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REVIEW THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES REGARDING THE SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MARCH 4, 2003

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REVIEW THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S INITIATIVES REGARDING THE SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2003

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SH–216, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Thad Cochran, [Chairman of the Committee], presiding.

Present or submitting a statement: Senators Cochran, Chambliss, Coleman, Harkin, Leahy, Conrad, Baucus, Lincoln, Miller, and Stabenow.

STATEMENT OF HON. THAD COCHRAN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will please come to order.

It is a pleasure for me to chair this first hearing of our Agriculture Committee on the subject of the reauthorization of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. These programs provide free or low-cost meals to more than 25 million children throughout our United States each day.

Today we will hear from three panels of witnesses to help us review these important programs, including representatives from the American School Food Service Association and others who are well-respected authorities on these programs.

I want to welcome all of you and thank you for the preparation of your statements in advance that you provided to the committee for us to review, and we appreciate all of you making the special effort to provide this valuable assistance to help us better understand the programs and how we may be able to improve them.

I am pleased to have other members of the committee here. Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa is the senior Democrat member of the committee and has chaired this committee before; and Senator Kent Conrad from North Dakota.

At this time, I will be happy to yield to them for any comments or statements they would like to make.

Senator Harkin.

STATEMENT OF HON. TOM HARKIN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM IOWA, RANKING MEMEBER, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Senator HARKIN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and again I commend you for holding this hearing and for making this the first hearing that you have held as chairman of the committee. That is significant.

Of all of the issues that have come before this Senate Agriculture Committee in all the years I have been on it, there is none that has been more bipartisan—or, I should say even nonpartisan—than the issue of child nutrition. The issue of school lunches, breakfasts, and the WIC program have all generated broad support on both sides of the aisle.

Of course, we are always looking for new ways and better ways of doing things and meeting the nutritional needs of our kids in school, but this has certainly been a very, very bipartisan effort.

Our Federal child nutrition programs are a success story that spans over half a century. School lunch, breakfast, and after-school nutrition are vitally important to healthy and productive lives of our Nation's kids. I want to join the chairman in taking my hat off to the school food service professionals who are indispensable to the progress, many of whom are here today.

How many are with American School Food Service Association here?

[A show of hands.]

Senator HARKIN. Oh, there you go. Welcome. I know a lot of us will be seeing you later on today also.

Despite the success, there are huge challenges. Far too many children who need schools meals are not getting them. Their families may not be able to afford the 30 or 40 cents charged for a reduced-price breakfast or lunch. Of children who eat school lunches, not even one in three receives a school breakfast, and only one in five receives a summer meal. Surely, we cannot leave no child behind if children lack the nutrition they need for learning.

In addition, we have a childhood health and nutrition crisis in America. I want to repeat that: We have a childhood health and nutrition crisis in America. Overweight and obesity among children and adolescents has tripled in the last 20 years. Their rates of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and Type 2 diabetes have shot up dramatically.

If we stay the current course, this crisis can only expand like a snowball barreling down a mountain. Our former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher concluded that the combined cost of overweight, obesity, and lack of physical activity—let me underline that—lack of physical activity—the combined cost of this in lost lives and impaired health actually exceeds the toll taken by tobacco in our society.

On the surface, it may seem contradictory to call for increasing participation in school meals in the face of growing childhood overweight and obesity, but the opposite is true. If children can obtain or afford balanced, nutritious school meals, unhealthy eating is frequently the alternative.

In other words, school meals are not the problem, but they are the essential part of the solution to childhood overweight and obesity.

To be sure, schools should further improve the nutritional quality of their meals, and schools have to do more to promote physical exercise and fitness. I saw a figure the other day, Mr. Chairman, that over 80 percent of elementary school kids in America do not even have 1 hour of PE a week. What can you expect when kids do not even get physical exercise?

Let us put the focus where it belongs. School vending machines and a la carte counters are filled with products from companies that seem determined to super-size everything—and everybody—within reach of their ever-present advertising. How in the world does a healthy, balanced meal stand a fair chance against billions of dollars' worth of marketing?

Common sense calls for increasing the availability of sound nutrition in schools and limiting the sales of competing foods that crowd out healthier choices. Instead of picking this up, which kids can get—potato chips, with all the fat and cholesterol—they ought to be picking up this orange and eating it.

The problem is that the potato chips are available, and the orange is not, and therein lies the problem.

We started a pilot program—I did—in the last Farm bill to offer free fruits and vegetables in schools. Four States signed up for it plus one Indian Reservation, 100 schools in total, and the preliminary data is that when kids get free fruits and vegetables in school, they eat them. We have one principal from Muscatine, Iowa today who will testify as to what happened in Muscatine with that program.

We should also build on these pilots and increase access to school breakfast and summer food and provide these free fruits and vegetables to kids in our schools. In the absence of any better alternative—and I say this forthrightly—in the absence of any better alternative, we should ban school vending machines and regulate a la carte sales.

[Applause.]

Senator HARKIN. To attain these goals, additional funding above baseline levels is critical. We are going to have to fulfill our responsibility here in Congress.

I just want to say one other thing, Mr. Chairman—and you have indulged me in giving me a little more time here—I just want to say one other thing. Our school food service people are doing an outstanding job. We are meeting the dietary guidelines today better than we ever have in the past. There is one problem. The dietary guidelines are wrong, and we are just beginning to learn that.

Look at the last issue, the January issue, of Scientific American—a very nonpartisan magazine, to be sure. It is called "The Government's Flawed Diet Advice." Nutritionists, doctors, and health professionals have been looking at our food pyramid for a number of years, and the conclusion among—well, I would not say 100 percent—but I would say close to 100 percent of them is that our old food pyramid is wrong, and we need a new one. Now, that has nothing to do with this, but I am just saying that part of our obligation here is to get the USDA to move very rapidly to come

up with a new food pyramid so that the school food service people can meet the new types of dietary guidelines we have with all the expertise that you have.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you and my colleagues in a bipartisan manner on this legislation which is so critical to our children and our future, and thank you for indulging me.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Harkin.

Senator Conrad.

STATEMENT OF HON. KENT CONRAD, A U.S. SENATOR FROM NORTH DAKOTA

Senator CONRAD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to echo the ranking member in thanking you for holding this hearing. It is very timely to have done it today, and we appreciate it very much.

I want to salute the representatives of North Dakota who are here—Kathy Grafsgaard, the Director of Child Nutrition Programs; Dixie Schultz from Mandan, which is where my family hailed from for many years; and Julie Tunseth from Grand Forks. They are in charge of serving nearly 74,000 meals each day for school lunch in North Dakota. We appreciate the job they do.

As Senator Harkin was speaking, I was reminded of a time when I attended a meeting of this committee many years ago. Back when I was a young man, I was in Washington, and came to a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing on the question of nutrition. I will never forget it. Senator McGovern from South Dakota was the chairman at the time, and Senator Dole was on the committee—and Senator Alan Ellender of Louisiana told the expert witness who, as I recall, was from the State of Iowa, that he said had only one question. The question was "What is this pablum?"

The witness was taken aback at the question and laughed. He then described pablum. Ellender said, "Well, I wanted to know because my daughter has fed that to our grandchildren, and they are all as fit as hogs."

[Laughter.]

Senator CONRAD. I do not know if we are serving pablum in our schools. I rather doubt that it is part of the breakfast program, but we all understand how important it is that people have good nutrition.

My grandmother, who raised me, was a devotee of Adele Davis' "You are what you eat" and believed very strongly proper nutrition and in physical exercise.

However, when I look across the spectrum and look at all the indices for our younger generation, they are missing out on both counts. The nutrition is inadequate and furthermore, too little physical exercise. As a result, we have obesity dramatically on the rise in this country.

As recently as in my grandfather's generation, they milked cows before they went to school in the morning—getting their exercise even before they went to school. In my time, it was not an hour of exercise each week like kids now are getting but an hour a day playing sports.

I am very concerned about this trend and the related nutrition and obesity issues, and again, thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing to examine them.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Conrad.

[The prepared statement of Senator Conrad can be found in the appendix on page 52.]

Senator Baucus.

STATEMENT OF HON. MAX BAUCUS, A U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA

Senator BAUCUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I was listening to the testimony not only of Senator Conrad but also Senator Harkin, I was reminded of several years ago in Montana, at the Fork Pack Indian Reservation, when I was talking to some of the high school students there on the reservation who were appalled at the food that they were getting in the school lunch and school breakfast program there and the USDA guidelines.

In fact, they took the issue into their own hands, and I was very proud of them. One of the students was an editor of the school paper, and she wrote a column about how bad things were and got several students to go on strike, that is, to just not participate and also not go to school for a couple days, because in their view, the program was so deficient.

The strike lasted for a while, but they finally had to give in, and USDA did not make the changes, and it really was sad to me, but it was an indication to me of just how bad things were, at least at that time, on that reservation and in that school, and to what great lengths the kids were willing to go to try to get some changes.

I must confess that I do not know at this point what the changes are and whether the program is much better, but right now, having said all this, I am going to find out, and we are going to see what can be done to make sure the changes are there. It really is appalling, and it has been said before, with the obesity that is growing in this country, and diabetes which is also growing in this country—and I also think that to some degree kids think they are somewhat entitled these days to certain things, material and to eat certain things, much different than was the case 20 or 30 years ago—there is just too much of a sense of entitlement among kids today.

I do not know what the solutions are. The solutions clearly have a lot to do with better programs and better nutrition, better dietary guidelines. There is no doubt about that. The problem runs even deeper.

Most of this comes down to attitude and self-esteem and self-respect, which kids apparently, for reasons I do not fully understand, do not have enough of these days to watch better what they eat, demand and want better food and so forth.

It also means perhaps some program, a public-private partnership with the fast food industry, to see if there is some way to make some of those products a little more nutritious than they are.

It is a huge problem, but I do know the basic premise is totally accurate, that is, that the better the food, the better the quality of the food, the better lives our kids are going to lead in school and can be more upbeat and proud and feel better and study better and

so on. It is true of all ages. The WIC program, for example, is extremely important for infants and for the mothers, because if there is low birthweight, clearly, the kids are much more at risk; and also, the kids do a lot better when they are fed properly. It is a huge issue.

I am reminded of something I saw on the news just a short while ago, that 800 million people in this world are starving. That is worldwide, of course. In our country, I suppose a few probably are starving, but there is no excuse for the biggest, wealthiest country in the world, the only superpower in the world by far, to not be sure that all of its kids have very healthy diets and are doing very well nutritionally. It is the very least we can do.

I commend you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and I hope we can make a difference here.

I also welcome Linda Adahold from Montana, who is with Montana Food Services—I believe she is in the audience. We do not have a lot of folks in Montana, so when somebody from Montana shows up, we are pretty proud.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Baucus.

Senator Stabenow.

STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE A. STABENOW, A U.S. SENATOR FROM MICHIGAN

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, let me offer congratulations. This is our first opportunity in the committee with you as Chairman, and I look forward to working with you. I would also like to comment our ranking member for his leadership as well.

I have to comment—Senator Harkin held up an orange—that is one of the few fruits that we do not grow in Michigan, but next time, I want equal time for an apple or a cherry or blueberries, peaches, and grapes—I could go on and on.

I would also like to welcome our panel. I have good friends on the panel. I look forward to working with you, as we move forward.

I want to apologize in advance. I have three committee meetings happening at the same time, so if I leave, it is not because of what you are saying. I will stay as long as possible.

I want to thank and welcome the members here from the Michigan School Food Service Association and other folks from Michigan who are here—I want to thanke all of you for coming. Many of you are returning and have been working on these issues for many years.

The child nutrition reauthorization bill is one of the committee's top priorities for this year, and we need your input and welcome it. This is a tremendously important bill, as we all know, that covers some of our Nation's most important nutrition programs, ranging from the School Lunch and School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Feeding Program, and WIC. These programs impact people's lives directly. I welcome you.

These programs are very important in Michigan. Last year, we had over 132 million school lunches that were served to children in our State. That is quite amazing—and think of the difference

that that has made in their lives—and I want to thank the people in the audience who have made that possible.

We all know that a hungry child cannot learn, and each of you does your part each and every day to make sure that our most basic and important needs are met for our children.

Many of the other programs that will be included in our reauthorization are equally important to Michigan. Half of all babies born in Michigan are eligible for WIC. Each day in my State, over 66,000 children and seniors attend day care centers that benefit from the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Twenty-five schools in Michigan are participating this year in the fruit and vegetable pilot, and I am hearing wonderful things about that and am looking forward to expanding that program as well.

The list just goes on and on, and simply put, the USDA nutrition programs provide critical help to people in my State of Michigan, as I know they do in the States of everyone who is here.

I am looking forward to working with the committee to devise a bill that increases access, increases awareness regarding nutrition and increases critical funding and support for these programs.

I am particularly interested in exploring ways to reduce paperwork for schools and to make sure that hungry children get the meals they need by reducing the current three-tier eligibility to a two-tier eligibility.

[Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. I did not mention it, but at the first applause that we had for one of Senator Harkin's statement, I did not say anything about the applause because I agreed with what he said, but for fear that I may not agree with everything that everybody else may say, I do not think we ought to turn this hearing into a pep rally of any kind. This is a serious undertaking to hear from the witnesses whom we have invited to testify before the committee today, and that is the reason we are here, and to hear their suggestions and observations about the way these programs have been administered, the suggestions for changes in the authority the Department of Agriculture has to administer the programs, the funding levels that are authorized in the legislation. There are a lot of very important factors and facts and information that we need in order to do our job to write this legislation so that it can meet the needs of all the children and others in our society who are served by these programs.

It is with that frame of mind and attitude that we are going to proceed—not as a political rally and not to express your favor or displeasure with anything that any witnesses says or any member of this committee says. I hope you will honor that as we proceed with the hearing—and that is not to criticize anything Ms. Stabenow said or to say that I disagree with anything she said, but I just thought we ought to start now at the beginning, with the Senators' statements, to have that understanding.

I apologize for interrupting you. You may continue.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is perfectly all right. I have a couple more points, but I do hope for the record that we will recognize that there was extreme applause for that last point—and I will assume applause that will be unheard for the next point.

As a member of the Budget Committee, I also want to put into the record that I stand behind the child nutrition forum's proposal for allocating an additional $1 billion per year for reauthorizing these important programs. We will be bringing a budget resolution before the Senate in the next few months, and I am hopeful that we will have strong bipartisan support coming from the committee to do that.

I would just say that as a Senator representing a very diverse State—we are very proud to represent a large State that grows many fruits and vegetables—there are many ways that we can meet the needs of children with our fruits and vegetables. It is a win-win for agriculture as well as for children and seniors and others.

We made progress in last year's Farm bill when we required that the USDA purchase an additional $2 billion a year in fruits and vegetables. I was very proud to lead and sponsor that effort. We are running into trouble implementing that with the Department, and I am hopeful, Mr. Chairman, that we can work together to correct that particular issue.

There are many other things that we need to be focused on—more fruits and vegetables in the WIC program and possibly we need to mandate that change in order to make sure that that happens. In conclusion, I would just say that I cannot forget my dairy producers in Michigan, who provide such an important role in providing milk for children with every meal.

Mr. Chairman, this is an important bill and an important set of issues. There is nothing more fundamental than nutrition and giving every child the opportunity to be healthy so that they can succeed in life.

Again, I welcome the witnesses.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me welcome our panels. We have three panels of witnesses who will testify before the committee this morning. First, representatives of the American School Food Service Association; and a second panel represented by Robert Greenstein, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; and a third panel of other representatives of the American Dietetic Association and some local administrators of child nutrition programs and school administrators.

Our first panel is led by Ms. Gaye Lynn MacDonald, who is the Food/Nutrition Services Manager of Bellingham Public Schools in Bellingham, Washington. She is accompanied by others representing the American School Food Service Association, including Ms. Paula Cockwell, who is Manager of Nutrition Services at the Adams School, District 14 in Littleton, Colorado; Ms. Gail Kavanaugh, of the Vicksburg-Warren School District in Vicksburg, Mississippi; Ms. Teresa Nece, Food Service Director in Des Moines, Iowa; and Mr. Marshall Matz, who is counsel to the American School Food Service Association here in Washington, DC

Ms. MacDonald, we welcome you and your colleagues. I must tell you that I am going to have to leave to go over to an Appropriations Committee meeting of Republican Senators where we are organizing that committee for this Congress, and I am going to leave the committee under the tender mercies and astute chairman-

ship—temporarily—of my good friend from Iowa, who has agreed to be here while I go to this other meeting. I will return, but Senator Harkin is going to assume the duties of the chair to hear the testimony of this group, and I will return as soon as I can.

Thank you, Senator Harkin.

Senator HARKIN. Does that mean I will get some more money from the Appropriations Committee?

The CHAIRMAN. You never know.

[Laughter.]

Ms. KAVANAUGH. Senator, before you leave, I would like as one of your constituents from Mississippi to make one statement.

I totally agree with the statement that was submitted by ASFSA to the committee, and I would like to address one issue before you do have to leave us, and that is in the area of the program access under the reduced meals that we are talking about.

In my State of Mississippi, as other States across the Nation, many of our children and families who qualify for the reduce-price category are finding it very hard to pay for these meals and to come up with the 40 cents for lunch and the 40 cents for breakfast.

Increasingly, we are seeing food service administrators, food service managers, principals and teachers having to reach into their own——

The CHAIRMAN. If you want me to go and get some money for these programs, I need to go to the Appropriations Committee.

Ms. KAVANAUGH. Well, I would just like to say that it is an issue in Mississippi.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate your pointing that out, and we have talked about it before, and we will continue to listen to your concerns and suggestions for changing it.

Ms. KAVANAUGH. Thank you, Senator.

Senator HARKIN [presiding.] Thank you. We will proceed, then, Ms. MacDonald.

All of your statements will be made a part of the record in their entirety. We would appreciate it if you could summarize and hit the high points of your statement for us within—we will use the timer—why don't we take about 5 minutes per person, and if we need more, we can extend it, but let us try to keep to about 5 minutes.

Again, I join the chairman in welcoming all of you here, and Ms. MacDonald, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF GAYE LYNN MACDONALD, FOOD/NUTRITION SERVICES MANAGER, BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS, BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON, ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD ASSOCIATION

ACCOMPANIED BY PAULA COCKWELL, MANAGER OF NUTRITION SERVICES, ADAMS SCHOOL DISTRICT 14, LITTLETON, COLORADO;

GAIL KAVANAUGH, VICKSBURG-WARREN SCHOOL DISTRICT, VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI;
TERESA NECE, FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR, DES MOINES, IOWA; AND
MARSHALL MATZ, COUNSEL, AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. MACDONALD. Thank you very much, and I appreciate the Senator introducing the rest of the panel so that we can move on, and you already acknowledged that we have a few hundred of the best child nutrition administrators throughout the country with us along with some of the representatives of the food service industry.

I do want to begin by thanking you and the committee for again accommodating us in this very special tradition of holding this hearing during our Legislative Action Conference. We are delighted to be with you to provide some proposals to you for child nutrition.

The success and the security of a culture is often measured by how it nurtures its children, and there is a traditional Masai greeting, "Kaseria n ingera," that asks, "And how are the children?" If the children are well, the society is well, and the future is secure. Our statements will touch on how are the children in the United States.

We have hungry children in our rural communities and our urban cities. We also have the paradox, as you pointed out, of overweight and obesity. We believe that the school meal programs are part of the solution to both of these problems.

We also believe that this is a pivotal year for child nutrition through the reauthorizing of the programs that expire in 2003, and certainly these programs can improve health outcomes for children and further the goals of No Child Left Behind.

I will frame our proposals in three areas—program access, healthy children, and program integrity. As you heard from Ms. Kavanaugh, many children from families qualified in the reduced price category are not able to participate in the program because they cannot afford the fee of 40 cents for lunch or 30 cents for breakfast. While this may not seem like a lot of money to those of us in this room, it is a lot of money for families from households between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty line.

The reduced-price fee is a major barrier.

Senator HARKIN. If I might just interrupt, a lot of people forget that sometimes these families may have three or four kids in schools, so it is not just 40 cents a day—it could be up to maybe $2 a day.

Ms. MACDONALD. That is absolutely correct. Thank you for understanding that. That is a complex point, and it is very, very true.

We see that participation rates decline toward the end of the month in this particular category if they are participating at all.

As you know, in the WIC program, all those with family incomes below 185 percent of poverty and who otherwise qualify receive benefits without charge. We are proposing that this same income guideline be extended to the school nutrition programs. The reduced category is by far the smallest of the three tiers we currently have. Less than 10 percent of all the meals are served to children in the reduced category. Eliminating the reduced price category and feeding children eligible up to 185% is our primary priority.

Also, consistent with GAO analysis showing a gap between the cost to produce a school lunch, we would propose that Federal re-

imbursement rates for all meal categories be increased. The current reimbursement rate of $2.14 for a free lunch is simply inadequate. The rates for reduced and paid meals are not adequate, either, resulting in higher and higher prices being charged to the paying child.

It is also our recommendation that Congress extend the USDA commodity program to the school breakfast program. Currently, that program receives no USDA commodities. We recommend that USDA contribute 5 cents in commodities for each breakfast served in the program, which also serves American agricultural interests.

In terms of healthy children, the American School Food Service Association is deeply committed to the health of our Nation's children and continues to work collaboratively to further positive health outcomes.

