



**Statement to the Senate Committee on Agriculture**

by  
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**Des Moines, Iowa**

**regarding**

**"Beyond Federal School Meal Programs:  
Reforming Nutrition for Kids in Schools**

**March 31, 2009**

**on behalf of:**

**International Dairy Foods Association  
and  
National Milk Producers Federation**



**International Dairy Foods Association**  
Milk Industry Foundation  
National Cheese Institute  
International Ice Cream Association



Good morning, Chairman Harkin, committee members.

I am Miriam Erickson Brown, President and CEO of Anderson Erickson Dairy in Des Moines Iowa. We are a third generation family-owned dairy. My brother, Warren Erickson, and I work together to run a company that we sets extremely high standards for itself and prizes constant innovation. We love bringing our customers the very best dairy products available.

I am here today representing two leading dairy organizations: the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF) and the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA). National Milk members market a majority of farm milk in the U.S., and speak with a strong voice on national issues for dairy cooperatives and their dairy farmer members. IDFA represents more than 85 percent of the nation's milk, cheese, and ice cream makers, with over 1100 processing plants and 120,000 employees nationwide. I have served as a past Chair of IDFA and the Milk Industry Foundation, one of IDFA's constituent organizations.

I am also pleased to serve as the chair of the Health and Wellness Committee of the new Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, a collaboration of the nation's leading producers, manufacturers and marketers of milk and milk products. The Innovation Center is a first-ever effort in our industry to work together in a formal way to meet the growing needs of consumers on a wide range of issues, from new product research and development to sustainability and health and wellness.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee today on the nutrition environment in our schools, particularly in the foods served outside of the federal school meal programs. The milk and dairy industry applauds your leadership on this issue, which is so important to the health and well-being of our students.

Because of the critical role of milk and milk products in children's diets, I ask the committee to consider three actions: make nutrient-rich foods a central part of the school nutrition environment; help increase consumption of nutritious low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products as part of the strategy to lower childhood obesity rates; and establish consistent nutrition standards for all foods and beverages sold or provided in schools.

### **Children and teens need dairy products for health and nutrition.**

Today's children are increasingly overweight and undernourished. We know that they are not consuming the recommended amounts of nutrient-rich foods; and that they are getting too many calories from foods and beverages that have little to no nutritional value. In fact, only 2 percent of children meet the recommended number of servings from the five food groups. This makes dairy foods' ability to provide several key nutrients lacking in children's diets all the more important.

Milk is the top source of eight essential nutrients, including calcium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, vitamins D, A and B12, and riboflavin in the diets of children and adolescents. Milk is also the number one source of protein in diets of children ages 2-11.

Low-fat and fat-free regular milk and flavored milks are the optimum beverage choice for children and adolescents, providing a powerful package of eight essential nutrients necessary for healthy growth and development. Studies show that drinking three 8-ounce glasses of milk daily fills nutrient “gaps” and increases intake of essential nutrients. In fact, The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee identified five nutrients lacking in children’s diets (calcium, magnesium, potassium, Vitamin E and fiber) -- dairy products provide three out of the five.

Because of its unique and unparalleled nutrient package, milk has long been a mandatory component of the school meal program. While school meals are not the focus of today’s hearing, we would be remiss if we didn’t take this opportunity to emphasize the importance of increasing milk consumption among all school-age children, including those that don’t participate in a meal program. With respect to nutrition standards that may be developed for competitive foods in schools -- including options available on the a la carte menu, in vending machines and through school stores -- we urge that they, too, be designed to encourage increased consumption of nutrient-rich milk and milk products.

There are a range of healthy dairy products available in schools – including white, lactose-free, and flavored milk as well as yogurt and cheese – and it is important to develop school-wide standards that recognize their nutritional value. Offering a range of choices that include white or flavored low-fat or fat-free milk in a variety of sizes and packages can help children and teens make milk their beverage of choice. In Central Iowa, for example, more than 50 percent of children choose chocolate milk over regular milk to drink with lunch at school.

Yogurt is a popular choice with kids of all ages, and provides a rich source of many nutrients for growth and development. One 6 ounce carton of yogurt contains as much protein as one large egg, more potassium than one orange and less fat than a quarter pound of lean ground beef. Yogurts contain live active cultures that help protect the body against infection and disease. Our dairy in Iowa makes 27 flavor varieties of low-fat yogurt like: Key Lime Pie, Strawberry Rhubarb Pie and Apple Bread Pudding. (We don’t believe dairy should be boring!)

