in a dramatic increase in this cost over time. Research also suggests that diets during pregnancy and early childhood can have long-term impacts on child and adult health. Consumption of a healthy diet in the early years is essential for normal growth and development, and to prevent a variety of nutrition-related health problems, such as iron-deficiency anemia, growth retardation, malnutrition, compromised cognitive achievement, obesity, dental caries, and chronic diseases later in life.

Nutrition education through information and promotion is a key strategy for changing behaviors that lead to reaching health goals. Research also confirms that properly designed and implemented nutrition education interventions, focusing on achieving behavioral change, can be effective at improving diets and nutrition-related behaviors. The governments *Healthy People 2010* initiative also recognizes nutrition as an important factor in the prevention of premature deaths from the chronic diseases described above and sets numerous nutrition objectives including an increase in the proportion of schools that provide nutrition education in school curricula

**Child Nutrition Programs Educational Efforts**— Nutrition education in the Child Nutrition Programs is designed to be supported through two complementary, integrated mechanisms – the Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET) and Team Nutrition. NET has provided support for the State and local infrastructure to deliver nutrition education at schools and childcare settings participating in the Child Nutrition Programs. Team Nutrition is a strategy for incorporating behavior-based messages into new materials for use in NET and other community-based initiatives that target children.

Team Nutrition establishes a national model that encourages use of multiple, reinforcing channels of communication to reach children and their caregivers with targeted nutrition education messages. The NET staff and infrastructure have used materials designed by Team Nutrition and begun to follow the Team Nutrition communications strategy. Without the NET Program, there is no delivery mechanism for either national Child Nutrition initiatives like Team Nutrition or more localized approaches and projects. Although NET continues to be authorized at 50 cents per enrolled child to provide State grants for the infrastructure needed to coordinate nutrition education activities in CN Programs, no federal funding is currently provided. A NET-like infrastructure continues to exist only to the extent that States provide the funding.

#### Policy Statement

*Improving the design and delivery of nutrition education and promotion efforts holds great potential in achieving significant improvement in dietary practices for all Americans. It is critical that a coordinated approach to fruit and vegetable initiatives within these important nutrition programs is developed and established to meet the Federal Dietary Guidelines and the Healthy People 2010 objectives.*

#### Policy Recommendations

Allow for schools and school districts to participate in a public/private matching education program to promote increased fruit and vegetable consumption.

Authorize FNS to appoint or identify a 5 A Day Liaison at the national, the seven regional FNS offices, and state levels to coordinate and expand USDA efforts to promote fruit and vegetable intake.

Provide FNS with authority to enter into financial partnerships with business and private non-profit entities to develop and implement 5 A Day promotional initiatives.

Enhance and strengthen the Team Nutrition program by adding a state-level infrastructure and networking component called the Team Nutrition Network. Increase funding for Team Nutrition by adding an additional \$40 million annually for the Team Nutrition Network. Maintain the current level of funding \$10 million per year for existing Team Nutrition program components and give USDA more flexibility to maintain Team Nutrition Functions.

Provide funding to FNS to develop a clearinghouse of best practices regarding fruit and vegetable promotion and consumption efforts across the various nutrition assistance programs including child nutrition programs, food stamp programs, WIC, etc. Such a clearinghouse will help state agencies, districts and others in establishing effective fruit and vegetable promotional and consumption efforts.

### **Commodity Distribution and Infrastructure Improvements**

#### Background

USDA's distribution network is designed for moving truckloads (36,000 pounds) of nonperishable commodities and perishable products with long shelf lives. Contracts are established with vendors who deliver to warehouses, often at a State level within a two-week delivery window. States make arrangements for the storage of the commodities until schools or other recipient organizations need them. Each State has its own distribution system for redistributing the commodities within its borders. Distribution of highly perishable products, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, within USDA's network has sometimes resulted in products arriving at the end user in an unsuitable condition for consumption or with a very short shelf life. Perishable fresh fruits and vegetables need to be delivered to end users in smaller quantities that can be used in a relatively short time. Also, the time between harvesting and usage of perishable, fresh fruits and vegetables needs to be kept to a minimum. USDA's distribution method works best for non-perishables and

bulk volumes rather than distributing fresh fruits and vegetables. USDA generally distributes only fruits and vegetables with relatively long shelf lives. Over the last five years, entitlement and bonus commodity donations of fresh fruits and vegetables have been limited to commodities such as potatoes, tomatoes, apples, pears, oranges, cantaloupes, lemons and grapefruit.