We are about good nutrition, not just providing food, and as you know, we strongly supported amending the National School Lunch Act to require implementation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

According to the most recent USDA study on the subject, schools are making very significant progress in implementing those guidelines. The fat content of reimbursable meals is significantly down, and an increasing variety of fruits and vegetables is more readily available.

Food service program operators have modified food preparation methods, rewritten food product specifications to lower fat, sodium and sugars. Industry has responded to our requests, and familiar student favorites are part of meals meeting the dietary guidelines.

We further, however, recommend that an additional 10 cents per meal be provided to schools to further improve their nutritional quality. There are significant costs associated with meeting nutrition standards, such as continuing to increase the availability and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and to purchase products consistent with the dietary guidelines.

I want to note that in the past year, ASFSA has joined with the National Dairy Council on a research project to determine if changes in the way milk is marketed in schools can increase consumption of milk and the nutrition it provides. The results of the test are very positive, and we have provided the committee a copy of the report. There are again cost implications in implementing the recommendations of the study.

As you pointed out, Senator Harkin, in the "Call to Action to Prevent Overweight and Obesity," there are recommendations that schools adopt policies ensuring that all foods and beverages available across school campuses and at school events contribute toward eating patterns that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. We urge the Congress and the administration to implement the recommendation of Secretary Tommy Thompson and the Surgeon General with regard to foods available in school.

Another important point is nutrition education, and financial support for nutrition education continues to fade into oblivion. Not many years ago, nutrition education was a Federal entitlement program—a small program, but one that provided guaranteed funding. Nutrition education is now a discretionary program without any

funding. Students cannot learn to make healthy food choices without access to age-appropriate nutrition education.

At a minimum, we propose an entitlement of one-half cent per meal be allocated to States to develop State and local infrastructure to deliver that nutrition education.

In terms of program integrity, ASFSA members are public employees, and we take very seriously our responsibility to administer the programs consistent with the law. We are aware of concerns raised by reports indicating that there may be an excessive error rate in the number of students approved as eligible to receive free and reduced-price benefits in the school meal programs. We question the underlying assumptions and conclusions of these studies. It is a subject that we have discussed and continue to discuss almost weekly with USDA.

We believe that reasonable income verification requirements are necessary to guarantee that the program is administered consistent with the law. Eligible students should not be intimidated by excessive income verification requirements, and the greater the regulatory burden on the program, the greater the cost to produce a meal.

In an effort to respond appropriately and reasonably, ASFSA has made specific recommendations and continues to work with USDA, and we look forward to working with you to resolve these concerns.

Last but not least, let me comment on food safety. Maintaining high food safety standards in the Federal nutrition programs is critical——

Senator HARKIN. Excuse me. I am not going to cut you off, and I want to give you some more time, but could you go over your recommendations on the application process. It would be good for you to go over those. Would you do that for me?

Ms. MACDONALD. Did you want the specific proposals or just what we believe are reasonable here?

Senator HARKIN. Your recommendations.

Ms. MACDONALD. Yes. First, make school meal application approval valid for the full year. Second, expanded categorical eligibility. Currently if you qualify for Food Stamps or TANF, you automatically qualify for school meals. We are proposing to expand that so in States where the eligibility guidelines for Medicaid, SSI, and Children's Health Insurance Programs are compatible with the school meal eligibility, those programs would also allow children to be directly certified for meals.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you.

Ms. MACDONALD. Also, there are applications that are called "error-prone" that is when the application income falls within $100 of the guideline. Studies have found that those tend to have more errors in them than others.

We are proposing that we would verify 100 percent of those error-prone applications at the time that they come in to us to further ensure that eligible children only are brought into the program.

Thank you, for allowing us to clarify in more detail those proposals. Now I will go on to food safety.

Data shows that in the majority of schools nationwide, the food service staff demonstrate very high standards and performance in

the safe handling of food. We support public expectation that foods be handled using consistently monitored and reinforced food safety training and techniques for food service staff—as is found in most school programs across the country.

The United States has the most abundant and safest food supply in the world, and within the United States, school food service is one of the safest providers. Food safety is not an area in which to take any chances, particularly when we are talking about the Nation's children.

Therefore, ASFSA has outlined and we are submitting with this testimony a legislative proposal that ensures the development and implementation of food safety systems in all schools participating in the Federal school lunch program. The legislation includes funding for development of such a program, for training consistent with the program, for facility improvements necessary to meet the standards and development of a reasonable timeframe.

In conclusion, Senator Harkin, members of the committee, we present to you a very full agenda for the child nutrition programs. We do appreciate that we are meeting at a very difficult time for the United States and that Congress has many issues to address.

However, the health and well-being of our children is paramount to the security and the future development of our country. It is our responsibility as those who work in child nutrition programs to share our views on what is needed to assure that healthful meals and nutrition education are available to all children.

We look forward to working with the committee and with the Congress on the 2003 child nutrition reauthorization legislation. We would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have, and we do thank you all for your continuing support of child nutrition.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. MacDonald can be found in the appendix on page 56.]

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Ms. MacDonald, and thank you for your great leadership and all of you from the American School Food Service Association.

I will open it with questions, and we will take 5 minutes each as we go down the line on questioning.

I want to get one thing clear for the record, Ms. MacDonald. Is your association advocating the two-tier system? I know you talked about program integrity, a nd I am not certain that——

Ms. MACDONALD. Yes, we are.

Senator HARKIN. Oh, you are.

Ms. MACDONALD. Yes, we are. Our primary priority to take those students currently in the reduced category and move them into free.

Senator HARKIN. OK. I just wanted to make that very clear for the record.

Ms. MACDONALD. Thank you.

Senator HARKIN. I concur with you on that, and I hope we can move ahead in that direction this year to make this a two-tier system. In one of our panels coming up, Mr. Greenstein is going to be talking about some of the errors that were made in some of the data collection, and that will be good for the record.

Ms. MACDONALD. I believe he is, yes.

Senator HARKIN. Let me wade into an area that I mentioned in my opening comment. As I said, you all have done a great job helping our kids meet the dietary guidelines under really tough circumstances. As I said, these kids are inundated every day with billions of dollars of advertising every year for unhealthy foods, yet you are trying to get them to eat foods that are good for them and that meet the dietary guidelines.

Now, this is not in your purview, but it is within ours, I believe, and that is to ask the USDA to come up with a new set of guidelines based upon a new kind of food pyramid. I referred to the article in Scientific American.

It is clear—abundantly clear now—that the original food pyramid is just wrong, and it needs to be changed. I am looking for any advice and suggestions that you all might have in that regard and how you all think it might be changed to better reflect what we know now in terms of childhood development, what is healthy, what is not, what is good for growth. We know a lot more now than we did 20 years ago.

Ms. MACDONALD. Well, we would hope that we could be part of the discussion with USDA, and as you know, our concern is to advance good nutrition for all children, and we do believe, as you stated, that school meals can be part of the solution. We are probably one of the only programs or areas in the country that still models age-appropriate serving size, so we that is something that we continue to promote.

We also, though, recognize that the issue of foods available in schools is not limited to what is available in the cafeteria, that it does extend to the total school environment as well. I am particularly pleased about your pilots, the fresh fruits and vegetables pilot——

Senator HARKIN. I want to ask you about that.

Ms. MACDONALD [continuing]. If I may, I would like to defer to Ms. Nece who, as a food service director in Des Moines, is actually participating in the pilot.

Senator HARKIN. As a preface, Ms. Nece—and I welcome you here again—but just as a preface, I put $6 million in the Farm bill last year to do a pilot program. I had this theory that I wanted to test. I tried to get rid of vending machines before, and I was not very successful, so I wanted to try a new theory, and that is if fruits and vegetables were available to kids during the day, free—not just in the lunch room, but free, during the day—my theory was that kids would eat them, and perhaps some of their consumption of some of this other stuff might go down.

Four States were involved—Iowa, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio, and one Indian tribe in New Mexico—100 schools. That is the basis of it, and I am just wondering what you have heard about it.

Ms. NECE. I am actually implementing the fruit and vegetable pilot in three schools in Des Moines, Iowa. We have the program in three buildings that are K–12, so it is an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. The program is awesome. It has been very well-received by our student body, our administration, and our teachers.

The students consume huge volumes of fresh fruits and vegetables, and that is the most exciting thing that you can see happen on a daily basis when you walk into a high school cafeteria during a block schedule break, and the cafeteria is abuzz with students coming in for a fruit or vegetable break.

The building staff tell me that the vending machines have actually seen less volume of usage during those morning break periods than previously. We have not seen any negative impact on school meals participation; we have actually seen students come down and have lunch with us who may not have previously set foot in that particular high school cafeteria.

In the middle school, we are actually doing classroom distribution. We send a basket, which is a very large basket, to each and every classroom each day, filled with at least three choices of fresh fruits, vegetables, or dried fruits, and those baskets are empty at the end of the day. If there is something that is a very student-popular favorite such as a pineapple item, they will go from room to room to find that pineapple.

That is probably the testimony of how successful this is, from building administration, from teachers, and most important, from the students themselves. We have had children try things that they have never, ever tasted in their entire lives.

Senator HARKIN. We have Mr. Dennis Heiman here, the principal of Muscatine High School, and he is going to talk specifically about one high school in Muscatine and what they have done with that. I thank you for that. Thank you for administering this program.

We have heard the same kinds of results from other States; Senator Stabenow earlier from Michigan, the same thing.

Senator Conrad.

Senator CONRAD. Thank you, Senator Harkin, and thank you to our panelists for being here today.

In just a few minutes, I will have to leave to give a speech to the State Treasurers from around the country about the budget outlook for our Nation. All of these issues with the school lunch and breakfast programs are linked with the budget. We talk out of context too much of the time in Congress. We talk in the Defense Committee about defense; we talk in the Agriculture Committee about nutrition and aid to our farmers; and we talk in the Environment Committee about what we can do to clean up our air and water. However, there are very few opportunities to bring all of the issues together. That is the responsibility of the Budget Committee of which I am a member.

I can tell you that the child nutrition programs are going to be dramatically impacted by decisions made in the budget. Already, we are in record deficit. The deficits that we are currently running are the largest ever. We now see that we will be running budget deficits, very large deficits, the entire rest of this decade. On top of that, we will be taking all of the Social Security surplus funds generated over the next decade—every last dime—and using it to fund tax cuts and for other expenditures.

We are now in a circumstance in which the President is recommending additional tax cuts eventhough we all know the baby boom generation is about to retire and put unprecedented demands on the Federal Government for spending on programs like Social

Security and Medicare. In addition, he is recommending making permanant the previously enacted tax cuts and an additional round of tax cuts as a part of what he calls a "growth package." On top of that, the President also recommends a whole new savings plan that will result in enormous cost to the Federal Treasury in the second five years of that plan. All of these proposals will add to deficits that—according to the President's own analysis will spin out of control in the next decade when the baby boomers retire.

I say this because all of this involves choices. Ms. MacDonald, you are asking for an increase of spending on the school breakfast and school lunch programs by a billion dollars each year. Those billion dollars would have to be borrowed. As I have indicated, all the Social Security surplus is already being spent for other purposes, so that fund cannot be used anymore.

This funding request raises the question—do you add to the deficit, do you raise taxes, or do you cut someplace else for this priority? We are going to have to wrestle with this question. I am not going to ask you, Ms. MacDonald, because you do not have responsibility for putting together the budget. Although, in a way, you do have that responsibility, because you are part of the American public, and the American public ultimately has to decide what makes sense.

Personally I believe we are on a disastrous course as a country, one that does not add up and one that is going to lead to very, very serious—very, very serious—choices down the road for a future Congress and a future President.

I will ask you one question, Ms. MacDonald. What is the evidence that parents are not able to meet the requirement for as little as 40 cents a meal for lunch? What tells you that they are having trouble meeting that? It seems like a very modest amount of money.

Ms. MACDONALD. They telephone us, and they say, "You know, we have these charge notices home that our child owes $6. I do not understand."

"Well, you have to pay 40 cents."

"I cannot pay 40 cents."

They cry. I have had grandparents call me who are raising their grandchildren. They cannot meet the 40 cents.

It is very, very difficult. As you heard from our witness from Mississippi, who has a poignant story that I will let her tell you, our staff are paying money out of their pockets so that these children can eat.

Ms. KAVANAUGH. Several years ago, Senator, I had a young mother come to my office, and she needed some help with a charge notice that she had gotten. She did not quite understand why she owed the money. As we reviewed the paperwork on this particular family, her eligibility had been changed to reduced price. She had been free in prior years, but she had secured a job and was working, and in this particular year, she was very good at her job and got a raise at her job. This automatically threw her into the reduced category where she lost any other benefits that she was getting including the free benefit.

At that time, she was actually in worse condition because she had worked, because she was trying to provide for her family. She

requested a hearing, and we provided an official hearing. We did have her bring in documentation of income, and we looked at all that. It was conclusive that we were correct in determining that she would fall into the reduced category.

As she left the hearing, she began to cry, and she said, "I do not know what I am going to do." Excuse me if I get emotional, but it was an emotional situation. My superintendent was very emotional over it.

As she left, I said, "We will find a way to take care of this child." In the end, I talked with my superintendent, and I said, "I will find an organization." Well, I went to the "organization of Gail Kavanaugh," and I went back to my office and wrote out a check for the rest of the year for the child's meals. He was taken care of, but we increasingly see this especially with our staffers out in the lunch room—and these are low-paid positions anyway—that they are not going to let a child go hungry. They will pay it out of their own pocket.

Increasingly, we are seeing this. We see principals on a daily basis who come to school with money in their pockets to give out. Now, we are already talking about people who work for education who, as you know, are some of the lowest-paid positions.

Yes, we are not asking for anything particularly for ourselves; we are asking to help our working poor families.

Senator CONRAD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Kent.

Senator Lincoln.

Senator LINCOLN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What an incredibly important series of hearings that we are having here today on the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, specifically, the school lunch and breakfast program.

I have to say that I am sure I am not the only Senator, but I am one of the few Senators who carries my shopping list in my pocket around here, and with twin boys who are in first grade now, and myself making somewhat regular visits to the lunchroom in the public schools that we attend, it is a critical issue for this Nation. If we truly, truly, truly believe that our children are our future, it must mean that everyone's children are our future.

What a basic concept of providing a nutritionally sound meal to those who are not going to get it anywhere else. It is amazing.

I have certainly been a long-time supporter of the programs, and I certainly appreciate the strong commitment to child nutrition that you on the panel as well as our chairman and our ranking member have demonstrated on these issues.

Many people in this great country—and we realize how blessed we are—but they do not realize that hunger remains a very serious problem in the United States. Unfortunately, that is very true for my home State of Arkansas. We are unbelievably bountiful in our great State, but 2 years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program issued a report that ranked Arkansas as one of the bottom five States for food security and hunger. When we took that to our farm community, they were absolutely aghast. They did not have any idea that in all of what they produced our great State, we had a broad number of children across our State who were suffering from hunger.

In spite of the incredible and sizable agricultural sector we have in Arkansas, almost 5 percent of households in Arkansas do not always have access to adequate food. I have been extremely involved with foodbanks and other means of getting food into our households, but without a doubt, in dealing with the children, the breakfast and school lunch programs are the most critical in providing these children the ability to meet their potential.

I sent two little boys off to school today with a good breakfast, and I am blessed to be able to do that. To think of the mothers, particularly the single mothers, who find themselves in the situation where they cannot provide that incredible need that those children have before they go to school, and then to think that as they go to work, because of the meager income that they are making, they are all of a sudden making their children ineligible for a program that they know is absolutely vital to their well-being.

The children's nutrition programs in our schools are key to eliminating hunger and ensuring the health and well-being of our young people. We all know that nutrition is an important determinant of health and well-being. We can also point to teacher testimonials and academic studies that demonstrate the further fact that children who eat a well-balanced meal, particularly a morning breakfast, perform better in the classroom. It is not rocket science. It is just basics. It is no great leap, I do not think, to suggest that nutrition programs contribute to long-term academic success, which pays great dividends in each student's future, not to mention our great Nation and not to mention health care costs and needs.

It is an unbelievable difference that we have been able to see when we have been able to provide pediatric dentistry so that children can actually eat to get the nutrition they need.

I just applaud all of you for being here and for your willingness to work with us in providing what is one of the most important components of a safety net that many of our disadvantaged families, who are working desperately to provide for their children, rely on to see them through the very difficult times.

Mr. Chairman, particularly in a time of economic recession, it is critical that we look for ways to strengthen and broaden that safety net. You all are the ones responsible not only for making this program efficient, making it available, making it nutritious, but certainly working with us to meet all the different demands that we find ourselves in economically. To that, I just want to say how much I appreciate what you do.

Again, having watched both my parents being involved in my education and watching in the public schools where I grew up the involvement of particularly our schools in a very low-income area in the Mississippi Delta, and now to see in my own experience with my own family the needs that the schools are providing for with our children, it is just remarkable, and I hope we can continue to work with you to make sure that that happens.

The Healthy Foods Program—again, exposure is so important. Watching my children as I am trying to expose them to good and healthy foods, encouraging them just to try a few things, and after about three or four meals realizing that they actually like something, is great.

I want to ask Ms. Nece if you see in that fresh fruits program a difference between the older children and the younger children in terms of exposure, particularly as you introduce that program to older children who may or may not have been exposed at an earlier age. Do you see a difference there?

Ms. NECE. We see a difference in each of the areas, and part of the difference is that in our school meal programs, we may not necessarily serve a whole piece of fruit in the same way as Senator Harkin's orange in the appearance of what it really is. One thing we are doing in this pilot is to serve an entire piece of fruit.

I remember being in an elementary school classroom one morning where we served a whole fresh pear, and the students are saying, "This is a brand new fruit." Then, we went down and got canned pears so they could see that it was the same fruit in a different form.

It is that nutrition education piece that has been able to be linked with not only offering a variety at the high school level, but the most exciting thing is to see them actually choosing fresh fruits and vegetables over going to the vending machine for any other product that is in that machine. That is not 100 percent, and we would never expect 100 percent at this point in time in our environment, but to get to the participation where students are making that obvious selection.

Senator LINCOLN. Well, variety is so important. There is no doubt about that. Being able to provide that variety is critical for them to make those choices; there is no doubt. Also, the education is critical, so that they do know that that fresh pear is the same or relatively close to what they can also get in the lunch room.

It is so interesting when your children come home from school and you ask them, "What did you have in the lunch room today?" and they talk about, "Well, it would have been great if you had given me 50 cents before I left so I could have a cookie," but it is great to have the fresh fruits and the other things that are available to them. That is really wonderful.

Well, again, Mr. Chairman, we have a great task ahead of us and that is to make sure—not just to say that we are going to nip and tuck and do whatever it takes—that is what we have to commit ourselves to doing in this country, and we should begin right here in the Agriculture Committee, and that is making the commitment that we are going to provide the nutritional needs that the future workers and the future legislators of this great country are going to get at a time when they need it most. I certainly think we can find the means the wherewithal to be able to do it. You all do it every day, and there is no reason we cannot here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Lincoln.

Senator Coleman.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I want to join in the thoughts of the distinguished Senator from Arkansas and the others who have spoken. This should not be a partisan issue. In 1999, the Minnesota legislature funded a program initiated by an Independent Governor, a Republican House, and a Democratic Senate, called Fast Break to Learning. That program provide school breakfast at no charge to all stu-

dents at select elementary schools, setting up a study to see what the results would be. The results are obvious. This is not rocket science. This is common sense, Mr. Chairman.

The first year results of the Minnesota study showed improved scores in standardized reading and math tests at Fast Break to Learning Schools compared to a control group of schools. Earlier studies at the University of Minnesota have also shown that you have decreased discipline referrals with kids who eat school breakfast. It is tough for kids to learn if they have empty stomachs. That is simply a reality.

I support the healthy choices concept. There is a parental role in there somewhere. My 13-year-old daughter would take the carrots, and my 16-year-old son would take the cookie. Having those choices is important.

My distinguished colleague from North Dakota raised the issue of budget, and that is a reality. I was Mayor of the capital city of St. Paul, elected in 1993 during times of economic recession, and we were faced with some difficult, tough times, gang summits, folks out of work, and we made choices. Folks at my rec centers came to me and said, "Mayor, we have to put more money into those rec programs because kids are on the streets." Folks at my libraries said, "Mayor, we have to get more money into these libraries because kids need to read." My police and fire people said, "We have to get more money into public safety." In St. Paul, if we did not plow the streets when it snowed, I was in big trouble. We had all of that, and I will tell you that the path we took is that we kept a lid on taxes, and we enforced fiscal discipline, and in the end, I had more money in my libraries when I was done and more money in the rec centers and 18,000 new jobs and $3 billion in new investment.

We are all united on the purpose here, which is to make sure that kids can eat, that moms and dads have good jobs. The debate is simply how you get there, how do you generate economic growth.

The reality that we face now is that all levels of government are facing very difficult times, and it is not just at the Federal level—it is at the State level. My State has an over $400 billion deficit. I worry, Mr. Chairman, about this stuff that we have to do. We have to make the commitment.

I would ask the question—one of the keys to my success—again, at the very local level, but you never forget where you came from, and you bring that to the table—we worked very closely with folks on the private side, particularly at a time when government was really struggling. We did a number of creative programs with the private side. Coca-Cola has a "Step With It" program, which is exercise and a whole range of other things. They have resources. They have resources, and we are struggling for resources, and I know there are choices to be made. Again, business is facing some tough times. We are in economic recess.