Many of the most popular and nutritious dishes served in schools today include cheese. Not only is cheese an excellent source of calcium and a good source of high-quality protein, many school nutrition professionals find that cheese can help increase consumption of other healthful foods including vegetables and whole grains. A wide variety of cheeses are available today, including tasty reduced-fat varieties. The protein found in dairy products like milk, cheese and yogurts promotes satiety, an important part of maintaining a healthy weight.

### **Nutrition standards should help children and teens get more nutrients from their calories**

Milk and milk products have long been an integral part of the school meal program, which is built on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The dairy industry is proud to be

part of helping our children meet their basic nutritional needs.

As this committee considers setting nutrition standards for all foods and beverages available in schools, there are two important factors to consider: the need to focus on moderation and a balanced diet, and the role dairy ingredients play in getting kids to eat healthy foods.

From our experience as a partner in many school nutrition programs, we recognize that effective school nutrition standards can encourage the enjoyment of nutrient-rich foods such as milk, fruits and vegetables, and whole grains. If we expect our children and teens to consume the foods and beverages provided to them in school, we must make sure they are nutritious **and** delicious.

Consumption of a wide variety of foods by children, taking care to balance caloric intake and nutrient consumption, is still the most effective way to achieve overall nutritional health. Nutrition guidelines for school meals are constructed to average meals over the course of a week. A similar approach can be effective for foods and beverages served in a la carte programs. Overly restrictive nutrition standards applied to individual foods may put nutrient rich foods such as yogurt cups and cheese sticks, out of the reach of our children. That would be unfortunate since the Dietary Guidelines indicate that these types of products are among the “food groups to encourage.” These nutritious products, along with the other food choices served as part of the school meals program should be included in the mix of healthy options available to children. The school lunch room is a good place to teach our children to develop the balanced eating patterns they need to promote healthy development.

A variety of cheeses are required to meet the needs of food manufacturers who make the pizzas, quesadillas, pasta and many other dishes that are served in schools. The nutritional profile of these dishes must consider its total nutrient package, the serving size and frequency of consumption. The dairy industry has invested in extensive research and development of new ingredients and products that minimize added sugars, sodium, and allow for a variety of fat levels. In fact, a growing number of our cheese varieties have been able to successfully reduce fat and sodium levels while retaining the good taste that everyone expects from cheese.

So whether as a nutrient-rich ingredient in the foods kids like to eat, or as an a la carte menu item, dairy foods come in a wide variety of versions and packaging that provide unbeatable nutritional benefits. For these reasons, we encourage you to set school-wide nutrition standards that include milk, yogurt and various types of cheese as a valuable and important part of a child's healthy diet in schools.

### **Decreasing obesity rates – milk is part of the solution.**

With the alarming increase in obesity rates among children, it is imperative that national nutrition policy encourages school districts to make nutritious foods and beverages available and to limit foods and beverages that provide minimal nutrition to children’s

fast-growing bodies.

Milk consumption among children and teens has been in decline for more than three decades. During this same time period, we have seen childhood obesity rates grow to epidemic proportions. You need look no further than the USDA's own Economic Research Service to see the simple inverse relationship between rising obesity rates in kids and declining milk consumption. ERS research indicates that each 1-ounce decline in milk consumption is accompanied by a 4.2-ounce rise in consumption of other beverages, resulting in a gain of 31 calories and a loss of 34 milligrams of calcium.

Many of our children are living unhealthy lifestyles due to a diet filled with poor food choices and less physical activity. We believe that milk and dairy products are a key part of the nutrition solution to that challenge.

The Dietary Guidelines recognize that milk is a naturally nutrient-rich food, providing a unique nutrient package. Yet the older children get, the less milk they consume. Recent USDA research shows that 60 percent of preschool children meet their calcium intake recommendations, but only 13 percent of teenage girls meet the requirement.

But as parents know, in today's highly competitive marketing environment, it is no longer enough to simply tell our children to "drink your milk." Despite the unbeatable nutrition it offers, milk must compete with many other beverages in schools especially on the a la carte menu, in vending machines and school stores.

As you are aware, carbonated soft drinks have the largest market share of all beverages, accounting for nearly half of all advertising dollars, with sports drinks being the most heavily marketed of all beverages on a volume basis. Many children are offered the same highly marketed beverages in vending machines, cafeterias, and at school sporting events.

As nutrition standards impact the availability of options in these venues, milk must be on a level playing field with other beverages. This means, for example, that if sports or diet drinks are available through vending machines in larger container sizes, then milk, too, should be available in competitive sizes and flavors.