Policy Statement

*Due to lack of infrastructure investment for schools by the federal government, the ability to provide fresh fruits and vegetables for school feeding programs continues to be inadequate. In addition, logistical transportation issues continue to impede the delivery and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in school feeding programs. Congress should include policy recommendations that aid local school districts in the ability to transport, store, handle, and prepare more fresh fruits and vegetables for school feeding programs.*

Policy Recommendations

- Develop a grant program to provide state and local governments, food banks; federal food distribution program administrative organizations; and charitable and faith based organizations with a dedicated funding source for infrastructure and technology improvements to store, transfer, and efficiently distribute fresh fruits and vegetables obtained through federal feeding and nutrition assistance programs, state and local government distribution channels, and private sector charitable donations.

Reinstate funding for food service equipment necessary for preparing, serving and school meals in addition to storing highly perishable commodities.

**Fruit and Vegetable Nutrition Research**

Background

Historically, FNS had money appropriated for research purposes in three program accounts. The three program accounts were: Child Nutrition, Food Stamps, and WIC. Four years ago, the House Appropriation Committee required that funds designated for research under the FNS' Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation be transferred to the Economic Research Service. At the time Congress felt having an USDA consolidate research functions was appropriate. Currently, this policy remains in place.

Policy Statement

*Given the expanding research base on the role of fruits and vegetables in health promotion, and the gap in federal funding for such research, FNS, ERS and other research agencies within USDA must assure that their research agendas include more emphasis on fruits and vegetables.*

Policy Recommendations

Require USDA to develop a fruit and vegetable research agenda that coordinates research between the Economic Research Service, Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Research Service and other USDA agencies. That agenda should include research on how best to promote fruit and vegetable intake to children and should be developed in coordination with the produce industry, nutrition and health organizations, school food service professionals, and other stakeholders.

- The impact of increased fruit and vegetable consumption toward preventing chronic diseases, including reducing obesity, diabetes, diverticulosis, cataracts, cancer, heart disease, stroke, and hypertension, and the overall benefits of whole food consumption including documentation of certain phytonutrients found in fresh produce that may help prevent such chronic diseases;

- Development of more effective behavior-based dietary interventions and health promotion programs within federal nutrition programs to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables based on federal dietary guidelines, including environmental influences, strategies for overcoming barriers to behavior change, and food preference development for children and adolescents; and
- Influences on food choices and options for providing an optimal environment for making informed healthy food choices in a free-market economy including evaluation of different health communications and delivery mechanisms to reach underserved and nutritionally “at risk” populations.

### Miscellaneous Provisions

Funding to states for operation of state-based 5 A Day initiatives (funding to be used for staffing and programs)

Establish policy re: commercials during children's TV that would allow "equal time" for healthy food commercials

### Conclusion

We recognize that as with any new or expanded programs, financial resources have to be reallocated or increased to account for the cost associated with these initiatives. On the other hand, we believe investments into these specific policy initiatives will ensure that the federal child nutrition programs represent the nation’s best commitment to offer young people a bright start to good nutrition choices.

It can no longer be acceptable to say we don’t have the money. With all due respect to the Budget Resolution passed last week in the House, the only reason some say we do not have the money to spend on prevention today is the exorbitant costs of health care we must spend to make up for earlier failures in public health and nutrition programs. Let us not repeat those same mistakes, but instead, *find* the money needed for prevention now, because we’ll surely save money in the long run.

We look forward to working with the Committee to address these important issues and offer our tireless commitment to improving child nutrition programs. Thank you.