I would raise the question as to the prospect of public-private partnership, what role is it playing, how effective is it, and are there things that we can do to promote that to make it easier for you.

Ms. MACDONALD. We are working on some public-private partnerships particularly in the area of wellness and nutrition education. I am pleased that you raise that question.

It is also not just the wellness and physical activity that we are working with them on but also nutrition education materials. I believe that in our proposal, I spoke about how we have materials available, but States and local jurisdictions do not have an infrastructure to deliver that nutrition education and those materials. We are hoping that the Congress will again join us in our public-private partnership and with you, see that we can get there.

As a commitment to working with us, we have with us at our conference 160 members of industry. Our industry partners are key to the success of these programs. They understand clearly the link between healthy children and the effectiveness of their business. They would much rather be putting their money into research and development, production and equipment, than paying high health care costs for their employees, or substitutes when there is lost time when a parent has to go and pick up a sick child at school, or having to put money into remedial reading programs for their workers.

We are actively engaged in those partnerships and welcome your cooperation as well.

Senator COLEMAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Coleman.

Senator Miller.

Senator MILLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I have no questions of this panel.

I am sorry I am late. I have been listening to some of it, though, on the audio down in my office. I do not have any questions of this panel. I just want to say thank you for being here, thank you for what you do on a daily basis. I have grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the public schools of Georgia, and what you and your colleagues do around this country is very much appreciated.

Thank you.

Ms. MACDONALD. Thank you.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Miller.

I will recognize the other Senators who have just shown up in a second, but I wanted to ask one followup question.

I mentioned the Scientific American article. Most of the nutritionists, sciences, doctors, and health care folks I have spoken with, at the bottom of this new pyramid, at the very base of this, is "daily exercise and weight control." As I mentioned earlier, 80 percent of our elementary school kids in America do not even get 1 hour of P.E. every week.

Now, you might say to yourself, "Well, that is not my department." I am wondering—I like to think about how we put things together and make a seamless system, and I am wondering if there might not be some connectivity between the school lunch and school breakfast programs and exercise.

I am wondering if we might partner somehow with schools in doing this. Again, it has to be a carrot approach—I mean, it has to be something where we provide a benefit, more to a school if in fact they can show that they have an exercise program for their

kids on a weekly basis and that they have a program for weight control and for exercise.

I am just wondering if this is something that you have ever thought about or would you consider joining somehow in some demonstration programs of that nature.

Ms. MACDONALD. I am sure that you are aware that in October, there was a Healthy School Summit here in Washington, DC, chaired by the former Surgeon General.

Senator HARKIN. Very much so.

Ms. MACDONALD. At that conference, we brought together people from every State who are interested in physical activity, the school environment, and school meals. Teams were formed that went back to every State. They are currently working on action plans that do encompass, as you suggested, all the components of a healthy, whole child.

We are working on that, and we would be very interested in any further discussions that you might want to engage in.

Senator HARKIN. I appreciate it. We ought to look at that.

Senator Chambliss.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Senator Harkin.

I do not have any questions for this panel other than just a couple of comments. First of all, I do have a statement for the record that I will insert. I just want to thank you folks for the great work you do and for your lobbying efforts. I have heard from every school nutritionist in the State of Georgia over the last couple of weeks, and that is always good, because we like to hear from you. In our school system our nutritionists all the way down to the cafeteria workers are very important folks. My wife just retired after 30 years of teaching in an elementary classroom, and my daughter is a fourth-grade teacher, so they come home every night and remind me of how important nutrition is to their students.

I thank you for the great work that you do, and we look forward to moving through this process and reauthorizing this very important bill.

As Senator Miller knows two predecessors of ours, Senator Russell and Senator Talmadge, were primary motivators behind the School Lunch Program, and he and I are both very proud of that. We want to make sure that this program is strong and viable into the future. Thank you for the great work that you do.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Senator Chambliss.

I now call on our former distinguished chairman of the committee, Senator Leahy.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Senator Harkin.

I will put a full statement in the record.

As I look around, I see a lot of friends in this room. I have worked on nutrition matters literally since the day I came here when, as many of you know, back in the eighties, when I was chairman of the committee, we put back the original name of the committee so it became the "Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee." I have been pleased with that, and I would hope that we are able to reauthorize the program.

I will be submitting a letter cosigned by a number of Republican and Democratic Senators hoping that there will be additional money in the budget for that. As Senator Chambliss has said, we

do tend to hear from back home—I know I do—almost every week when I am back in Vermont, somebody will stop me in the grocery store or on the street or elsewhere to talk about the school lunch program.

Ms. MacDonald, you mentioned that reimbursement rates have not kept pace with inflation, especially because of the dietary guidelines. What kinds of changes would we get if reimbursement rates were raised specifically for the purpose of improving the nutritional quality of meals, something that Senator Harkin has raised a number of times—and before you answer, just so you understand my concern—you go to some school lunch programs, and they are really good, attractive, nutritional. Others, you have your choice between the gray glop or the green glop. I realize it is different where you are. Sometimes it is regional. Sometimes it is regional things—a Western meal might not be good for an Easterner, or a Southern meal might not be good for a Northerner, and back and forth. You have to improve the nutritional quality of the meals, but then you have to make them appealing to the kids. Otherwise, of course, they are going to run out—if they have any loose change or any money at all in their pockets, they are going to go somewhere else and get something that is not nutritional, and we lose an opportunity, one, to teach them good nutrition and set those habits, but also to make them healthier and, as every teacher will tell you, they are going to learn better.

What kinds of changes would we see if reimbursement rates were raised?

Ms. MACDONALD. Those of us who administer the programs are committed to improving that nutritional quality of the meal. There are significant costs submitted in our statement, to doing so in terms of providing more variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and purchasing products that meet the dietary guidelines in their specifications.

As you so correctly pointed out, there is a vast difference in programs across the country in terms of the support and the infrastructure that they have and the likes and dislikes of the students. You really need to give the directors the flexibility to write their specifications for purchasing what is appealing to the kids in that area.

We all want to add more fresh fruits and vegetables, and with the transportation costs and availability you would see there is no argument among any of us in promoting that.

Senator LEAHY. I agree with that. I started a Farm to Family Program for farmers' markets to be able to use everything from WIC coupons to foodstamps. I go to a local farmers' market almost every Saturday morning back in Vermont. I love going there. I see everybody I have known from days when I was in grade school right on up—people I knew from the time I was able to walk. I have seen in this farmers' market and many others around our State a tremendous improvement—one, in the number of people who can actually sell their products there—they have a market—and people are now buying nutritional things. We do not grow oranges in Vermont, but there is a lot less of the potato chips and a lot more of the carrots and the beans and the fresh corn, peas,

and so on. There are things that we can do, and it can be a win-win situation.

Ms. MACDONALD. I attended the Farm to School Conference, and it is a program that is wonderful. Many of our schools are already participating in that. It is an area that more and more of our members are excited about and partnering. Thank you so much for your leadership on that issue.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you. Mr. Matz has actually seen some of those with me.

I apologize, Mr. Chairman. We have Secretary Ridge and Attorney General Ashcroft and Director Muller at the Judiciary Committee, and I will have to go back.

Thank you.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you. Tell them that homeland security depends on healthy kids, too.

Senator LEAHY. There you go.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you all very much for being here. We will now move to our second panel. Again, through you, thanks to all the American School Food Service people all over the country.

Ms. MACDONALD. I will. Thank you so much.

Senator HARKIN. Mr. Greenstein, welcome back to the committee. You are no stranger here; every time that we have had in my memory any hearing dealing with food and nutrition or school lunches, school breakfasts, the WIC program, you have been our expert witness, whether it has been under Republicans or Democrats—again, another indication that this is truly a bipartisan issue.

I thank you again for being here from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Thank you for a lifetime of you work examining and analyzing our food programs of a broad variety, not just school but WIC, foodstamps, and everything else.

Without objection, your full statement will be made a part of the record in its entirety, and again, you know the drill here—if you could summarize and hit the high points, we would sure appreciate it.

Welcome again.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT GREENSTEIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Thank you very much, Senator and Mr. Chairman.

My testimony this morning focuses primarily on one issue, and that is the need to reduce participation in the free and reduced-price school meals by ineligible children in a way that does not cause eligible children, eligible needy children, to lose benefits.

My written testimony covers one other issue that I will just mention but not go into orally, and that is the importance of maintaining in the WIC program the competitive bidding requirement for the purchase of infant formula. This was initiated under President Reagan. It has been one of the most effective cost containment mechanisms in any health-related program. Without it, Congress would either have to appropriate $1.5 billion more in WIC each year to serve the same number of women and children or remove

25 percent of the people on the program from it. It is very important to maintain that.

One of the most difficult issues you will face in the reauthorization this year involves this question of whether there is ineligible participation in the free and reduced-price meal program and if so, what to do about it. There are three questions that stand out: What do we know about the nature of the problem? What have been the results of efforts tried or tested in the past to reduce the participation who may be eligible, and how have those efforts affected eligible children? Third, what do we do?

One possible response is to expand the verification of free and reduced-price meal applications. Currently, school districts are required to take a sample of 3 percent of the approved free and reduced-price applications, send parents a notice to verify the income reported, and if there is no response, to terminate the children.

We have information on verification from three sources—nationally representative demonstration projects conducted in the eighties, current pilots that USDA is running, and data on the verification procedures now in use in the program.

Unfortunately, the one most striking finding that emerges is that attempts to use verification have run into a major problem. Large percentages of the families sent notices to provide pay stubs to document their income have not responded, and the children in the families have been terminated.

Specifically, one of every three children selected for verification under the existing system and the current pilot project is terminated due to non-response. What makes those figures really disturbing is the data suggest that a very large share of the children who are terminated due to non-response are actually eligible. This was a major focus of the demonstration projects of the eighties and of a separate, major study of the verification process. In the study, 81 percent of the children who did not respond and were terminated were found to be eligible for either free or reduced-price meal. In the pilots, 86 percent of those who were terminated because they did not respond were found to be eligible.

Now, these data are from the eighties. There are not currently more recent data, but the system has not really changed that much since then, and while the percentage of those terminated for non-response who are actually eligible may be somewhat lower today, it almost certainly is still very high.

This raises serious concern about proposals to substantially expand verification until we learn how to change the verification process to bring non-response rates among eligible families down. In fact it was as a result of the very findings that I have just cited that the Reagan Administration rejected options in the 1980's for widescale verification and instead adopted the current system of a sample of 3 percent of the approved applications being verified.

The studies from the 1980's found many non-responding parents when they were followed up with had no recollection of getting a notice telling them to provide verification; some had limited literacy and did not understand the notice; some were non-English-speaking.

We have a very different situation here than in, say, foodstamps or Medicaid or welfare, where if you apply for a benefit, you end

up meeting with a caseworker who sits across the desk and tells you what is provided—there is really no personal contact here. There is a notice sent, and in most cases, if there is not a response, there is no followup phone call. There may also be a stigma issue; some parents may not want to provide income stubs to their children's schools.

Let me give you just a couple more figures about what makes this so difficult to figure out how to proceed. Let us suppose that Congress were to require that all free and reduced-price meal applications be verified. Let us suppose that the non-response rate, now one out of every three, or 33 percent, were lowered to 25 percent, and let us suppose that only 40 percent of the non-responders were really eligible instead of the 80 percent found in the earlier studies. These are optimistic assumptions that I am making. Under these optimistic assumptions, more than one million eligible low-income children would lose benefits. Under some less optimistic assumptions, 2 million would.

Compounding the problem is that eligibility for areas to participate in the summer food program, for poor schools to get more ample reimbursements in the school breakfast program, and for part of the reimbursement structure in the child care food program are all tied to the percentages of meals that are served free or at reduced price, which means that if we ended up instituting a system that lost lots of eligible kids, we would end up disqualifying, for example, lots of summer feeding sites from being allowed to continue in the summer feeding program.

We badly need, I believe, a new round of rigorous demonstration projects to get to the goal that everybody on a bipartisan basis wants to get to. To the degree that there are ineligible kids in the program, we want to address it, but we want to do it without deterring the eligible kids.

Now, what is the extent of the problem? Unfortunately, we do not know that much about this. When we hear what the error rate is in foodstamps or welfare or whatever, that comes from the States taking a sample of the participants and doing an extensive audit, and they determine an error rate. There are no comparable data available now on the school lunch program.

The Food and Nutrition Service at USDA, facing these data limitations, has tried to do some other comparisons. They did one comparison using Census data that has now made its way into the media but is highly problematic. In this, FNS compared the number of children certified for free school meals in the 1998–1999 school year, those certified by October 31, 1998, to the number of children with incomes below the income limits for the free meals in calendar year 1999.

When they conducted this comparison, they found significantly more kids certified for free meals than were below the free meal income limit in the following calendar year, but there are two problems here. The first is that when FNS also did the same comparison but instead of looking just at free meal certifications and kids below the free meal income limit, they looked at free and reduced certifications combined, compared to kids below either the free or the reduced-income limit. There, the numbers closely matched.

The second problem is more fundamental, and that is there is an inherent problem with comparing the number of kids certified for free and reduced-price meals in the fall of 1998 to incomes for calendar year 1999. Unemployment fell in 1999. We know that poverty dropped significantly. More important, eligibility for this program is based on monthly income, not annual income.

Now, Senators may recall that several years ago, we had this issue in the WIC program. FNS used the same set of Census data, and it seemed to show that the number of infants in WIC exceeded 100 percent of the number eligible. FNS was concerned that there were problems with this kind of a comparison, so it commissioned the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences to get experts to look into this, and the National Research Council reported in 2001 that using Census data on annual incomes to estimate the number of people eligible for WIC underestimated the eligible pool. The National Research Council developed a more accurate estimate, and when it did, the number of infants in the program fell below the number eligible. No longer was there any discrepancy.

The same issues apply to school lunch in that it has the same rules for measuring income as WIC. It is monthly income, not annual income. In the past week, data have become available from the Census Survey that uses monthly income to compare the number of kids eligible for the meals in the very months in which the certifications are done, and much of the overage disappears when that is done.

The bottom line is we do not have good data on the proportion of meal approvals that are erroneous. We know enough to know there is a significant issue here. It also is probably much less than these figures that are sometimes cited in the media based on the apples and oranges comparison of 2 months in the fall of 1 year to the next calendar year.

Adding to the complexity of this problem is the fact that there are really two types of so-called errors here. One kind, which we really do need to be concerned about, is where the parent misreports the income or the school mishandles the application. The other kind of error is where the parent reported the income accurately, the school dealt with it accurately, the student was certified accurately in August/September, the beginning of the school year, and during the course of the year, the parents were able to increase their earnings. Their income subsequently during the year may have moved from the free meal range to the reduced-price meal range. Technically, that is an error; that is part of the error rate.

Most other major means-tested benefit programs are now moving to make children eligible for a 12-month period. The reason for this is most of the programs that have welfare office bureaucracies have found that you just cannot track the incomes of the low-income population from month to month. A lot of these people have low-wage jobs that do not have paid sick leave, so their hours of paid work fluctuate. The employer may want a different number of hours of work from them at different times. Child care arrangements can vary and can affect work hours.

In the Medicaid program and the SCHIP program, States increasingly certify children based on their income at the time of application, and they are then eligible for 12 months, and at the end of the year, you check again.

In foodstamps, this committee last year moved essentially to do the same thing for a 6-month period. The States can now determine your income for foodstamps, and your benefit is fixed for 6 months.

Effectively, that is how the school lunch program works, too, but technically, in the Code of Federal Regulations, there is a regulation that says you are supposed to change the eligibility every month, whenever the incomes rise or fall above the limits. I asked the Agriculture Department a couple of weeks ago, Have you ever enforced that rule in the history of the program? They said, No, we cannot enforce it; schools cannot administer it. If the welfare agencies cannot do it in foodstamps and Medicaid, the schools cannot do it. That is another part of the error rate.

What do we do? Let me finish quickly. The policy goal is that we want the certifications to be as accurate as possible at the start of the school year without losing eligible, needy children, and once children are certified, they should be good for the year.

Now, how to achieve that goal? The problem is that no one—not myself, not the Agriculture Department, not the schools at this point—no one really knows exactly what is the right mix of procedures to get ineligible kids out without losing lots of eligible kids. As I have noted, the things done in the past have lost lots of eligible kids.

That is why we really need some major demonstration projects, which I believe will identify how to do that, and then we can institute that.

Having said that there are four things we can do now. No. 1, schools currently may directly certify for free meals children getting foodstamps or TANF cash assistance. That makes sense. TANF and foodstamps do pretty intensive verification. USDA studies have found extremely low error rates among the kids who are directly certified, but not everyplace does it. It would make sense to require direct certification be used everywhere except where it is administratively infeasible for schools to do. The President's budget includes that recommendation, and it is a very sound recommendation. In addition, it would make sense to give States the option to use direct certification from Medicaid and SCHIP in those States where the Medicaid or the SCHIP income limits are comparable to the free and reduced-price school meal income limits. Medicaid does verification. Let us piggyback on what other agencies already do. We know those kids' incomes from the verification, and if we go that route, we can reduce error rates without deterring eligible children.

No. 2, I would recommend—and the School Food Service Association has a well-intensifying the verification of applications where the incomes are modestly below the income limits. There is a GAO study from the 1980's that found that when you target verification on the applications just below the income limits, you get more bang for the buck, and you find larger numbers of ineligibles, for reasons such as some families apparently mistakenly multiply their weekly

wages by 4 to get monthly income, and you really should multiply by 4.3. If you verify and multiply by 4.3, they move from the free to the reduced category.

Third, we badly need to reform the verification procedures to reduce non-response rates among eligible families. My testimony has some specific suggestions. Do we know for sure that these things will work? No. We need to try them, we need to test them.

Finally, children who are certified should remain eligible for the school year.

I will just close by saying that the principle that underlies all of this is the Hippocratic Oath: Do no harm. No one would want to see efforts to reduce erroneous certifications result in large numbers of needy eligible children losing benefits with adverse consequences for their nutrition, their health, and their educational attainment.

Thank you.

[Theprepared statement of Mr. Greenstein can be found in the appendix on page 66.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Greenstein. You have offered some very interesting observations, and we appreciate your thoughtful contribution to the hearing that we are having today. I have appreciated your advice and counsel over the years as we have gone through various appropriations bills and authorization efforts in this Agriculture Committee, too.

Let me ask you how you would configure a demonstration project. You have talked about that we need massive demonstration projects—or some adjective——

Mr. GREENSTEIN. I would not say "massive," no.

The CHAIRMAN. What was it? It was a lot.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Significant.

The CHAIRMAN. Significant.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Rigorous, carefully evaluated.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. How much would they cost? I wonder how big you are talking about, and what kind of demonstration project would you construct to try to find a better way of handling the certification issue?

Mr. GREENSTEIN. They do not necessarily need to be that big. What they really need to be is nationally representative. The current pilots that FNS is running in this area are not nationally representative. For example, the pilot where they are testing expanded verification does not have a single school in a major-size city in it. The reason for that is that those pilots were limited to volunteer schools. You do have an issue where, if you are testing improved methods of verification and you do find some ineligible kids and you do weed them out, the school gets less funding, and therefore, some schools may not want to volunteer to be in the pilot.

What you have to do is—and this is not really a cost; this means you lose a savings in the pilot—you have to work out a system that holds the schools harmless from losing money during the demonstration. If you say to schools, "Coming into the demonstration means you are going to lose Federal money," not surprisingly, we are not going to get a good cross-section of schools.

The main cost of the demo tends to be for the evaluation contractor. Now, I do not know exactly what such a set of demos would

cost. Is it $2 or $3 million, is it $7 or $8 or $9 or $10 million, over a few years—I do not know. I suspect it is in that range.

Let me say, Mr. Chairman, that the series of things that I have proposed here, I view—and if they are not, they could be made to be—as in the short run being roughly neutral in cost. From these demos, there ought to emerge treatments that, once instituted, could yield some not insignificant savings from reducing ineligible participation that you could plow back into the child nutrition programs.

The difficulty is that at the present time, we do not know how to do the things that would get the sizable savings on reducing ineligible participation without losing lots of eligible kids. In fact, some of the proposals that one could look at now, you could get a big savings figure for it, and the majority of the savings would be losing eligible kids.

What I am trying to propose here are some things that get us in a process through some immediate improvements and some demonstrations that lead policymakers to have the information they need to then take a second set of more substantial steps.

The CHAIRMAN. One thing you mentioned in your suggestion list was schools contacting parents who turn in questionable information about income or whatever, or those who do not respond, to have them call——

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Yes, a phone call.

The CHAIRMAN. Who is going to do this? The teachers have to do these applications; the administrators are busy doing other things. I wonder how we are going to impose new requirements on schools without figuring out what the implications are as a practical matter for them.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. That is an excellent question. There is no way to take further steps with regard to the over-certification issue, as it is sometimes labeled, without some additional administrative cost. My sense—and this is the way the Department is thinking as well—is that one would put some increment into the free and reduced-price meal at free and reduced-price meal reimbursement to cover the additional cost.

There are two additional costs. One is if you verify even modestly more applications than the current 3 percent, you have some administrative costs from doing more applications. If you improve the verification process, the same is true.