We should be helping schools to encourage students to choose from more nutritious options. The impact of heavy marketing of foods and beverages that provide less nutritional value for our children can be mitigated by setting standards that apply to all foods and beverages available in schools, including a la carte menus and school vending machines.

Flavored low-fat or fat-free milk is an excellent way to increase milk consumption among children and teens. According to a study in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, children who drink flavored milk, drink more milk overall and are more likely to meet their calcium needs without consuming more total fat and calories as compared with their peers. In addition, those who consume flavored milk have higher total milk and calcium intakes yet do not have higher intakes of added sugars or total fat,

or have a higher body mass index (BMI) than children who do not consume flavored milk.

Providing a variety options, including fat content, flavoring, size and packages can help children and teens make milk their beverage of choice. A recent report based on USDA data from the School Nutrition Dietary Assessment shows a significant shift in the types of milk consumed in schools from whole- and reduced-fat milk to low-fat or fat free milk. Three-quarters of students now select low-fat or fat-free. A major factor in this shift is the popularity of flavored milk. Approximately 90 percent of flavored milk sold in schools is low-fat or fat-free

The dairy industry is working hard to develop flavored milk formulations that have fewer added sugars and total calories while maintaining “kid appeal.” Sixty-seven percent of milk companies have developed one or more flavored milks that have fewer than 170 calories per 8 ounce serving. Establishing guidelines that are overly restrictive on added sugars would not only drive up costs significantly, but are also difficult to achieve without non-nutritive sweeteners. For example, Anderson Erickson Dairy is known for our fat free chocolate milk, which has one of the lowest calorie counts in the nation. We have always used a blend of three European cocoas in our recipe and less sugar, but our fat-free chocolate milk is not always selected in the bid process because it is not the lowest bid price.

As school districts across the country struggle to provide healthy meals on tight budgets, many depend on additional revenues generated through a la carte sales. Many schools, understandably, offer beverages that maximize the revenue from a la carte sales by offering drinks that provide a higher profit margin. USDA has a small program that subsidizes a la carte milk sales, called the Special Milk Program, and we would encourage this committee to increase its funding and scope so that more schools can be partially reimbursed for the milk they serve to kids outside of the school meal program. This would help schools by offsetting the cost of milk and help boost milk consumption among children not participating in the school lunch program.

As the committee considers setting standards across the school environment, we urge you to balance nutritional goals with the necessity of helping ensure that kids actually eat the healthy options offered. Foods that are good for you must also taste good. For example, if sugar levels in flavored milk are too low, it may have unintended consequences of reducing consumption of this nutrient-rich favorite among school aged children, and reducing milk consumption during these important growing years.

**Consistent nutrition standards for all foods and beverages must be grounded in the Dietary Guidelines and emphasize nutrient richness.**

The dairy industry is proud of its long history of efforts to help our children meet their nutritional needs through school-based food programs. We know that schools are places of learning and provide an outstanding environment where children can learn healthy nutritional habits that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. That is why we

support the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which recommends three daily servings of low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products as part of an overall healthful diet. The Dietary Guidelines should form the foundation of all school nutrition policy.

The school food environment has changed dramatically since most of us were in school. Today there are a la carte menus and vending machines that provide an array of competing foods – some provide important nutritional contributions to children's diets, but others do not. Only the USDA school meal programs operate under the direction of the Dietary Guidelines. Everything else in the cafeteria and on the school grounds is subject to few rules and often conflicting guidelines. None of the so-called "competitive foods" are held to government nutrition standards.

School meals are richer in calcium than meals eaten by children anywhere else, largely because milk is served as a required part of school meals. Research shows that students that participate in the national school lunch program consume four times more milk at lunch than non-participants (0.8 ounce servings versus 0.2 ounce servings). However, many students don't buy school lunches, especially teens. That's why we need your help to promote milk and dairy consumptions in the a la carte line and elsewhere on school grounds.

In conclusion, we believe our schools are best served by having one set of standards for food and beverages available in our schools. Standards that are set through a process that is based upon the best available nutrition science should apply equally across the country, and should not be subject to state or local political pressures. In addition, nationally consistent nutrition standards would make delivering highly nutritious products more efficient and cost-effective.

Speaking for both dairy producers and dairy food companies, we share your commitment to the need to improve the nutrition our students receive at school. We will continue to find innovative ways to support the overall goals of the Dietary Guidelines, providing new products, new flavors and new ways for students to enjoy the taste and goodness of dairy products.

Thank you for holding this hearing today. We look forward to working with you on ways to improve and reform the nutritional environment for kids in schools.