I was recently told that there was a meeting that I am not sure if it was the Congressional Research Service or Congressional staff had on this issue a few months ago where, interestingly enough, one of the participants was an individual from Virginia whom a Virginia school district contracted with to handle the verification of the school meals for them. Under this contract, the contractor did make a phone call to each family that did not submit verification when requested to do so. He reported to Congressional staff and CRS that when they made this phone call, they substantially reduced the non-response rate. It did mean the contract cost a little more because they made these phone calls. It seems to me that if we are looking at a larger process, and we think that the larger process overall will produce ultimately some net savings—even if it produced no savings, I would argue if it were deficit-neutral, get-

ting it right would be worth doing—but over time, there ought to be net savings from a more accurate process where we weed out more of the ineligibles but we do it in a way that we do not lose so many of the eligibles.

A way to think about it is that some of those savings go back into the costs for a better verification process.

Having said that, this is another reason we need the demonstration projects, because no one wants to move forward with something that adds cost in the area. I should have said we need to find the most cost-effective, cost-efficient ways to reduce ineligible participation without losing eligible children.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Harkin.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, thanks, Mr. Greenstein, for the insights that you provide to us. On the four recommendations that you made, I am wondering—there is no recommendation here or really any observation by you on the prospect of a two-tier system. The American School Food Service Association testified that in the WIC program, anyone with incomes under 185 percent of poverty level is automatically in the WIC program without charge. They say the same income guidelines should be extended to the school nutrition programs. They point out that—and I am reading from Ms. MacDonald's testimony—"The reduced-price category is by far the smallest of the current school meal categories. Less than 10 percent of the meals served are served to children in the reduced-price category." She goes on to say, "The reduced-price copay should be eliminated, and meals should be available at no cost to all children with family incomes up to 185 percent of poverty."

Wouldn't that take care of all these demonstration programs and things that we are trying to figure on? You are talking about less than 10 percent.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. While we do not have good, precise data, there is reason to believe that a significant portion of the over-certification rate or over-rate—whatever term you want to use—consists of children who are eligible for reduced-price meals getting free meals, in many cases because the income rises a little over the year.

Doing a single tier in my view would substantially reduce the error rate. I did not include it in my testimony for the reason that, as you know, our Center does a lot of work on budget issues and follows the budget process closely, and everything I am hearing indicates to me that this year's budget resolution will not provide any new money for child nutrition. In the absence of money, we wouldn't be able to move to a single-tier system—I do not know the price tag on that, but it would be a not insignificant budgetary cost—and presumably, if the committee did not get money allocated to it in the budget resolution to do that, it would not be able to proceed. That was the reason I did not include that here.

I also wanted to quickly note, because I realized I did not fully answer, to Chairman Cochran, I certainly do not envision teachers having to do that extra work. One of the things that warrants some consideration, actually, is whether this whole verification process should be moved up to the school district level, the administrative

offices at the school district, in which case they could either do it directly or perhaps contract it out. I certainly do not want to burden the school food service personnel or the teachers with doing this. I agree that that would not be wise to do.

Senator HARKIN. Somebody has to do it, and therefore, you have to pay someone someplace to do this.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Yes, yes.

Senator HARKIN. That is another cost. I would have to take a look at that to see what the cost-benefit ratio of something like that might be. I mean, what are we chasing here? How much savings are we chasing? That is the question I have in my mind.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Yes. We really do not know. That is the problem.

Senator HARKIN. We do not know that.

The other question I have—and we have asked CBO for this, and we cannot seem to get an answer, and I thought maybe your Center might have some answers—is do they have any anticipated cost of what it would be to go to a two-tier system? We cannot seem to get estimates on it.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Oh, that is an easy estimate for CBO to do.

Senator HARKIN. Well, how come I cannot get it from them? Do you have it? Do you know it?

Mr. GREENSTEIN. I do not have it. One can do a mechanical calculation where you simply take all of the current reduce-price meals, and you multiply them by the difference between the free meal rate and the reduced-price rate. The cost is probably somewhat more than that to the degree that if the meals were free, between 130 and 185 percent more of the children would participate. What I do not know—and this is CBO's job—they will make an estimate of what the change in the participation rate will be, and that will be part of their cost estimate.

I presume that if you have not gotten an answer, it is probably because this time of the year, CBO focuses on doing its reestimate of the President's budget, which comes out later this week, and then the budget committees give them a huge amount of stuff to do as they move toward budget resolution markup, and often, other requests get backed up.

There is no question CBO can answer your question. I guess they just have not gotten to it yet.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Miller.

Senator MILLER. I do not have any questions, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Greenstein. It is a pleasure to see you and have the benefit of your testimony at our hearing.

Mr. GREENSTEIN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Our final panel is invited to come and take your places at the witness table.

We welcome Ms. Susan Borra, who is immediate past president of the American Dietetic Association here in Washington; Mr. Robert Kemmery, Jr., Executive Director of Student Support Services of Baltimore County Public Schools in Towson, Maryland; Ms. Melanie Payne, a child nutrition director from Opelika, Alabama; Mr. Jerry Kozak, who is President and Chief Executive Officer of

the National Milk Producers Federation, from Arlington, Virginia, and he is appearing on behalf of the National Milk Producers Federation and the International Dairy Foods Association; and Mr. Dennis Heiman, who is principal of Muscatine High School in Muscatine, Iowa.

Thank you all for being here. We have copies of the statements that you have provided us which we appreciate very much, and we would ask you to make whatever summary comments from those prepared texts that you would like.

We will start off with Ms. Borra.

STATEMENT OF SUSAN T. BORRA, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION, WASHINGTON, DC

Ms. BORRA. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I really thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role that school nutrition programs can play in children's health.

My name is Susan Borra, and I am a registered dietician and immediate past president of the American Dietetic Association. I am here today delighted to represent my fellow members of the American Dietetic Association, ADA, 67,000 of us, and we are food and nutrition professionals across the Nation.

ADA is the largest organization of its kind, and we guide our work by the philosophy that we base our work on sound science and evidence-based practice in everything that we do.

One in six of our members is employed in the public health setting, including school food service representatives here today, and they bring unique training and skills that integrate nutrition and safe food-handling programs into these public programs.

This morning, I have been asked to do a little stage-setting for you to discuss the issue of childhood overweight, which is certainly an important issue that has been identified here, and it is growing in prevalence.

The problem of childhood overweight is influenced by a huge variety of factors. Therefore, when we start to look at solutions, we are really going to have to look at both environmental and individual approaches.

Prevention of the problem we will all say is key, and school food and nutrition education programs can really play an important role in positively impacting the health of children.

The American Dietetic Association has focused our attention on the issue of overweight and obesity, particularly on the subject of healthy weights for our children. As Senator Harkin mentioned, you have heard some of the statistics that are out there. It is at an all-time high in childhood overweight. The rates of tripled in school-age children since 1970. Sixty percent of overweight children have at least one adverse cardiovascular disease risk factor. Research shows that overweight children frequently become overweight adults. Looking at our entire Nation, we are spending more than $100 billion in direct and indirect costs annually to treat obesity and associated chronic diseases in both adults and children, and these costs are indeed rising.

Overweight and obesity is a chronic disease that occurs simply when people consume more calories than they expend. However,

many factors—genetic factors, physiological factors, psychological factors, metabolic factors, and certainly the environmental influences—contribute to the imbalance of caloric consumption and energy expenditure. These facts are affecting when, where, and what we eat. These factors are also affecting the decline in physical activity and the increase in sedentary behaviors.

Children of all ages are spending more free time in sedentary activities both at home and in school. The dietary intake of children is currently not meeting Federal nutrition guidelines. For example, fewer than 15 percent of school children eat the recommended servings of fruit, and only 30 percent consume the recommended milk group servings.

The fact that more than half the children in the United States eat breakfast, lunch, or a snack at school demonstrates the degree to which schools can support the development of lifelong balanced nutritional habits. In addition, as has been mentioned, while it is beyond the scope of the discussions today, schools also need to provide many more opportunities for physical activity for our children.

Because of the complexity of this problem, prevention of childhood overweight will require a multifaceted approach. Prevention in childhood could reduce the incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. ADA has invested in numerous projects, many in partnership with other organizations and groups, public and private, to understand more about childhood overweight.

In qualitative consumer research, we found that people do not seem to connect the relationship between overweight and chronic disease. We found that children and adolescents are focusing on subjects like appearance, not necessarily their health. Their concerns about weight generally arise as a result of failed athletic performance, as in the case of boys, or dissatisfaction with their appearance, as in the case of girls. When children and adolescents are asked about what they try to do to change their eating behavior to lose weight, what they tell you is, "Well, I will skip a meal," rather than modify their eating behaviors in a more healthful way.

Our consumer research also shows that parents generally do not recognize the potential long-term health problems for overweight children. Parents hesitate to take action regarding their children's weight because they really believe their children will outgrow these problems, and they fear that their interventions may cause unhealthy eating disorders such as anorexia.

Teachers consider it essential that parents support healthy lifestyles at home. However, they see little continuity between lessons on healthy living at school and lifestyle outside their classrooms.

Clearly, children, parents, and teachers need resources to deal with the issues of healthy weight. ADA urges comprehensive strategies for reducing the number of overweight children with particular emphasis on family and community-based interventions that promote healthful eating practices and daily physical activity.

School nutrition programs do offer a unique opportunity to positively impact the health of our Nation's children, and that is why the American Dietetic Association is committed to strengthen Federal nutrition programs. In the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, we will focus our attention certainly on enhancing nutrition

education, looking at improving environments conducive to healthy food and beverage choices. We want to help in developing a comprehensive, behavior-based research agenda so we really know what we are doing. ADA believes that appropriately trained individuals such as my colleagues in ASFSA and ADA should be in decisionmaking roles that can transform these programs in ways to help students succeed in making food and beverage choices that will really contribute to a healthy eating pattern.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to lay the groundwork on thoughts toward making the school nutrition programs an important resource in our national strategy focused on promoting optimal health and preventing overweight in our Nation's children.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Ms. Borra, for your interesting testimony.

Mr. Kemmery.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Borra can be found in the appendix on page 77.]

STATEMENT OF ROBERT J. KEMMERY, JR., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES, BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS, TOWSON, MARYLAND

Mr. KEMMERY. Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony regarding the school lunch and school breakfast programs.

I am Robert Kemmery, Executive Director of Student Support Services for the Baltimore County Public Schools. The Baltimore County Public Schools is the 23rd largest school system in the United States, serving 108,600 students.

From 1991 through 2002, I was principal of Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore County. My 32 years as a public school educator have shaped the statement I will share with the committee. I would like to leave the members of the committee with three key thoughts.

First of all, the Baltimore County Public Schools are an excellent representative of the challenges educators face—an enormous demand for quality education with limited resources.

Second, with our No Child Left Behind Federal legislation and the expectation of a quality education for all students and high performance for all students, schools must form partnerships with businesses and their communities to achieve this laudable goal.

Third, partnerships with beverage companies are a win-win situation for education and business if managed appropriately. Keep them a local decision by educators in consultation with their school community.

If I can take you back 12 years when I was first appointed principal of Eastern Technical High School, I faced a situation that many principals faced across the United States. I went into a very economically challenged school community with a school that was sanctioned by the State in terms of not meeting the requirements of the Maryland State Department of Education High School Performance Report Card. Many of the areas that were requirements for graduation were at the "unsatisfactory" level.

Being a new principal, one of the first things I needed to do was to get people to recognize that we did have some difficulty. When I turned to the Essex-Middle River-White Marsh Chamber of Commerce, they listened to our plea. They got involved with the schools. They helped us set up focus groups across the county to determine what is the purpose of a high school education, how can we work together to see that all of our students achieve at high levels. They were truly the catalyst that helped us reinvent a school.

This school, being at the bottom performance level in 1991, became a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence and a United States Department of Education New American High School in 1997 and 1999 with visits from the U.S. Secretary of Education and educators and business leaders from 45 States and 25 countries around the world.

If it were not for these business partnerships, this would not have happened.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation released a major report in 1996 called "Breaking Ranks: A Systemic School Model for School Reform Across the United States." If you look at the major guidelines of this systemic school reform model, partnerships are at the heart of it—how do you build relationships to advantage students and a community?

This school, through reaching out to partnerships, has a Lockheed Martin Applied Physics Lab, a Verizon Telecommunications Showcase and Distance Learning Lab, a Comcast Communications Center. There are over 100 corporations and business that work with this school to raise the opportunity and the future promise for each and every student in that school.

Two years ago, I served as president of the Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals. In Annapolis, a bill was entered called Senate Bill 453, the Captive Audience/Stop Commercialism in Schools Act. This particular bill mobilized educators from across the State of Maryland, and they went to Annapolis and said: Please, let this be a local decision. Let our school communities work together with educators to determine what type of relationships should work between business and schools.

A lot of attention works around vending machines and business partnerships. In my estimation, the best way to foster these partnerships is to let the decision be made by those school districts and educators and partners. That allows choice; it allows choice for beverages like water, juice, sports drinks, soda and diet soda.

Maryland already had a mandate on the books. If you are a school in Maryland, you cannot operate any vending machines until the last period of the lunch day. At my high school, that meant that at 1:30 in the afternoon, the machines were turned on. They were on electric monitors. That when school let out at 2:15, if a student wanted to purchase a beverage, they could.

The other part of this is that schools are their community lifeline. There were over 600 adults a year who were getting skills upgrade training courses at the school. When you factor in 45 interscholastic sports, drama productions, all the community meetings held, people running from one job to training programs, it was critically important to have these machines available.

There is also a financial benefit to schools that derives from these machines, and I can tell you in the 11 years that I was principal at Eastern Technical High School, we derived $30,000 a year in profit from these machines.

What did we do with the profit? We worked with our school community representatives, and we hosted 45 interscholastic sports teams. We also had drama productions. I remember purchasing shoes for students who were in need, students who could not afford to go on field trips. That is the only pot of money that principals have across this country—and I am talking about secondary principals—that is discretionary, how you can help people go forward. We did not compete with the school lunch program. We made possible educational opportunities. We were really supporting the physical education activities, because when 55 percent of your 1,375 students are playing interscholastic sports, that is the kind of activity balance and moderation—you need to have healthy young people.

I would ask you to please keep this a local decision. The power of partnerships is the power to reach out to one another and do what is best for our students.

In my remarks which you have, I also share with you a copy of a 16-page color brochure on Eastern Technical High School. If you look at the second page, you will see former U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. Riley, who visited the school; our state superintendent, Dr. Nancy Grasmick; our former Governor Parris Glendening. This school became an economic catalyst for revitalizing older neighborhoods throughout the State, and we cannot afford to have any kind of limitations on that power to hold hands together with partners, whether business, whether higher education, whether community agencies, to serve our most valuable resource—our students.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Kemmery.

Ms. Payne.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kemmery can be found in the appendix on page 88.]

STATEMENT OF MELANIE PAYNE, CHILD NUTRITION DIRECTOR, OPELIKA CITY SCHOOLS, OPELIKA, ALABAMA

Ms. PAYNE. Thank you for inviting me.

I was asked to come and share a little bit about what our school system is doing in Alabama.

Opelika, Alabama is a small city of about 24,000 people. Opelika City Schools has an enrollment of 4,500 students with approximately 63 percent free and reduced. Our area is predominantly blue-collar industrial but located 7 miles from the educational community of Auburn University.

Our school system is operated along business principles much like a corporation. It has long been our policy to use our funding wisely to educate every child without parents being constantly asked for donations or funding. We have never allowed vending machines in our schools.

Our city supports our schools financially with an extra annual allocation of $1.7 million. We committed some of those funds to our schools to eliminate fundraising by students.

Our child nutrition program is not-for-profit but self-supporting. We have a closed campus policy, and our program is not competing with school stores or school vending machines. Therefore, we expect nutrition to be the focus without snack food sales to balance the budget. Participation is 90 percent systemwide for lunch and 33 percent for breakfast. Our program is financially sound.

When USDA offered the option in the early 1990's to serve meals based on nutritional standards for students rather than food groups, our child nutrition program adopted NuMenus. We turned off our fryers and purchased steamers. We did intensive training for our cooks to help them learn to cook with spices instead of the traditional Southern ham and bacon seasoning. We served more fresh fruits, but our fresh vegetables were limited to salad bar-type items because of the time involved in preparation.

Two years ago, we discovered the New North Florida Farmers Cooperative. The coop carries liability insurance and requires their members to take classes on use of pesticides. Working through the coop gives us a level of quality assurance that we would not have buying from a farmer off the street.

They pre-process fresh collards, peas, butter beans and sweet potato sticks in season. We now offer this variety of fresh vegetables among our other offerings one or two times a month. We hope to continue to expand these offering as more small farmers join the coop.

Our appeal to parents is that we offer their children two nutritious meals each day with numerous choices. If they will encourage their children to eat at school and eat a variety of what we offer, they can feel less pressured when their evening meal is a higher-fat choice. We still serve pizza and hamburgers several times per month. We do not serve any one food every day. Students can buy any regular item on the line a la carte. Ice cream and a noncarbonated sports drink are the only special a la carte items we ever offer. We have justified the ice cream choice as a means to get students to consume more calcium, because so many do not drink milk.

The Child Nutrition Program in Opelika has the support of the administration, the faculty, and the parents. We do not have to compete with anyone for the food dollars.

Convincing the adults in schools can be just as difficult as convincing the children. The tremendous rise in Type 2 diabetes among children is staggering. Schools cannot fix all problems, but they do hold their share of blame on this issue when students have high-fat, high-sugar foods available all through the day.

Schools are contributing to the obesity issue. Schools provide students more of their meals and snacks during the school year than they get at home. The school environment as a whole must be accountable for what they feed children. Opelika City Schools recognized our responsibility about 10 years ago and began the movement to get where we are today.

Child feeding programs are part of the problem, but have the least control to fix them. Most of my colleagues would prefer to feed children healthy choices. Economics has made this virtually impossible. Many kitchens were designed with fried foods as the focal point and do not have the equipment to steam fresh vegetables. Many students have never been exposed to a fresh, cooked vegeta-

ble. They only know fried. Change will have to be made with a sound plan and will take a great deal of work from all areas of education. It will require commitment and creativity. Most important, it has not been an easy transition for us and will not be easy for anyone else.

Many schools rely heavily on vending to pay for everything from supplies to club activities. Removing vending and high-fat snack foods from cafeterias while allowing school stores to continue to sell those products will bankrupt most child feeding programs.

Opelika City School system approaches every area of education with the child's well-being first. Our child feeding program teaches nutrition by example and is the child nutrition program. We do not believe that offering students pizza and fries every day for lunch supports the nutrition education information being taught in the classroom.

Our goal is to always support education. Approaching child feeding from a child nutrition perspective requires rethinking most longheld beliefs about what children will and will not eat and requires us to be the adult when it comes to balancing what is popular versus what is nutritious. That works in Opelika, Alabama.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Payne, for your interesting testimony.

Mr. Kozak, please proceed.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Payne can be found in the appendix on page 92.]

STATEMENT OF JERRY KOZAK, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION AND THE INTERNATIONAL DAIRY FOODS ASSOCIATION

Mr. KOZAK. Mr. Chairman, I am Jerry Kozak, president and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation. Today I am testifying on behalf of both National Milk, which represents producers, and the International Dairy Foods Association, which represents processors. Greg Frazier, senior vice president of IDFA, is in the audience with me.

Our unity on this issue reflects the critical importance of child nutrition programs for the dairy industry.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of all the people in this room, especially the American School Food Service Association. I have been married to an elementary teacher for 30 years, and if I did not get that in, I would be in big trouble when I got home.

Let me discuss the programs and the national commitment to offer our young people healthful choices and a fair start toward lifelong good nutrition. Milk is an essential part of that commitment.

The child nutrition programs have strong public support for several reasons. Fundamentally, almost all of us would agree that they are the right thing for society to do. We recognize a responsibility to give children a fair start in life, nutritionally and otherwise. The programs have an excellent track record, as all members of this committee know, and child nutrition programs encourage

our children to develop good dietary habits not just at lunch but throughout the day and throughout life.

Unfortunately, budgets for these programs have not kept up with inflation over the years, and we believe additional budgetary resources are necessary. Funding constraints can create a vicious cycle, discouraging innovation and improvements in food quality and service. In turn, that may drive children away from these programs.

We know that participation in school meal programs has been stagnant or declining. Meanwhile, the programs face stiff competition. This competition might be the fast food restaurant down the road or the vending machine down the hall. I am not condemning either one, but the studies do show that the children who participate in school meal programs are better-nourished than those who do not. Like most of you, we believe that children learn better when they eat right, so it is in our interest to have more children participating.

Milk has always been central to the child nutrition programs, right from the beginning in 1946, when the School Lunch Program was initiated. Milk is a marker for a healthy diet. It is the best answer to our children's chronic calcium deficiencies. More than two-thirds of teenage boys and nearly 90 percent of teenage girls do not get the recommended amounts.

Milk is much more than calcium. It is also an important source of phosphorous, potassium, and many other nutrients. We are learning more about milk's benefits all the time. There is emerging evidence that milk is also an important solution to our Nation's obesity crisis. Several studies show that dairy consumption is inversely related to obesity and may help reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Yet trends in school milk consumption have not been encouraging. Our industry needs to do a better job of making milk attractive to children. Last year, the National Dairy Council and the American School Food Service Association sponsored a pilot test in 140 schools involving 100,000 students. The idea was to see whether children would drink more if they had a better product. That meant additional flavors like strawberry, attractive plastic packaging, keeping milk cold in new and better coolers, and offering milk through a la carte and vending sales.

The test was a tremendous success. Children in fact did drink more milk. Sales were up 15 percent in elementary schools and 22 percent in secondary schools. There was more. Participation in the school meal programs went up also by nearly 5 percent in secondary schools. That is important because it means that more children will get the benefits not just of milk but other healthy foods in the lunch program.

If we could improve milk in the same way nationwide, participation in the school meal program could grow by nearly half a million children. More than 2 million children who already eat in the cafeteria but do not drink milk would become milk drinkers. Potentially, these 2.6 million children would reap lifelong health benefits. Their health care costs would decline as much as $1 billion a year.

Mr. Chairman, the entire dairy industry, both producers and processors, believes that Congress should use these and other successful models to improve child nutrition programs. First, Congress should promote more consumption of milk in schools by providing incentives to schools that upgrade the quality of milk. Schools should be able to do this by adopting improved standards of the type that I described as well as finding other ways to increase consumption.

Second, Congress should provide more opportunities for commercially branded milk in more sales venues throughout the school. Placing these products alongside milk in the school lunch line is one example.

Third, Congress should reject a tax on milk's role in the child nutrition programs. The statutory requirement to offer milk in our schools is fundamental and should remain in place.

Finally, Congress should assure that schools that want to may offer milk any time, anywhere on the school premises and at any school event, regardless of any other contractual arrangements.

These four items are priorities of the National Milk Producers Federation and the International Dairy Foods Association. We developed them together. We would like to work with this committee to achieve those.

We are proud of our industry and the nutritious products that we make and sell. We support you in trying to give all of our Nation's children a fair start—an opportunity to make healthy choices. The work you are doing on this committee is vital to our children's well-being, and we would like to help you in any way we can.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Kozak, for your testimony.

Mr. Heiman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kozak can be found in the appendix on page 95.]

STATEMENT OF DENNIS J. HEIMAN, PRINCIPAL, MUSCATINE HIGH SCHOOL, MUSCATINE, IOWA

Mr. HEIMAN. Thank you.

First, I am honored to be the only active principal here. It is quite a thrill.

As I enter the building by 7 a.m., I say hello to the head cook and the head custodian, and therefore I know that everything is going well. If I am not there, they wonder what is wrong.

We are at the secondary level, a high school of about 2,000 students, and our cafeteria manager sent along a Valentine's Day card from the kids in the building. She received about 30 of these, and I know the elementary cooks received quite a few as well. This is for the fruit and vegetable program, and it says "Thank you tremendously."

As you establish priorities and funding, I understand this committee has a difficult task; but as a high school principal, I also understand the difference between my making a recommendation and you making a decision, so I respect you for that.

With all said, feed the children. You have brought in numerous nutritional experts, you have heard testimony from cooks, doctors, and other experts in regard to energy, lifespan, and healthy living.

I am here to tell you about the experience and the growth that Muscatine High School accomplished through this pilot program.

At first, we too looked at solely the nutritional aspects of it, trying to blend the natural sugar high with academics, striving to have our ITEDs, or Iowa Test of Educational Development, soar so that we could meet the No Child Left Behind requirements.

When we should feed the child was the question was approached. After gathering all the data, we simply asked our customers—our students—when should we feed you, and they said when we are hungry—mid-morning. That made sense to us.

We chose to feed the kids at 10 a.m. during our Channel One time. Channel One is the equivalent of CNN, or about 16 minutes of teenage news worldwide.

You have heard of the nutritional value, but I want to speak to you about the unintended consequences of this program that far outweigh—unfortunately or fortunately—any of the nutritional value.

Our student-teacher camaraderie grew. Imagine being in a classroom with one of your teachers and having the teacher explain his likes and dislikes in fruits and vegetables and why. The teacher is seen as a more human person. The children understand. I have heard more friendly conversations with faculty and students than at any other time in my 30 years of being an educator.

I thought it was interesting 1 day when we had tangerines, and the teachers said, "No, these are not small oranges. These are tangerines." The kids had never had things like that before. Explaining the difference between broccoli and cauliflower was interesting.

Probably the No. 1 hit in our school is either the fat-free caramel apples or the fat-free French dressing with carrots. We do have a wide range. The student camaraderie has grown tremendously.

On peer acceptance, some of the students who aid in the delivery of the food have special needs. This provides the children with special needs an avenue never before entered into at the high school. They received a position of respect. They have been talked to by students who normally would not talk to children with special needs. We have regular education students deliver, through severe and profound, to our behavioral-disordered, and those children have gained the self-respect that was not known to them before.

On team-building—how to deliver, hand out, and collect the remains of nearly 2,000 pieces of food in 100 locations caused a major building involvement. Cafeteria workers, teachers, custodians, administration and students—yes, everyone—worked closely together to solve the problem. Plastic grocery bags were brought in from home, and teachers brought a towel from home with a spray bottle to clean up afterward. The kids helped to solve the problem, and the problem was solved with no expense, which is always nice.

On peer pressure—occasionally, a new food is not well-received. My personal choice of not-well-received would be the trail mix, but other kids did not like the banana chips or, unfortunately, the dried cherries from Michigan—but we tried them. It is a good thing the Senator left. Sometimes, this unfavorable food was found in the hallways or in waste cans. I simply made one short announcement: If the mess continues, the program will cease. If you do not want the food, trade with someone, save it for later, eat it at a later

time. The mess disappeared. Students once again solved the problem.

In large schools such as ours, our children might not even know people in their own classes. They may know them by their first name, alone, and "They are in my physics class." This gave the children the opportunity to talk, trade food, listen to each other—"Oh, I have had that before—it is good—I'll trade." It removed all the levels of social/economic, ethnic, and academic barriers.

What I just described is now being pushed as character education—understanding, caring for, and working with others to solve common problems.

In another light, this program may be better than the proposed tax cuts. The program places money in local control, stimulates local economy, and eliminates the wide social/economic disparity of delivery. Everyone at Muscatine High School, from the principal to the lowest social/economic child in the building, receives the same benefit at the same time in the same manner.

To outdo the milk person, my wife is a kindergarten teacher, and I have been married for 32 years, and her building also has a free and reduced program as well as a fruit and vegetable program. Her building is over 50 percent free and reduced. If her children did not have this fruit, they would never experience it. It is crucial for them. They also receive the same unintended consequences.

I have heard today and I read an article that nearly 25 percent of people who receive free and reduced lunches do not qualify. If $100 is keeping children from eating, why? This is America.

As we grew, our parents and grandparents taught us that we were never really accepted into a home until we were offered food or beverage. You have made each classroom a warmer, more welcoming educational environment. I would like to thank you.

I came here to speak of food and told you that the program that you endorse has crossed all aspects of education and has made our school a better place.

Two other unintended consequences—we have removed the candy machine; our sales had dropped 48 percent since we brought in the fruit and vegetable program—and with the help of our Pepsi dealer, we put in a milk machine. We need more milk because the biggest problem in the four schools I visited in the State of Iowa is that we cannot keep supplied with the bottled milk to put in the milk vending machine.

Thank you for your time, and please continue and expand the program.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Heiman can be found in the appendix on page 101.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Heiman, for your interesting testimony. I am very impressed with what you have told us about what you do at your school and the successes you have had in bringing high-quality nutritional foods to the students. It is a model that seems to me worth emulating all around the country. I hope there is some way to disseminate that information so that other schools can hear of your successes and try to figure out how they can apply these same techniques in their classrooms and in their schools.

I am not just talking to you because you are a principal, although I do have a partial attitude toward school principals. My father was one for his entire career, later as an administrator of the county system, but most of his career was spent as a high school or secondary school principal, consolidated school principal. I share the challenges—I shared them growing up—that you are faced with getting good workers in the cafeterias and the lunch rooms and getting staff members to do the best possible job they can delivering these meals in a way that the children will appreciate them and also profit from them.

One thing that we have some experience with here is providing authority to the Department of Agriculture to disseminate surplus commodities or commodities to schools around the country, and I just wonder what your experience has been with that. I am going to ask each one of you who is involved in the school programs what your impression is and any suggestions for improving that distribution program.

Mr. Heiman, I will start with you.

Mr. HEIMAN. I will let someone else start.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Payne, do you have any thoughts on that?

Ms. PAYNE. I have been in my position for 17 years, and there has been a great deal of improvement in the delivery of commodities. This year, the fresh produce is fabulous. It is getting to us on time, and it is getting to us in high quality. We are very glad to get it.

The CHAIRMAN. That is great.

Let me ask you, Ms. Borra, about the comments you made about getting children to appreciate the nutritious foods that are made available. Sometimes it is difficult to get students to eat them, much less taste some foods that they are not familiar with. Do you have any thoughts about techniques that can be used by school food managers or others to encourage students to try new things and to eat nutritious foods?

Ms. BORRA. Certainly the availability is a big key on that, to make sure those types of foods are available. I believe research shows that it could take anywhere from three to ten tries for someone to actually incorporate a food into their lifestyle. It is not just a one-time shot in most of these cases if you are talking about food behaviors.

I would like to comment on Mr. Heiman's program. That is the best nutrition education I have heard of in terms of actually having the opportunity to work with the food and be with the teachers in the classroom. I am sure that in that environment, a lot of foods were tried that were probably never tried before, so that those types of opportunities would certainly be helpful.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Payne, I appreciate the success that you have had at your school, too. It is heart-warming to hear that story and the progress made in that district. In addition to providing nutritious foods to your students, do you offer any education classes or instructional opportunities for the students as well?

Ms. PAYNE. We did a survey 3 years ago and found that less than 10 percent of our students knew how many grams of fat they should have a day, how many calories they should have a day at

the middle school and high school levels. I went back to the school administrators—I am not an educator; my background is business and nutrition—so I went back to the school environment and asked how can we do something about this.

We have added a kindergarten program working with Cooperative Extension Service. They have a program called Nutrition Education Program, and they provide a lot of things that children can take home, stickers, that type of thing. They could not get to all of our kindergartners, and in Opelika, if you do something for one classroom, you do it for every classroom in the system in that grade level. We had the extension service come in and train our kindergarten teachers. Now, every kindergartner has nutrition for 10 days in the spring. They go to a farm, they eat fresh vegetables and fruits in the classroom and do lots of other hands-on things with fruits and vegetables, including planting something.

We now plan when that first group of kindergartners reaches fifth grade to have a fifth grade program, because that is when the educators told me that we needed a backup. We use some of our nutrition education money in child nutrition to pay for supplies for the teachers, and my secretary runs copies for their worksheets; I go out and buy the dirt for their planting and take it to them. I had to justify that to the auditors when they came.

The CHAIRMAN. I hope you did not get into too much trouble.

Ms. PAYNE. No, not too bad—local auditors.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Kozak, I was interested to hear your observations about your pilot program to increase consumption and make the consumption of milk more attractive to students, that different ways of packaging and flavoring can increase consumption. You talked about that Congress should learn from this and provide incentives to schools that do this kind of thing. Why can't the industry do a better job of that itself? Why do you need Congress to provide incentives?

Mr. KOZAK. It is a good question, Mr. Chairman, and it is one of those areas that we are working cooperatively as we did in the school milk pilot test program that was funded by the industry. It has become apparent with inflation and the low margins that milk processors have that it is critical to make up some of the additional money to provide these extra products. There is a commitment on behalf of our industry, but we think it is also not practical in a number of school districts where the reimbursement rate is not sufficient.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Kemmery, it was interesting to hear about your success in the Baltimore area schools with the secondary education folks. Are there elementary students at this school, too, or are you just involved in the secondary?

Mr. KEMMERY. It is grades 9 through 12, Mr. Chairman, 1,375 students. The way our school system is set up, there are 102 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, and 24 high schools in the school district.

The CHAIRMAN. Do the same kinds of programs exist in the elementary schools as well as the secondary schools, or was this unique to the secondary school level?

Mr. KEMMERY. Basically, there is a prescribed health and nutrition curriculum that goes throughout the K through 12 program,

and at the high school level, the program is a required course for high school graduation with a number of units in healthy living and nutrition. That is true of the entire school district.

If you are referring to some of the particular programs at Eastern Tech, it is a magnet high school with a lot of business-industry partnerships to prepare students to go into engineering, allied health careers, computer-assisted drafting and design. It engendered a lot of support because of the nature of the school.

The CHAIRMAN. It was a unique opportunity to try these innovations.

Mr. KEMMERY. Yes. Yet it was critically important to have them come to the table and say if we are going to remain internationally competitive and have a world-class work force, we have to raise the bar, but we have to help you do that. In other words, there are things that we can bring to the table in terms of human resource help, not just financial but human resource help, to ensure that there is a quality educational program being delivered.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

This panel has really done a good job for me personally in understanding some of the new things that are going on and innovative ways of approaching the challenge.

Senator Harkin.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I too want to join in that accolade for this panel as a whole, and I have just a couple of questions.

Ms. Borra, please give the committee your views on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines as they exist now and the food pyramid currently in place. It has been in place for about 30 years at the present time. Could you define what is the ADA's role in revision of the guidelines and the food pyramid?

Ms. BORRA. Thank you. I had the feeling when you were pulling the magazine out that you were looking at that question.

Yes—the American Dietetic Association is on record supporting the work of the Dietary Guidelines and the food guide pyramid. We have been active observers of the process, and the Department set up an external review board that, actually, many of our members have served on those committee structures, not representing ADA but certainly representing their scientific expertise. Currently, the process that is in place to look at the current science and update the guidelines accordingly is in good shape.

The views in that magazine certainly represent another scientific approach to things. There will be the convening of a group I believe this year that goes into place to review the science behind the Dietary Guidelines this year so that possibly some of those considerations will be taken into account.

We do use the food guide pyramid as a teaching tool, as an approach to communicate this important information to consumers, so we need to have some central guidance to work from. It is really critical that the best science go into that food guide pyramid and that we continually have it updated and appropriate to the science.

Senator HARKIN. Aren't you a certified dietician?

Ms. BORRA. Yes, I am.

Senator HARKIN. Well, the old food pyramid has at the base bread, cereal, rice, and pasta, 6 to 11 servings. Do you agree with that?

Ms. BORRA. Yes. The guidance to have that many servings—you have to look at what they talk about as a serving. A serving of grain is not the bagel that you see in the market today; it is probably one-quarter of that bagel. That when you look at what servings they are talking about, the quantities will come out to devise a healthful diet.

Senator HARKIN. OK. You feel that you are consulted and that you are involved with both USDA and Health and Human Services, who share this jointly, in developing new guidelines?

Ms. BORRA. We have provided input and testimony to each of the processes that have gone on every 5 years.

Senator HARKIN. Do you feel the questions that were raised not just in this article but by Mr. Willett and others are adequately being addressed?

Ms. BORRA. This new committee will have some of that research on their table to look at, to say what does this mean and what do they do with it. However, the dietary reference intakes, the National Academy of Sciences has just released a report that puts the concept that the guidance in the food guide pyramid meets the National Academy of Sciences guidelines as well, currently.

Senator HARKIN. We seem to have a problem. We talk a lot about nutrition education. When I was a kid, we actually had nutrition education in school, plus we had exercise, which we do not have today. We do not have either one. We do not have exercise or nutrition education in our schools. About the only nutrition education that kids get today is the advertising they see on television. Of course, with the billions of dollars that different companies have to advertise their products, this is what kids get. This is their nutrition education. If you see it over and over and over again, well, it must be all right to consume these unhealthy foods every day. It does not say moderate your intake. I have never seen a McDonald's ad yet that says McDonald's now and then is OK. They would like you to eat two a day.

Kids get that from the earliest age, and that is really their nutrition education. I just do not know how you compete against that unless we have something in our schools that can actually compete against that.

Ms. BORRA. I could not agree more.

Senator HARKIN. I just do not know, and I throw that out.

Ms. Payne, thank you for very uplifting testimony. As someone said earlier, that what you have done is "awesome." It is amazing, just amazing. You did this 10 years ago—is that what you said—you started it 10 years ago?

Ms. PAYNE. Yes. We adopted NuMenus when USDA allowed us to go by nutrient standards rather than food groups.

Senator HARKIN. You have no vending machines in any of your schools?

Ms. PAYNE. We have never had vending years in the 17 years—we have a board policy against vending machines. We do not have those vehicles deliver to our buildings with the advertising on them.

Senator HARKIN. That is pretty amazing. You serve fresh vegetables—evidently, you were serving fresh fruits and vegetables long before my pilot program came into existence, and you have had good experience with this.

Ms. PAYNE. We have had great experience. I do not know if you are familiar with collards, but we served about 500 pounds of collards the first year, and we have served over 3,000 pounds this year.

Senator HARKIN. I spent most of my military career in the South, so my first introduction to collards was not too good. I mean, military cooking is not the best, OK? I have later come back around, yes, and obviously, they are very healthy.

Ms. PAYNE. We have a reputation—we can feed people out of the weeds in our back yard. We always feed you.

Senator HARKIN. Well, my hat is off to you.

What advice do you have for other schools. There are 24,000 people in your community; that is a nice size community. What advice would you have for other schools?

Ms. PAYNE. A couple things. First of all, you have to have the commitment of the community. We have this brochure—you have a copy of it—we send this out to parents, we put it in the Chamber of Commerce office, and local doctors waiting areas.

Senator HARKIN. I did not see it. I saw it mentioned in your testimony, but I did not see it.

Ms. PAYNE. I am sorry. We have a few more. She is going to bring you one.

Senator HARKIN. Thanks.

Ms. PAYNE. At any rate, we do a lot of advertising in the community that this is what we do, so if your children eat nutritious at school, if you have ball games or are running around at night, it is not as hard to go through that drive-through.

The other thing is the real commitment to not frying anything. We turned our fryers off. The only time a fryer is used in our schools is when we do a banquet at night where it is requested. We do not even have fryers anymore in some of our elementary buildings; in our new buildings, we have not installed fryers. We only fry for banquets.

Now, that is not to say we have an easy time finding foods that we can meet the Dietary Guidelines, because high-sodium and fried foods are a lot of what is available. Pre-fried chicken and so on has already been fried, but we are not frying it again.

When you asked about the pyramid, it is probably heavy on the starchy end. However, until we meet that pyramid, we are not ready to go on and meet something else, and that our Nation as a whole, we are not meeting that pyramid yet. If you really look at what our Nation is doing, the meat and the fat would be the bottom. If you really look at what our Nation is doing, we are not meeting that pyramid, and not in our schools, either, because we are only reviewed for the week that the auditors come. I hear that—"I cannot balance my budget if I serve those foods, so I will only serve them when the auditors are coming." We do not fry any time, and our children are eating 90 percent.

Senator HARKIN. Wow. That is pretty awesome.

Ms. PAYNE. The parents have to buy into it, and our superintendent is a strong believer in what we are doing, and we do not have schools that pull away from the program because he does not—it is just one of those positive approaches where it is not really tolerated.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you.

Mr. Heiman, again, thank you for being here and for participating in the free fruits and vegetables program. I know that Ms. Nece from Des Moines administers that program in Iowa.

From the States where we have had this program—Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa—at least the preliminary data that we have is that it has been a great success and that some initial problems were gotten through in terms of handling it and that type of thing.

The biggest question we get is will it continue. Well, we just do not know, because it was just a 1-year pilot program. You shed a different light on it that I never thought about in terms of all the unintended benefits of this. What we have found is that—and I guess maybe those of us who are upper-middle-class and those of us who were raised in rural areas where we always had fresh fruits and fresh vegetables growing up—and my mother canned it, so we had stuff all winter long—we do not realize that for many low-income families, fruit is something they just do not buy—it is just too expensive. We have had—and this is more than anecdotal—we have had kids in these various States in this pilot program putting fruit in their pockets and taking it home, and when they were asked about it, they would say, "I have a brother at home, and we have never had any of this. We do not have it at home." It opened my eyes to the fact that a lot of people in this country simply do not have fresh fruits or vegetables very often.

I hope we can continue the program, and I hope we can expand it. Obviously, it costs money, but as you pointed out, we have had some private-public partnerships in Iowa—Hi-Vee Grocery has been very helpful in Iowa; I know that—to help that program along. Again, we have to look—and this is what is always difficult, and this is what CBO never looks at—what do we save down the pike for having healthier kids. We just do not look at that down the pike, so it is always a cost but never a savings.

Again, I appreciate your testimony on that, all of you.

Mr. Kozak, I had a proposal 12 years ago that what we should do to get kids to drink milk in schools is just give them free milkshakes. Then they would drink milk. It would cost money, but you would get them to drink milk. Later on they told me that was too much sugar, that they should just drink milk straight, and I said OK, fine. We have to figure out some ways of doing this. There are problems; there are problems with this.

Again, I thank you all very much. I do not want to go on any longer. You have been here long enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Harkin, for your contribution to this hearing and for chairing the hearing today with me. This is a good way for us to start the year in the Agriculture Committee, with bipartisan cooperation, a well-behaved audience.

Thank you all for your assistance in keeping the hearing moving along in a professional manner.

To all the witnesses who have been here today, you have really been a great help to us. We know that you worked hard in preparation for the hearing and getting here today—you made sacrifices—and we thank you for that.

Our next hearing will be later this month when we will continue to hear from witnesses from the administration. Those who have the responsibility for administering the Federal programs will come and testify. Also, we will be looking into some of the other programs specifically, like the Women, Infants, and Children Program, and other food and nutrition assistance programs that the Federal Government supports.

Until then, this committee will stand in recess.

[Whereupon, at 12:50 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

March 4, 2003

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CONRAD:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to echo the Ranking Member in thanking you for holding this hearing. It is very timely to have done it today, and we appreciate it very much.

I want to salute the representatives of North Dakota who are here – Kathy Grafsgaard, the Director of Child Nutrition Programs; Dixie Schultz from Mandan, which is where my family hailed from for many years; and Julie Tunseth from Grand Forks. They are in charge of serving nearly 74,000 meals each day for school lunch in North Dakota. We appreciate the job they do.

As Senator Harkin was speaking, I was reminded of a time when I attended a meeting of this committee many years ago. Back when I was a young man, I was in Washington and came to a Senate Agriculture Committee hearing on the question of nutrition. I will never forget it. Senator McGovern from South Dakota was the chairman at the time, and Senator Dole was on the Committee. Senator Alan Ellender of Louisiana told the expert witness, who was from the state of Iowa, that he had only one question. The question was "What is this pablum?"

The witness was taken aback at the question and laughed. He then described pablum. Senator Ellender said, "Well, I wanted to know because my daughter has fed that to our grandchildren, and they are all fit as hogs."

I do not know if we are serving pablum in our schools. I rather doubt that it is part of the breakfast program, but I think we all understand how important it is that people have good nutrition.

My grandmother, who raised me, was a devotee of Adele Davis's "you are what you eat" and believed very strongly in proper nutrition and in physical exercise. However, when I look at the indices for our younger generation, they are missing out on both counts. The nutrition is inadequate and, furthermore, too little physical exercise. As a result, we have obesity dramatically on the rise in this country.

As recently as my grandfather's generation, they milked cows before they went to school in the morning – getting their exercise even before they went to school. In my time, it was not an hour of exercise each week like kids now are getting, but an hour a day playing sports. I am very concerned about this trend and the related nutrition and obesity issues, and again thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing to examine them.

Thank you, Senator Harkin, and thank you to our panelists for being here today.

In just a few minutes, I will have to leave to give a speech to State Treasurers from around the country about the budget outlook for our Nation. All of these issues with the school lunch and breakfast programs are linked with the budget. Sometimes, I think we talk out of context too much of the time in Congress. We talk in the Defense Committee about defense; we talk in the Agriculture Committee about nutrition and aid to our farmers; and we talk in the Environment Committee about what we can do to clean up our air and water. However, there are very few opportunities to bring all of the issues together. That is the responsibility of the Budget Committee, of which I am a member.

I can tell you that the child nutrition programs are going to be dramatically impacted by decisions made in the budget. Already, we are in record deficit. The deficits that we are currently running are the largest ever. We now see that we will be running budget deficits – very large deficits – the entire rest of this decade. On top of that, we will be taking all of the Social Security surplus funds generated over the next decade – every last dime – and using them to fund tax cuts and for other expenditures.

We are now in a circumstance in which the President is recommending additional tax cuts, even though we all know the baby boom generation is about to retire and put unprecedented demands on the Federal Government for spending on programs like Social Security and Medicare. In

addition, he is recommending making permanent the previously-enacted tax cuts and an additional round of tax cuts as a part of what he calls a "growth package." On top of that, the President also recommends a whole new savings plan that will result in enormous cost to the Federal Treasury during the second five years of that plan. All of these proposals will add to deficits that – according to the President's own analysis – will spin out of control in the next decade when the baby boomers retire.

I say this because all of this involves choices. Ms. McDonald, you are asking for an increase of spending on the school breakfast and school lunch programs by a billion dollars each year. Those billion dollars would have to be borrowed. And, as I have indicated, all the Social Security surplus is already being spent for other purposes, so that fund cannot be used anymore.

This funding request raises the question – do you add to the deficit, do you raise taxes, or do you cut someplace else for this priority? We are going to have to wrestle with this question. I am not going to ask you, Ms. MacDonald, because you do not have responsibility for putting together the budget. Although, in a way, you do have that responsibility, because you are part of the American public, and the American public ultimately has to decide what makes sense.

Personally, I believe we are on a disastrous course as a country, one that does not add up and one that is going to lead to very, very serious – very, very serious – choices down the road for a future Congress and a future President.

I will ask you one question, Ms. MacDonald. What is the evidence that parents are not able to meet the requirement for as little as 40 cents a meal for lunch? What tells you that they are having trouble meeting that? It seems like a modest amount of money.

STATEMENT

OF THE

AMERICAN SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY

UNITED STATES SENATE

MARCH 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, Members of the Committee, I am Gaye Lynn MacDonald, President of the American School Food Service Association (ASFSA), and the Program Manager of Food Services in Bellingham, Washington. With me this morning is Paula Cockwell, Chairperson of the ASFSA Public Policy and Legislation Committee our Counsel, Marshall Matz, and a few hundred of the best child nutrition administrators from throughout the country.

Let me begin by thanking you and the Committee for again accommodating ASFSA and continuing a very special tradition of holding this hearing during our Legislative Action Conference. We are delighted to be with you this morning to discuss child nutrition and explore how we might further improve these important federal programs. The federal child nutrition programs are a major success story, serving over 28 million children each school day.

ASFSA believes that 2003 is a pivotal year for child nutrition. Reauthorization of child nutrition programs offers an excellent opportunity for the Congress to consider changes that will improve health outcomes for children and further the goals of *No Child Left Behind*. Congress should reauthorize those programs that expire in 2003 (WIC, Commodity Distribution, State Administrative Expense, the National Food Service Management Institute and the Summer Food Service Program). Additionally, ASFSA

advances, for your consideration, a number of proposals to strengthen school and community based child nutrition programs.

Mr. Chairman, ongoing studies confirm that a hungry child cannot learn effectively. A hungry child is distracted from learning and is more likely to experience discipline and health problems. It is critically important that child nutrition programs be effectively extended and easily accessible to all children who are eligible.

PROGRAM ACCESS

* Many children from families qualified in the reduced price category are not participating in the lunch and breakfast programs because they can't afford the fee of 40¢ for a lunch or 30¢ for a breakfast. While that may not seem like a lot of money to those of us in this room, to families with household incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty line, many with more than one child, it is often too much.

The reduced price fee is a major barrier to the working poor, particularly at the end of the month when we see the reduced category participation rates decline.

As you know, in the WIC program, all those with family incomes below 185% of poverty, and who otherwise qualify, receive benefits without charge. This same income guideline should be extended to the school nutrition programs. The reduced price category is by far the smallest of the current school meal categories---free, reduced, and paid - less than 10% of the meals served are served to children in the reduced price category. The reduced price co-pay should be eliminated and meals should be available at no cost to all children with family income up to 185% of poverty. Schools should be reimbursed for these meals at the free rate. This change provides support to working families who are already struggling to keep up with increases in housing, fuel, health and childcare costs.

* Consistent with a GAO analysis showing the gap between the cost to produce a school lunch we propose the federal reimbursement rates for all meal categories be increased. The current reimbursement rate of $2.14 for a free lunch is simply inadequate. The rates for reduced and "paid" meals are not adequate either resulting in higher and higher prices being charged to the paying child. The gap between the costs of doing business and reimbursement rates widens each year as costs escalate at a rate greater than the federal rates increase. And, as I will share later, federal nutrition guidelines are expensive to implement.

* It is also our recommendation, that Congress extend the USDA commodity program to the school breakfast program. Schools currently receive 15¼¢ in USDA commodities for each reimbursable lunch served. This commodity assistance is very helpful and much appreciated, not only by schools but also by the agriculture communities in the states. The school breakfast program, however, receives no USDA commodity assistance. We recommend that USDA contribute 5¢ in commodities for each breakfast served in the program.

HEALTHY CHILDREN

The American School Food Service Association is deeply committed to the health of our nation's children and is working collaboratively to further positive health outcomes. We are about good nutrition not just providing food. As you know, we strongly supported amending the National School Lunch Act to require implementation of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

According to the most recent USDA study on the subject, schools are making very significant progress in implementing the Dietary Guidelines. The fat content of a reimbursable meal is down significantly, and an increasing variety of fruits and vegetables are more readily available. Program operators have modified food preparation methods and re-written product specifications to lower fat, sodium and sugars. Industry has responded to our requests and familiar student favorites like pizza, burgers and fries

are part of meals meeting the Dietary Guidelines. (this phrase is incorporated in the paragraph above)

We are proud of the meals our members serve but it is not realistic to expect children to select a lunch in school that is much different from the meals they consume outside of school. Further, the school lunch program---the USDA reimbursable meal---has significant competition inside and outside the school. Every day program operators are caught between the challenges of very limited resources, pressure to cover all direct and indirect costs or to even be a "profit center" for the district, competition from other groups selling food on campus and the demands of the customer.

Our customer is no longer a captive market. Young people are making more and more of their own decisions beginning at a very early age and have options other than a school meal available. For example, a la carte is increasingly available at all grade levels and many high schools have open campuses and a limited number of lunch periods both of which encourage students to leave school for lunch.

* ASFSA recommends that an additional 10¢ per meal be provided to schools to further improve the nutritional quality of school meals. There are significant costs associated with meeting nutrition standards, such as continuing to increase the availability and variety of fruits and vegetables and to purchase products consistent with the Dietary Guidelines.

This past year, ASFSA joined with the National Dairy Council on a research project to determine if changes in the way milk is marketed in schools can increase consumption of milk and the nutrients it provides. The results of the test are very positive. We are providing the Committee with a copy of the report. But there are some cost implications in implementing the recommendations of the study.

* The recent "Call to Action to Prevent Overweight and Obesity" recommends that schools "adopt policies ensuring that all foods and beverages available on school campuses and at school events contribute toward eating patterns that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans". We urge the Congress and the Administration to

implement the recommendation of Secretary Tommy Thompson, and the Surgeon General, with regard to foods available in school.

*Financial support for nutrition education continues to fade into oblivion. Not many years ago nutrition education was a federal entitlement program, a small program, but one that provided some guaranteed funding. Nutrition education is now a discretionary program without any funding. Students cannot learn to make healthy food choices without access to age appropriate nutrition education. At a minimum, we propose an entitlement of ½¢ per meal be allocated to states to develop state and local infrastructures to deliver nutrition education.

PROGRAM INTEGRITY

Mr. Chairman, ASFSA members are public employees. We take very seriously our responsibility to administer the programs consistent with the law. We are aware of concerns raised by reports indicating that there MAY be an excessive error rate in the numbers of students receiving free and reduced-price benefits in the federal school meal programs. It is a subject we have discussed with USDA at great length.

We believe that:

- Reasonable income verification requirements are necessary to guarantee that the program is administered consistent with current law.
- Eligible students should not be intimidated by excessive income verification requirements and
- The greater the regulatory burden on the program, the greater the cost to produce a meal.

In an effort to respond appropriately and reasonably, ASFSA offers these recommendations:

- Make school meal application approval valid for the full year.

- Expand the use of categorical eligibility, such as is currently authorized for TANF and Food Stamps, and expand the use of direct certification for the school meals application process. Categorical approval should be expanded to include state children's health insurance programs, Medicaid and SSI, where state eligibility guidelines for these programs are compatible with school meal eligibility guidelines. Furthermore, ASFSA supports requiring states to provide approved lists to local school districts for direct certification.
- Replace the current verification requirements with 100% verification of error-prone applications at the time of submission. Current regulations require school food authorities to verify a percentage of all applications received. A GAO study demonstrated that applications within $100 of the maximum allowable monthly income to qualify for free or reduced price meals are more likely to contain errors (error-prone). Verifying all applications received would act as a significant barrier to participation by eligible children as has been demonstrated by a USDA study.

FOOD SAFETY

Last, but definitely not least, allow me to comment on food safety. Maintaining high food safety standards in the federal nutrition programs is critical to their success and is an ongoing high priority for ASFSA. Data shows that in the majority of schools nationwide the foodservice staff demonstrates very high standards and performance in safe handling of food. We support the public expectation that foods be handled using consistently monitored and reinforced food safety training and techniques for foodservice staff – as is found in most school meal programs across the Country. The United States has the most abundant and safest food supply in the world. But food safety it is not an area in which to take any chances, particularly when we are talking about the nation's children.

Therefore, ASFSA has outlined legislation that ensures the development and implementation of food safety systems in all schools participating in the federal school lunch program. The legislation includes funding for development of such a program, for training consistent with the program, for facility improvements necessary to meet these standards and development of a reasonable implementation time frame.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, we present to you a very full agenda for the child nutrition programs. We do appreciate that we are meeting at a very difficult time for the United States, and that the Congress has many issues to address. However, the health and well being of our children is paramount to the security and future development of our Country. It is our responsibility, as those who work in child nutrition programs, to share our views on what is needed to assure that healthful meals and nutrition education are available to all children. The success of a culture is often measured by how it nurtures its children. A traditional Masai greeting – "Kasserian Ingera" asks "and how are the children?" It is our joint responsibility to assure that the children in the United States of America are well.

We look forward to working with the Committee, and the Congress, on the 2003 child nutrition reauthorization legislation. We would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you very much for your continuing support of child nutrition.

promar International

SCHOOL MILK PILOT TEST:
Estimating the Effects of National Implementation

The National Dairy Council® and the American School Food Service Association sponsored a pilot study to test improvements to school milk and determine whether milk consumption, participation in school meal programs and other important nutritional measures could be positively affected by school milk. The enhanced school milk program included upgraded packaging, more flavor variety, better merchandising, additional sales venues and more effective refrigeration. The **School Milk Pilot Test** (SMPT) was conducted in 146 schools (99 test schools and 47 control schools) and included over 100,000 students.

Promar International analyzed the SMPT results and estimated the effects of implementing these measures nationwide. If all schools used the SMPT guidelines to improve their school milk:

- Milk sales would rise 15% in elementary schools and 22% in secondary schools, a total increase of 63 million gallons of milk annually.
- Participation in the school meals programs would increase by 430,000 students.
- In addition to these new participants, about 2.1 million students who already participate in the meals programs would become milk drinkers.
- By adopting and maintaining healthy diets during their lifetimes, the 2.6 million students most directly affected by these changes would be expected to reduce their risk of six major health conditions. Depending on the condition, coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, colorectal cancer, osteoporosis, stroke and hypertension, risk of the disease could be reduced by 20-50%.
- In adopting healthy diets and lowering the risk of illnesses as they grow older, these students would lower the direct and indirect healthcare costs associated with the six health conditions by an estimated $0.8 to $1.1 billion (present value) per year.
- Increased participation in school meals programs would lead to higher federal reimbursements and commodity entitlements of about $104 million per year.
- Changes in packaging, labeling and distribution of upgraded products would add an estimated 2.2¢ to 4.4¢ to the cost of production. Nationally, these costs would amount to $161-$308 million per year.

Promar's full report – which identifies all key assumptions and the sources for each – is available on request by contacting Camellia Patey at camelliap@rosedmi.com.

American School Food Service Association NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL

ASFSA Proposal On Food Safety in Schools

The American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) is committed to the highest standards of food safety. This includes a belief that the most effective means of ensuring food safety is in utilization of safe food handling and preparation techniques that minimize environmental risks as well as improving school foodservice facilities that have deteriorated due to lack of resources. To promote these food safety standards, ASFSA seeks legislation that all school foodservice programs develop and implement a systemized approach to food safety, including HACCP components.

Data shows that in the majority of schools nationwide the food service staff demonstrates very high standards and performance in safe handling of food. Growing participation in school meals shows that these programs have earned the trust of their communities. We support the public expectation that foods be handled using consistently monitored and reinforced food safety training and techniques for foodservice staff. Therefore, ASFSA presents this proposal as an effective means of further ensuring the safety and reliability of the school meal programs.

There are a variety of resources available to assist schools in designing a food safety system. Development of, and training to maintain an effective food safety system requires additional resources. Therefore, ASFSA recommends that funds be provided for school food service staff training and assistance, through grants to state agencies and to other organizations able to provide the support needed for this purpose. For technical assistance and training, ASFSA proposes that $10,000,000 per year be made available (mandatory funds) for these grants.

In some cases, schools district facilities utilized for storing product and preparing and serving school meals have fallen into such disrepair as to pose a risk of environmental contamination. Therefore, ASFSA recommends funds be made available to schools for rehabilitation and modernization of food storage, preparation and service facilities. ASFSA proposes that such sums as may be necessary be made available (mandatory funding) for the purpose of school food service facilities im-

provements. These funds would be awarded through grants based upon the needs of individual school district food service programs.

Developing an effective food safety system requires a commitment of staff time and resources by School Food Authorities (SFA). Therefore, ASFSA recommends that a timetable for implementation of a systemized approach to food safety, including HACCP components, be developed that will provide sufficient time for design, development and training. Such a timetable should take into account the resources available to individual school districts including such factors as district size and the availability of local and regional support.

Timetable specifics shall be determined by a panel of state agency and school food authority staff within each USDA region to assure that demographics, resources and support are identified prior to determining an implementation deadline.

TESTIMONY OF ROBERT GREENSTEIN
Executive Director, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

before the
Senate Agriculture Committee
March 4, 2003

I appreciate the invitation to testify here today. I am Robert Greenstein, executive director of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a nonprofit policy institute that conducts research and analysis on government programs and policies at both federal and state levels. I have maintained a keen interest in the child nutrition programs, and been engaged in work relating to these programs, for 30 years. In the late 1970s, I also served as Administrator of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

The Agriculture Committee faces a number of issues in this year's child nutrition legislation. My testimony today focuses primarily on one issue, which I would regard as one of the most important issues and also one of the most challenging — the need to reduce the certification of ineligible children for free and reduced-price school meals without causing significant numbers of *eligible* low-income children to lose these meals. I will first touch briefly on one of the Committee's outstanding successes of recent decades in the child nutrition arena — the use of competitive bidding to contain costs in the WIC program — and then turn to the school meals issue.

Competitive Bidding in the WIC Program

In 1988, Congress established a competitive bidding requirement for the purchase of infant formula in the WIC program. This provision, enacted with the strong support of the Reagan Administration, has been one of the most successful cost containment reforms instituted in any federal health-related program. Some brief discussion of this reform is in order, since there are indications that elements of the infant formula industry have begun to mount a lobbying effort to weaken or overturn it.

The competitive bidding requirement was enacted after a decade in which infant formula prices mounted much faster than either general inflation or food-price inflation, pushing federal WIC costs up substantially. To address these soaring costs, several states decided to harness the power of the free market by applying to the purchase of infant formula for WIC a basic principle that both private industry and government agencies routinely use — competitive bidding, under which the bidder who offers a quality product for the lowest price wins the business. Competitive bidding for infant formula is especially well-suited to WIC, since the infant formula products of all manufacturers are nutritionally equivalent.

The two largest infant formula companies (Ross Laboratories, a subsidiary of Abbot Laboratories, and Mead Johnson, a subsidiary of Bristol-Myers Squibb) vigorously opposed the introduction of competitive bidding in WIC in the 1980s. In fact, these companies refused to submit bids when the first states sought to institute competitive bidding and almost derailed this reform at the outset. A third, smaller company began to submit bids, however, and to win state

contracts. This soon resulted in all three companies submitting bids when a state instituted competitive bidding and competing for WIC contracts in these states.

Nevertheless, major roadblocks to this reform remained. The two major companies worked aggressively to persuade states *not* to institute competitive bidding. To head off competitive bidding, they developed an alternative, watered-down form of cost containment. In states that adopted the weaker alternative approach, there was no competitive bidding, and all companies could sell their products through the WIC program. Companies that elected to do so would voluntarily agree to provide discounts to state WIC programs. Studies by the General Accounting Office, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and USDA found that state WIC programs that adopted the alternative, industry-designed system paid far more for infant formula than states using competitive bidding.

Even so, a substantial number of states adopted the alternative system, rather than competitive bidding. WIC food costs are borne entirely by the federal government; no state funds are involved. In addition, competitive bidding was a new practice, and establishing it required some additional effort. This created an opening for industry lobbying efforts in the states, which often met little opposition from other interests. In some states, the infant formula companies successfully offered grant funds to state health commissioners to use on any health project the commissioner saw fit in return for the commissioner's agreeing to adopt the industry-favored approach to WIC cost containment, rather than competitive bidding.

Facing this situation, this Committee, its counterpart committee in the House, and the Reagan Administration acted. The 1988 child nutrition reauthorization legislation required state WIC programs to use competitive bidding for the purchase of infant formula for the WIC program. The legislation allowed states to use an alternative cost containment system in lieu of competitive bidding if the state could show USDA that the alternative approach would save as much money. In the 14 years this law has been on the books, no state has used an alternative approach. The reason is simple: no alternative comes close to matching competitive bidding in containing costs.

Since the competitive bidding requirement was instituted, states have gained extensive experience with the bidding process and with administering the contracts. The result has been substantial savings. USDA reports that use of competitive bidding reduces federal WIC costs by approximately $1.5 billion a year. Without these economies, either the federal government would have to spend $1.5 billion more each year to serve the same number of women, infants, and children in WIC or state WIC programs would have to cut the number of women, infants, and children they serve by more than 25 percent.

It thus is essential that Congress not remove or weaken the competitive bidding requirement. Unfortunately, infant formula company representatives apparently are suggesting that something like that be done. The language they use can be somewhat antiseptic: they speak of replacing "sole source" infant formula contracts with "multi-source" contracts. "Sole-source" is simply a term for competitive bidding; under competitive bidding, the low bidder wins the contract, and the state thus contracts with one company. "Multi-source" is a euphemism for a system under which a company need *not* be the low bidder to sell its products through WIC. And if there isn't a competitive system in which the low bidder wins, there is not much incentive for companies to submit low bids or provide large discounts in the first place.

There is good reason that when the Pentagon wants to build a new aircraft or USDA wants to buy ground beef for the school lunch program, competitive bidding is used. Competitive bidding harnesses the competition that is the heart of our free market system. To weaken the competitive bidding requirement that has been such an outstanding success in the WIC program would be a serious mistake, especially at a time when the federal government faces large budget deficits for many years to come.

Issues Related to Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price School Lunches

In most programs that limit benefits to families or individuals who are below certain income levels, "errors" occur — that is, some people who are ineligible because their incomes exceed the income limits receive the benefits. The school lunch program is no exception to this phenomenon. But how to address this issue in the school lunch program presents a particularly difficult set of challenges.

In approaching this matter, three questions stand out:

1. What do we know about the magnitude and causes of this problem?
2. What have been the results of efforts tried or tested in the past to reduce the participation of ineligible schoolchildren, and in particular, how have these efforts affected participation by *eligible* children?
3. Finally, how can the school lunch program reduce participation by children who are ineligible for free or reduced-price meals without causing large numbers of *eligible* children to lose these meal benefits?

With the Committee's indulgence, I'd like to take these questions out of order and address the second question first.

Effects of Expanded Verification in the School Lunch Program

One possible response to school lunch certification error is to expand the verification of free and reduced-price meal applications. Right now children are certified based on income reported on meal applications at the start of the school year. By December 15, school districts are required to seek current income documentation from for a sample of 3 percent of the approved applicants. If a family does not respond, the children stop receiving free or reduced-price meals. If the family provides income documentation, a new determination is made about whether the children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. There is some useful information on the impacts of expanding income verification requirements. This information comes from three sources.

- Major nationally representative demonstration projects, conducted in the 1980s, that tested expanded verification approaches in the school lunch program. Unfortunately, no nationally representative demonstrations have been conducted since then.

- More modest pilot projects that the Food and Nutrition Service has been conducting the last few years. These pilots are limited to schools that volunteered to participate in the pilots and thus are *not* nationally representative. This limits the usefulness of the data from these pilots. For example, the pilot that is testing the effects of expanded verification efforts does not include any schools from a major metropolitan area.

- Data on the verification procedures that are currently in use in the school meals programs. A nationally representative study of the verification process was conducted in 1987; the current verification process was in place at that time. More recently, in 2000, USDA collected information on some of the impacts of the current procedures from 19 states.

The one striking finding that emerges from these data is that attempts to use verification in the school lunch program have run into a major problem — large percentages of the families sent notices to provide pay stubs or other documentation of their income to the school have not responded, and the children in these families have had their free or reduced-price meals terminated as a consequence.

- Three of every four children (74 percent) whose free or reduced-price meals have been terminated under the existing verification procedures were terminated *not* because they were found ineligible, but because of lack of response by their families to a request for verification.

- In fact, one of every three children selected for verification under the existing system (34 percent) is terminated due to non-response.

- The current FNS pilot tests are finding similar results. In the pilot that is testing expanded verification procedures, an average of 33 percent of the children subject to verification were terminated due to non-response.

What makes these figures particularly alarming is that the available data suggest that a *very large share of the children terminated due to non-response are, in fact, eligible*. The degree to which children terminated because of non-response were eligible was examined in the nationally representative demonstration projects conducted in the 1980s and the 1987 study of the verification process.

- In the 1987 study, 81 percent of those who did not respond and were terminated were subsequently found to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals. (Some 59 percent of the non-responders were receiving correct meal benefits. Another 14 percent were certified for free meals but were eligible for reduced-price meals, while eight percent were certified for reduced-price meals but were eligible for free meals. When children are terminated because of non-response, they lose all meal benefits.)

- Similarly, in the earlier pilot study, 86 percent of the children who lost benefits because their families did not respond were found to be eligible.

The percentage of children terminated for non-response who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals may be somewhat lower today, but the percentage likely remains quite high. This raises grave concern about proposals to expand verification substantially, at least until we can learn how to change the verification process to bring non-response rates down dramatically among eligible families. Indeed, it was as a result of these disturbing findings that the Reagan Administration rejected options to require wide-scale verification and established the current verification system instead, under which 3 percent of approved meal applications are subject to verification each year.

Accordingly, research needs to be conducted to learn more about why there is so much non-response among eligible families and to test and identify effective ways to lower the non-response rates. Several factors appear to be at work here.

The studies conducted in the 1980s found that many non-responding parents had no recollection of ever receiving a notice asking them to submit verification of their incomes. Significant numbers of non-responders also reported that they could not understand the language in the notice or were not fluent in English.

A key factor here appears to be that unlike in most other means-tested programs, the school lunch verification process involves no personal contact between parents and school officials. In most other means-tested programs, a parent sits across a table or a desk from a caseworker who explains what the parent needs to do and what type of documentation the parent needs to provide and answers questions that the parent may have. Not only does none of this occur in the school lunch verification process, but there generally is no follow-up phone call when a parent who has been sent a verification notice does not respond. (Another possible factor is that for some families, there may be a stigma factor or fears about confidentiality in submitting pay stubs to their children's school.)

Potential Effects of Greatly Expanded Verification Requirements

This year, for the first time since the 1980s, policymakers are again considering how to reduce the participation of ineligible children in the school lunch program. This is an area that needs attention but that also is fraught with risks of substantial adverse effects on children. Let me share a few more figures with you.

- Suppose Congress were to require that all free or reduced-price meal applications be verified. Suppose also that the non-response rate were reduced from its current level of about 33 percent to 25 percent and that only 40 percent (rather than 80 percent) of the non-responders were eligible. These are optimistic assumptions. Yet under these optimistic assumptions, *more than one million eligible low-income children* would lose free or reduced-price meals.

- If the non-response response were reduced to 30 percent and 60 percent of the non-responders were eligible, the number of eligible low-income children who would lose benefits under a universal verification requirement would *exceed two million*.

These disturbing figures indicate that there is a great need for new, nationally representative demonstration projects to test a variety of approaches to learn both how to reduce

participation by ineligible children *and* how to reduce non-response rates and avoid harming needy, eligible children. My first recommendation in this area for this year's reauthorization legislation is to mount such demonstrations, without delay.

What Do We Know About the Extent to Which Ineligible Children Are Being Improperly Certified for Free or Reduced-price Meals?

In programs such as food stamps, welfare, and Medicaid, error rates are or have been determined by selecting a sample of participating families and conducting an audit of their circumstances. There are no similar data on error rates in the school lunch program. There are simply no reliable data — in fact, there are not even reliable estimates — of the proportion of children who are incorrectly certified for free or reduced-price meals either because their families underreport income (or incorrectly report other household circumstances) on a school meals application or because the school certifies them for meal benefits when, based on the information in the application, it should not have done so.

Facing these data limitations, FNS has attempted to use comparisons to Census data to examine this matter. One such FNS comparison has now made its way into the media. FNS compared the number of children certified for free school meals for the 1998-1999 school year by October 31, 1998 to the number of school children that an annual Census survey indicated had *annual* incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line (the free meal income limit) for *calendar year 1999*. FNS found there were 15,876,000 free meal certifications as of October 31, 1998, compared to 12,464,000 schoolchildren with annual incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line in calendar year 1999. The first number — the number of free meal certifications — is 27 percent larger than the second number (the number of children with annual incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line in 1999). This has led some who have heard these figures, including some journalists, to conclude that FNS has found a 27 percent error rate.

Yet such a conclusion is mistaken. These data are not evidence of a 27 percent error rate. There are two types of problems with the assumption that these figures indicate a 27 percent error rate. I will cover the smaller set of problems first and then the more fundamental set of problems.

First, even if this comparison could be viewed as a proper measurement of the error rate, it would show a 21 percent error rate for free meals, not a 27 percent error rate. If there are 27 ineligible children out of every 127 receiving free meals, the ineligibility rate would be 27/127, or 21 percent.

Second, the aforementioned data apply to free meals only. When FNS conducted the same comparison for free *and reduced-price* certifications *combined* (that is, when FNS compared the number of free or reduced-price meal certifications as of October 31, 1998 to the number of children the Census survey estimated to have annual incomes below 185 percent of the poverty line for calendar year 1999), FNS found these numbers nearly matched. The number of free and reduced-price meal certifications exceeded the number of children in the Census estimates by only two percent.

The More Basic Problem

The more fundamental problem with this comparison is that the Census data in question substantially understate the number of children eligible for free meals. School lunch eligibility is based on *monthly* income, not annual income. Free meal approvals as of October 31 of a school year include applications that are based on household incomes in August, applications based on household incomes in September, and applications based on October incomes that were submitted a month or two into the school year by families whose incomes have just fallen. Census data on monthly income show that the number of children with incomes below the free meal income limit in any one of these months significantly exceeds the number with *annual* income below the free-meal income limits.

Furthermore, the FNS comparison involves comparing the number of meal certifications in the *fall of 1998* to household incomes for *calendar year 1999*. Yet half of calendar year 1999 came after the 1998-1999 school year was over. Other Census data show that between 1998 and 1999, poverty fell significantly, as unemployment declined and wages for low-income workers rose. Since significantly fewer families were poor in 1999 than in 1998, use of income data for 1999 to assess the accuracy of meal certifications conducted in 1998 results in further distortion.

A similar problem arose a few years ago in the WIC program. FNS had been using the same set of Census data on annual incomes to estimate the number of people eligible for WIC. Based on these data, it appeared that more than 100 percent of the eligible infants were participating. Recognizing that there were questions about the validity of using these Census data to estimate the number of people eligible for WIC (and about other aspects of its WIC eligibility estimates), FNS commissioned the National Research Council to convene an expert panel to investigate this matter. In a report issued in 2001, the National Research Council found that the use of Census data on annual incomes to estimate the number of people eligible for WIC resulted in a sizeable underestimate of the number of eligible people. The National Research Council reported that "the current method of using annual income to estimate eligibility results in an underestimate of the number of infants and children eligible for WIC."[1]

The National Research Council developed an alternative, more accurate estimate of the WIC eligible population, using a different Census Bureau survey that tracks *monthly* income. The National Research Council found that when the more accurate estimate was used, the number of infants participating in WIC no longer exceeded the number estimated to be eligible.

The same problems that applied to using Census data on annual, rather than monthly, income to estimate the number of infants and children eligible for WIC apply to using the Census data on annual income to estimate the number of children eligible for free school meals. Both WIC and the school lunch program use essentially the same set of rules regarding how families are supposed to report their incomes when applying for benefits. And both programs tell families to apply based on their *monthly* incomes, not their annual incomes.

In a recent meeting that Zoe Neuberger (now on our staff, formerly OMB's budget examiner for child nutrition) and I had with FNS analysts, there was agreement that use of Census data on monthly incomes (which comes from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and

[1] National Research Council, *Estimating Eligibility and Participation for the WIC Program*, 2001.

Program Participation) would provide a better measure of the number of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals than the annual income data that FNS has been using (which comes from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey). FNS analysts thought that use of two months of Census data on household incomes — data for August and September, the months when most school lunch applications are filled out — would be a good measure.

Unfortunately, the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, which contains the monthly income data, is more difficult and expensive to use than the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, which reports income over a calendar year. Until a few weeks ago, no analysis of the number of children eligible for free meals based on their family's income in August or September was available. In the past week, that has changed.

John Karl Scholz, Director of the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin (a noted poverty institute that was recently awarded a major poverty research grant by HHS) has been able to use his Institute's Census models to examine this question. His findings are illuminating.

- The number of children with incomes below 130 percent of the poverty line, based on their families' monthly income in August or September 1998, was *2.8 million greater* than the number of children whose annual incomes for calendar 1999 were below the 130 percent threshold.

- This large difference reflects the difference between basing estimates of the number of children eligible for free school meals on monthly income in the months when meal certifications are conducted and basing such estimates on annual income. This large disparity also reflects the difference between using income for the late summer and early fall of 1998 and using income for the following calendar year, when poverty and unemployment had declined to significantly lower levels.

Based on these new data, it now appears that the comparison showing 27 percent more children certified for free meals than were eligible for such meals is fatally flawed, due to its comparison of free meal certifications made in the fall of 1998 to annual incomes in calendar year 1999. As just noted, when the number of children eligible for free meals in the months in which the free meal certifications were conducted is compared to the number of children certified, 2.8 million more children are found to have been eligible — and as a result, most of the 27 percent "overage" disappears.

Most of the 27 percent "overage" thus appears to be an artifact of comparing meal certifications in the fall of 1998 to Census data on annual incomes in 1999. Yet that should not be taken to mean that there is a little or no error in the school lunch program. Suppose the number of children certified for free meals exactly matched the number of children estimated to be eligible for those meals. This exact match could still mask a significant error rate. Suppose only 90 percent of the children eligible for free meals had signed up for them. If the number of children certified for free meals and the number of children eligible for free meals were identical but only 90 percent of those who were eligible had actually enrolled, the other 10 percent of the enrollees would consist of ineligible children. (There are not reliable data, however, on the percentage of eligible children that are certified.)

At present, there are no good data on the proportion of free and reduced-price meal approvals that are erroneous. Based on the data that are available, the problem appears to be significant and warrants attention, but is probably significantly below the 27 percent level. USDA Undersecretary Eric Bost recently expressed a similar view, stating that he believed the 27 percent figure was too high but that the problem was significant.

The Causes of the Problem

Adding to the complexity of this issue is the fact that there are two very different kinds of "errors."

- One type of error results from inaccurate certifications. Inaccurate certifications can result either from misreporting of income on applications by parents or from mishandling of applications by schools.
- The other type of error consists of cases in which a child was *correctly* certified for free or reduced-price school meals, but the family's income rose later in the school year and climbed above the free or reduced-price income limits.

There are virtually no data available that distinguish these two types of errors. From a policy perspective, however, these two types of cases are distinct and should be treated very differently.

Increasingly, major means-tested benefit programs are moving to make children eligible for benefits for 12-month periods, rather than trying to track month-to-month fluctuations in the incomes of low-income families. The incomes of low-income working families can change significantly from month to month. For example, many such families do not have paid sick leave, so illness can lower their income and recovery can raise it. For other low-income working parents, the number of hours of work in a month can vary depending on employer needs, child care availability, and other factors.

In Medicaid and SCHIP (the State Children's Health Insurance Program), many states now certify children for 12-month periods, based on their monthly income at the start of the period. Last year's Farm Bill moved the Food Stamp Program in a similar direction, allowing states to fix benefits for households for six months at a time.

Medicaid, SCHIP, and the food stamps program — which employ tens of thousands of caseworkers and incur administrative costs of some billions of dollars a year — have taken these steps because they have found they simply are not able to keep up with households' monthly income fluctuations. If these programs, with their much larger infrastructures and bureaucracies, cannot track such income fluctuations, it should come as no surprise that the school lunch program — which has no comparable bureaucracy — cannot do so either.

On paper, school lunch regulations call for changes in households' monthly income or household composition to be reported to schools and acted upon. In the real world, as USDA acknowledges, this rule has never been enforced or implemented, because schools cannot administer it. Part of the school lunch error rate consequently consists of cases where a child was properly certified for free meals, but the child's parent increased his or her earnings later in the year to a level exceeding the free meal income limit or another adult moved in or out of the

household and changed the relationship of the household's income to the poverty line, which is based on family size. (In many cases, the income of such families rises from the free meal income range to the reduced-price income range.) If the child's eligibility is checked later in the year as part of a study or as part of the verification process, the child appears ineligible for free meals. Yet the child was correctly certified at the year's start, and there is no administratively feasible system for schools to shift children back and forth between meal categories each month as family income fluctuates.

I believe that policymakers should separate these cases from the others. The policy goal should be to make meal certifications as accurate as possible at the start of the school year without causing large numbers of eligible children to lose benefits. Once children are properly certified, their eligibility should last for the full school year.

Providing eligibility for the school year is how the program has always operated. It does not make sense to maintain in the Code of Federal Regulations an unrealistic rule that cannot be implemented, and then to tar the program as having more "errors" because the rule departs from reality.

What to Do?

In the absence of better information on many aspects of this problem — and especially on how to reduce participation by ineligible children without deterring eligible children — it is difficult to determine exactly what to do. We badly need demonstration projects to identify solutions. Research and demonstration projects need to be a major part of the approach to the problem. Nevertheless, there are some steps that can be identified and taken now.

- ***Mandate and expand "direct certification"*** — Currently, schools may "directly certify" children whose families are receiving food stamps or TANF cash assistance. This makes sense; the TANF and Food Stamp Programs conduct verification of their own. USDA studies have found extremely low school meal error rates among children who are directly certified.

  It makes sense to require that direct certification be used everywhere, except where schools can show this to be administratively infeasible. The President's budget includes such a recommendation.

  In addition, it makes sense to extend direct certification, at state option, so children enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP can be directly certified. Many children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals are enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP but not in TANF or food stamps. Since Medicaid and SCHIP conduct income verification, the school meals program can piggyback on that. This will further lower error rates without deterring eligible children.

  State income limits in Medicaid and SCHIP vary. Our recommendation is that states in which Medicaid and/or SCHIP income limits are near the income limits for free meals or reduced-price meals be allowed to directly certify children enrolled in Medicaid or SCHIP. States that have higher Medicaid or SCHIP income limits also should be permitted to use direct certification through

Medicaid and/or SCHIP *if* they are able to generate lists of Medicaid or SCHIP children whose incomes are in the free meal or reduced-price meal income ranges.

- ***Improve the accuracy of school meal certifications by intensifying the verification of applications that show incomes only modestly under the free or reduced-price income limits.*** A GAO study in the 1980s found that when verification efforts were targeted on applications that reported income within $100 a month of the free or reduced-price income limits, they identified a significantly higher number of ineligible households than when a random sample of applications was drawn. Applications with reported income within $100 of the limits may reflect common mistakes such as multiplying weekly income by 4 instead of by 4.3. Schools could be required to verify a larger percentage of applications that show income in these income ranges.

- ***Reform the verification procedures to reduce dramatically the non-response rates among eligible families.*** That so many eligible children selected for verification lose benefits due to non-response should be considered a failing of the current system. Reforms are needed. For example, school meal applications should provide a phone number that parents can call for assistance over the phone or in person. Schools or school districts should be required to make at least one attempt to contact by phone any household that does not respond to a verification notice. Mechanisms also are needed so that parents with children in different schools do not have to submit the same documents to multiple schools. Applications and verification notices need to be available in languages other than English where there are significant numbers of non-English speaking families. Special procedures are likely to be needed for homeless children. Federal free or reduced-price meal reimbursements will need to be adjusted to cover the additional administrative expenses involved in taking steps to lower non-response rates.

- ***Modify the unrealistic rules that, on paper, call for children to be moved back and forth between meal categories as family income fluctuates over the school year.*** Once properly certified, children should remain eligible for the school year.

- ***Conduct a vigorous program of research and demonstrations to test both these measures and other steps.*** We need to learn the most effective, cost-efficient ways to reduce the non-response rate. We need to evaluate whether verifying more applications that come in modestly below the free or reduced-price income limits turns out to be cost-effective. And we need to test and evaluate other error-reduction approaches. The goal is to find ways to reduce participation by ineligible children without losing eligible children.

The final principle I'd suggest underlies all others. Care should be taken that in seeking to reduce ineligible certifications, we do not violate the Hippocratic Oath of "Do No Harm." The nation's children are among its most valuable resources. It would be tragic if efforts to reduce erroneous certifications resulted in large numbers of needy children losing benefits, with adverse consequences for their nutrition and health and their educational attainment.

Testimony of
Susan Borra
Immediate Past-President, American Dietetic Association
on
Healthy Children in the School Nutrition Programs
before the
Senate Agriculture Committee
March 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role school nutrition programs can play on children's health. My name is Susan Borra and I am the immediate past-president of the American Dietetic Association (ADA). I am here representing my fellow members of ADA -- 67,000 food and nutrition professionals. ADA is the largest organization of its kind and it is guided by a philosophy based on sound science and evidence-based practice. ADA members work on nearly every aspect of food, nutrition and health, here and around the globe. One in six of ADA's members are employed in a public health setting, including school food service, and they bring their unique training and skills that integrate nutrition and safe food handling into public programs.

I will describe to the Committee the prevalence, influences and implications of childhood overweight and obesity. My comments reflect consumer research focused on children, parents and teachers regarding overweight and obesity and ADA's recommendation for the role schools can play. ADA believes that the most effective strategy in addressing obesity through the school nutrition programs is a three pronged approach: trained professionals in decision-making roles, nutrition standards with accountability and nutrition education that is evaluated and complements the ability to select a healthful diet with foods that are served in the school nutrition programs.

ADA has focused attention on the issue of obesity – particularly healthy weights for children. You have heard the statistics:

- Childhood overweight and obesity is at an all-time high in the United States.
- Obesity rates have tripled in school-age children and adolescents since 1970.
- Sixty percent of overweight children have at least one adverse cardiovascular disease risk factor such as high cholesterol, triglycerides or blood pressure.
- Research shows that overweight children frequently become overweight adults.
- Americans are spending more than $100 billion in direct and indirect costs annually to treat obesity and associated chronic disease and these costs are rising dramatically.

Overweight and obesity is a chronic disease that occurs when people consume more calories than they expend. Genetic, social, cultural and environmental influences contribute to the imbalance of calorie consumption and energy expenditure – affecting where, when and what we eat, declining physical activity and increasing sedentary lifestyles. Children and adolescents are not immune from those influences. The dietary intake of many children does not meet federal nutrition guidelines. For example, fewer than 15 percent of school children eat the recommended servings of fruit, and only 30 percent consume the recommended milk group servings. Children of all ages also spend more free time in sedentary activities at home and in school. If these trends continue, children's ability to learn and grow to their full potential may be affected. The fact that more than half of all children in the United States eat breakfast, lunch or a snack at school demonstrates the degree to which schools can support the development of life long balanced nutritional and exercise habits.

Researchers who have studied overweight and obesity agree that successful intervention will require a multifaceted approach. They also agree that successful prevention and treatment of obesity in childhood could reduce the adult incidence of chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease. Research specific to the role federal nutrition programs in obesity prevention is extremely limited, yet it would be helpful in designing effective interventions.

ADA has invested in numerous projects to understand more about childhood overweight and obesity. In qualitative research we found people do not seem to connect the relationship between overweight and chronic disease. Children and adolescents focus on appearance, but they are not focused on health. Their concerns about weight generally arise as the result of failed athletic performance (more for boys) or dissatisfaction with appearance (more for girls). When children and adolescents try to change their eating behavior to lose weight, they say they skip meals rather than modify their eating habits in healthy ways.

Research shows that parents generally do not recognize the potential long-term health problems for overweight children. Parents hesitate to take action regarding their children's weight, because they believe their children will outgrow their weight problem. Many parents are disengaged from their kids' eating habits and only recognize weight as an issue when acute health problems arise or when it is extreme enough to prevent their children from keeping up physically or socially with their peers. And, they say they lack knowledge about how to help children control their weight and they fear that their intervention could cause other unhealthy eating disorders, such as anorexia.

Teachers recognize that their overweight students are less active, less confident, less popular with peers and oftentimes, more pessimistic about their lives compared to children of normal weight. Teachers consider it essential that parents support healthy lifestyles at home. However, they see little continuity between lessons on healthy living at school and lifestyle outside their classrooms.

Clearly children, parents and teachers need resources to deal with the issues of healthy weight. Government, academia, the health community and industry all have roles to play in addressing the factors contributing to this national epidemic. ADA believes that planning and coordination of activities are vital if rapid progress is to be made and sustained.

School nutrition programs offer a unique opportunity to positively impact this complex issue. Schools may have the best opportunity to influence health and nutrition habits because students spend such a large portion of their day in school.

We conclude that much more than lunch is on the table in the school lunch program. Developing children's knowledge and building healthy eating behaviors must be considered and supported. The school nutrition programs are a logical focal point of what should be a comprehensive effort to help kids remain healthy for life by making sound choices about eating and exercising.

ADA believes that the most effective strategy in addressing obesity through the school nutrition programs is a three pronged approach: trained professionals in decision-making roles, nutrition standards with accountability and nutrition education that is evaluated and complements the ability to select a healthful diet with foods that are served in the school nutrition programs.

Well-designed and effectively implemented school-based nutrition education is essential to helping children improve nutrition knowledge, attitudes and behavior. The complexities of the food environment coupled with dynamic family structures and increasing independence of children, underscore the need for enhanced nutrition education efforts in schools.

ADA believes that nutrition education needs to be strengthened and promoted in school nutrition programs by adding a state-level infrastructure and networking component to the existing Team Nutrition program. This would allow better coordination of nutrition education activities across states and districts. It would also provide the programs consistency and the ability to conduct evaluations to determine effectiveness and enhance program operations.

Education efforts are likely to be more effective when combined with positive changes to the school environment, like improving the quality of school meals and promoting more fruits and vegetables. Planning menus and foodservice for children of different ages, preferences, activity levels, cultural backgrounds, and special needs is a complex and challenging task. The difficulty of achieving nutrition standards for school nutrition programs is indicated in research documenting problems in foodservice and these same studies verify that standards alone are not enough. Other research suggests that child-care programs with access to dietetics professionals produce higher-quality meals.

ADA believes that it should be required that the Director of the School Nutrition Program at the district level obtain a national certification such as Registered Dietitian, Dietetic Technician, Registered, American School Food Service Association School

Food and Nutrition Specialist certification, or other certifications deemed appropriate by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Selling competitive foods with a low ratio of nutrients to energy in schools contradicts nutrition education taught in the classroom and sends children the message that nutrition is not important. While some competitive foods might be low fat and healthy, the majority of competitive foods offered in schools are high in calories and fat and low in nutrients. It is inevitable that in today's school environment, consumption of these widely available competitive foods can negatively affect children's diets. The school environment should support and reinforce nutrition education in the classroom.

ADA believes the Secretary of USDA should appoint an advisory committee to develop universal nutrition standards for all foods and beverages served on school campuses in order to promote food choices that contribute to a healthy eating pattern. This committee should be comprised of persons with interest and specific expertise in child nutrition and health, dietetics, and school food service and operations. When these guidelines are developed, the Secretary should have the authority to enforce these guidelines.

A recent report by the National Research Council suggests that USDA research needs to focus on improving the understanding of food-consumption behavior and its links to health. This research is essential for designing effective nutritional policies and programs.

Nutrition -- one of the most cost-effective preventive treatments available to the American public -- remains a minor priority in federal research funding, with approximately four cents of every $100 spent on health care in the United States

directed toward nutrition research. Between 1965 and 1995, the proportion of health research and development funded by federal sources dropped by almost half to 37.4 percent of the total $35.8 billion expended. ADA encourages increased funding for school nutrition program research.

Addressing obesity through the school nutrition programs by placing trained professionals in decision-making roles, implementing nutrition standards with accountability and providing nutrition education program that is evaluated and complements the ability to select a healthful diet with foods that are served in the school nutrition programs can be an effective strategy. While making changes to the school nutrition programs won't solve the nation's obesity problems, changes today can contribute to disease prevention.

Thank you for the opportunity to describe this national epidemic, the attitudes of children, parents and teachers, and to lay the groundwork of thought toward making school nutrition programs a resource in the national strategy focused on prevention of overweight and obesity among American children.

School Food Programs: Competitive Foods and Nutrition Education

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www.eatright.org

Healthy eating patterns in childhood and adolescence promote optimal health, growth and intellectual development. Studies show children perform better in school when they have appropriate nutritional intake. Significant health problems, such as iron deficiency anemia, renal disease, eating disorders and dental problems can be prevented with a healthy diet. Dietary habits also play an important role in helping to prevent more chronic health problems such as coronary heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and osteoporosis.

Lifestyles that include healthy eating and physical activity support and sustain the maintenance of a healthy weight, for both individuals and the population as a whole, are a major focus of the American Dietetic Association (ADA) and its members. With obesity rates continuously rising—they have tripled in school-age children and adolescents since 1970—ADA will focus on obesity, including prevention of childhood obesity, as a key interest. ADA is committed to strengthen the federal nutrition programs and will focus child nutrition reauthorization efforts on enhancing nutrition education, improving environments conducive to healthy food and beverage choices and developing a comprehensive, behavior-based research agenda. ADA believes appropriately trained individuals in decision-making roles can transform these programs in ways to help children/students succeed in making healthy food and beverage choices throughout the day.*

Guiding Knowledge

ADA's work on the issues of competitive foods and nutrition education are guided by the following principles:

- School food and nutrition environments should promote energy balance, moderation and eating patterns that are consistent with the federal dietary and nutrition guidelines.
  - *Schools and communities have a shared responsibility to provide all students with access to high-quality affordable foods/beverages and nutrition services as an integral part of the total education program.*
  - *A healthy lifestyle can be achieved when a variety of foods and beverages are consumed in moderation with appropriate portions and balanced with adequate physical activity.*
  - *Foods and beverages available and consumed by children in schools should contribute to dietary patterns consistent with Federal and national nutrition recommendations and guidelines (e.g. Dietary Reference Intakes, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and the Food Guide Pyramid) and contribute to the development of lifelong, healthy eating habits.*
- School nutrition personnel are integral to food service systems and should be appropriately certified and possess principles and knowledge in food and nutrition.
  - *The knowledge and skills required of school food and nutrition program professionals are rigorous, diverse, and comparable to the depth of knowledge required in other educational disciplines.*
  - *No other aspect of school administration is required to operate a self-supporting business within the framework of service delivery. Cost-effective school food service requires precise skills to balance student satisfaction and nutritional needs.*
- Students can be taught optimal dietary practices and incorporate that knowledge into their lives. School-based nutrition education is vital for many students to learn healthy eating patterns.
  - *Developing life-long healthful lifestyles and behaviors requires education and an environment to support healthy food habits and physical activity.*
  - *Educational goals, including the nutrition goals of the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program, should be supported and extended through policies at the federal, state, and local levels that create an overall school environment with learning experiences that enable students to develop lifelong, healthful eating habits.*
- A comprehensive research agenda is essential to address the needs of school nutrition programs. The following areas represent research priorities of the Association.
  - *Effectiveness of nutrition and lifestyle change interventions.*
  - *Prevention and treatment of childhood obesity and associated chronic diseases.*
  - *Translation of research into nutrition interventions and programs.*
  - *Access to safe and secure food supply.*
  - *Cost-effective delivery of food and nutrition programs at the local, state, and federal levels.*
  - *Evaluation of nutrition interventions and programs.*
  - *Dietary pattern and eating behavior and choices.*

* These are a summary of findings. A full report with scientific attributions will be published by ADA later this year.

Strategies for Addressing Competitive Foods and Nutrition Education in School Nutrition Programs

ADA supports the following strategies for addressing the school nutrition programs. ADA recommends:

- **The Secretary of Agriculture be empowered with authority to regulate all foods and beverages sold throughout the day on school premises for schools participating in the school breakfast, lunch, and after school programs.**
  - *The Secretary of USDA should appoint an advisory committee to develop universal nutrition standards for all foods and beverages served on school campuses in order to promote food choices that contribute to a healthy eating pattern. (e.g., vending, a la carte, school store options, competitive foods). This committee should be comprised of persons with interest and specific expertise in child nutrition and health, dietetics, and school food service and operations.*
    - *USDA should provide guidance to states and districts in consultation with key stakeholders, such as ADA and American School Food Service Association (ASFSA), on food and beverage contracts. All foods and beverages (including those sold in vending machines, as part of the school lunch and a la carte in the school cafeteria, in school stores and other areas where foods are sold) should comply with the universal nutrition standards and contribute to dietary patterns consistent with federal nutrition and dietary guidelines.*
  - *USDA should issue guidance to states regarding the time students have to purchase and consume meals. Guidance should highlight the need for students to have adequate time available to obtain and eat school meals. Such guidance should be tied to meal reimbursement. The USDA should work with the Department of Education to review considerations of minimum time periods once students are seated with their meals.*
  - *USDA initiatives should support fruit and vegetable intake throughout the school day.*
  - *The requirement for milk beverage should be continued; schools should have the flexibility to decide what types of milk to offer so that school meals are nutritionally and cost equivalent to current offerings. Lower-fat milk is among the healthiest choice.*
  - *Require that the Director of the School Nutrition Program at the district level obtain a national certification (ASFSA-SFNS[1], RD, DTR or other deemed appropriate by the Secretary).*
  - *The Director of the School Nutrition Program possesses the knowledge and skills and should be involved in the decision-making process on all food and beverages served on the school campus to ensure that students can make healthy food and beverage choices throughout the day.*
  - *Planning for the nutritional intake of children with special food and nutrition needs requires the biochemical and food science knowledge that only registered dietitians possess. Mandate that RDs make decisions that address the nutritional intake/needs of children with special health-care needs (e.g., allergies, diabetes, medication interaction with foods, lactose intolerant, enteral feedings, special formulas, HIV/AIDS, dialysis, etc.).*
  - *Reimbursement rates should be increased. The amount of the increase will be determined after analyzing data being collected by Government Accounting Office on meal costs. An analysis by OANE/FNS[2] for school year 2000, determined that free meal reimbursements for lunch were 6 cents short, reduced price were 36 cents short and full-paid were 18.75 cents short.*

- **Strengthening nutrition education and promotion in School Nutrition Programs.**

  Enhance nutrition education, evaluation, and the Team Nutrition program by adding a state-level infrastructure and networking component to coordinate nutrition education activities across child nutrition programs and conduct evaluations to determine effectiveness and enhance program operations.

  Well-designed and effectively implemented school-based nutrition education is essential to helping children improve nutrition knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Education efforts are likely to be more effective when combined with positive changes to the school environment, like improving the quality of school meals and promoting more fruits and vegetables. The complexities of the food environment coupled with dynamic family structures and increasing independence of children, underscore the need for enhanced nutrition education efforts in schools. Environmental changes – like increasing healthy beverage choices in vending machines - coupled with effective nutrition education, go hand in hand. The coordination of classroom and cafeteria experiences provides greater opportunities for students to practice skills and develop lifelong healthy eating habits. While nutrition education is essential to promote positive dietary habits, many programs have not been evaluated or shown to be particularly effective in bringing about positive behavior changes. While USDA's Team Nutrition program includes a number of essential components for delivering nutrition education, it is deficient in two critical areas: infrastructure and evaluation. To address these needs, ADA recommends the following enhancements to the existing Team Nutrition program:

  - *Increase funding for Team Nutrition by adding $50 million annually for the Team Nutrition infrastructure component; $10 million will go towards funding staff in each state, $10 million will go towards conducting essential evaluations of nutrition education programs, $30 million will go towards program funds, to be distributed to each state, for conducting program operations including surveillance, technical assistance, grants to local districts, etc. The current level of funding for Team Nutrition - $10 million per year – shall be maintained. Total request for this recommendation is $60 million.*

- **Increasing funding for Child Nutrition Program research.**

  This funding will:
  - *Allow FNS to conduct research on and evaluation of their programs.*
  - *Allow FNS to develop a comprehensive research agenda.*
  - *Encourage FNS to develop a research agenda with input from key stakeholders as well as an open process for all qualified researchers to bid on FNS research projects.*

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[1] ASFSA-SFNS – American School Food Service Association – School Foodservice and Nutrition Specialist. For further info regarding the qualifications please visit www.asfsa.org

[2] OANE/FNS – Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation/Food and Nutrition Service, a division of USDA.

PUBLIC POLICY STRATEGIES TO REDUCE PREVALENCE OF OBESITY/OVERWEIGHT

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Lifestyles that support and sustain the maintenance of a healthy weight, for both individuals and the population as a whole, are a major focus of the American Dietetic Association and its nearly 70,000 members. In the last 20 years, obesity rates have increased among adults in the United States by more than 60 percent. Perhaps more troubling is that rates have doubled among children and tripled among adolescents since 1980. This rapid rise in the prevalence of overweight and obesity among all segments of the U.S. population, identified by the Surgeon General as a national epidemic, is of grave concern as people's health and quality of life suffer and society's health care costs and related burdens soar.

Dietetics professionals are ideally qualified and positioned to make vital contributions toward the prevention and treatment of obesity. In their everyday roles, they translate complex nutrition principles into a vast array of healthful and appealing food options for millions of Americans. At nearly every level where professionals and institutions attempt to deal with the health and social consequences of obesity, dietetic professionals help lead the way in finding individual and national solutions. For these reasons, obesity is a primary focus of ADA's work.

GUIDING KNOWLEDGE

ADA's work on the issue of overweight and obesity is guided by the following statements:

- Obesity is a complex multifactoral chronic disease state involving interactions between genetic, physiological, psychological, metabolic, and environmental influences.
  - ✓ *The medical definition of obesity must be evidence-based, appropriate to each segment of the population, and reflect the obesity syndrome that is more than extreme levels of fatness.*
  - ✓ *The environment promotes increased consumption of calories and decreased physical activity, leading to weight gain for many individuals.*
  - ✓ *The increasing incidence of obesity and associated chronic disease is estimated to cost more than $100 billion in the United States this year, and the costs are rising.*
- Prevention and treatment strategies are both needed.
  - ✓ *Success requires life-long commitments to healthful lifestyles and behaviors -- including those that guide food habits and physical activity.*
  - ✓ *A variety of intervention options must be available to meet individual needs, including diet and lifestyle modifications, pharmacotherapy and surgery, as appropriate.*
- Prevention and treatment of obesity/overweight must be addressed in a multidisciplinary team approach.
  - ✓ *Registered dietitians (RD) and dietetic technicians registered (DTR), physicians, nurses, psychologists, exercise physiologists, pharmacists and others must work collaboratively to identify people at risk and to implement successful interventions that create awareness, teach appropriate nutrition and exercise strategies and skills and address environmental contributors to obesity and overweight at all stages of the life span.*
  - ✓ *All foods can fit into a healthful eating style as a part of a balanced diet when consumed in moderation with appropriate portion sizes, and combined with regular, adequate physical activity.*
- The nature and depth of work required to intervene effectively on an individual or community basis will require resources beyond those routinely provided today for promoting healthy lifestyles.
  - ✓ *Addressing obesity will reduce the risk for many chronic diseases and substantially reduce the millions of dollars now spent on treating diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease and knee osteoarthritis.*
- Public and private initiatives are needed to combat factors that contribute to increase in obesity.
  - ✓ *Government, academia, the health care community and the food industry all have roles to play in addressing the factors contributing to obesity and overweight. Coordination of activities and partnerships are vital if rapid progress is to be made and sustained.*

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING OVERWEIGHT/OBESITY

ADA supports the following strategies for addressing the epidemic:

- **Promote healthy weight for children.**

ADA urges a comprehensive strategy for reducing the number of overweight children, with particular emphasis on family and community-based interventions that promote healthful eating practices and daily physical activity. As effective programs and programmatic elements are identified, family, school and community-based physical activity and nutrition education efforts should be implemented and expanded.

- **Designate obesity a disease by federal agencies and insurers.**

This designation would lead to system changes for reimbursement and include sanctioned insurance coverage for obesity treatment. This means that all categories of obesity defined under the ICD-9 codes would be covered, not just surgical intervention for the morbidly obese.

- **Support multidisciplinary health initiatives over a substantial period of time, with registered dietetic professionals placed to bring their particular knowledge and skills to bear.**

Interventions must be carefully targeted and chosen based on generally accepted, peer-reviewed scientific research. Obesity is such a complex chronic disease that it requires the expertise of a multidisciplinary team over an extended period to effectively address.

- **Increase funding for basic, translational and outcomes research.**

Currently, there is a limited understanding of the etiology of obesity and the outcomes associated with weight management. Advancements in the fields of biology, genomics, psychology, pharmacology, and nutrition as well as an understanding of environmental factors, including economics, can lay the groundwork for improved responses. Clinically useful outcome measures should be developed to evaluate interventions. To achieve appropriate goals, research is needed to support evidence-based practice and quality improvement initiatives for successful prevention and treatment of obesity and research focusing on economic incentives needs to be explored. Greater funding should be directed to these and other facets of obesity in both public and private research.

- **Ensure continued, current and adequate monitoring and data collection of food intake, eating behavior and health status.**

To assess the incidence of obesity, identify at-risk populations and define contributing factors to increased prevalence of overweight and obesity, accurate data are vital to document changes and in designing and implementing successful interventions.

- **Involve stakeholders to achieve a coordinated effort to address the issue at a national as well as local level.**

The nature and scope of the obesity problem requires a shared commitment by individuals, in addition to governmental, social, business and health care institutions. For example, the model of shared commitment that has yielded progress in addressing drunk driving and seat belt use may be well suited in addressing obesity.

- **Create and support programs integrating both nutrition and physical activity, and support the individual to be able to make wise lifestyle choices.**

Culturally appropriate and non-stigmatizing, sensitive approaches are needed, offering people the opportunity to gain access to programs and facilities through numerous venues. Creative programming should be included in elementary and secondary schools' educational curricula, corporate wellness, community and other programs appealing to a broad range of individual interests.

The American Dietetic Association is the nation's largest association of food and nutrition professionals. Guided by a reliance on sound science and evidence-based practice, the organization is a sought-out participant in the deliberation and resolution of food, nutrition and health issues. ADA members' unique education, supervised practice experience, national registration examination, and mandated continuing professional education equip them to collaboratively identify, prevent and treat overweight, obesity and its health consequences at all stages of the life span and in a myriad of educational, community, medical, commercial, and research environments.

Statement of Robert J. Kemmery, Jr.

Executive Director
Student Support Services
Baltimore County Public Schools

Before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee
On School Nutrition Programs

March 4, 2003

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the value and power of Business/School Partnerships. In 1991, as the newly appointed Principal of Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore, I was challenged with empowering a school and community to revitalize and reinvent itself. At that time, Eastern Tech was rated unsatisfactory in many areas of the Maryland State Department of Education's School Report Card.

I felt that the first step in building a high performance high school should be an agreement by all constituent groups on a shared vision or mission. During my early focus sessions, the business community members were the primary catalysts in getting the constituencies to address the purpose of high school and the preparation of students for the complex, changing workforce needs of the 21st Century. Enriched by the human resources and financial contributions of the business community and propelled by the hard work of students, parents, and staff, Eastern Tech was named a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1997 and a United States Department of Education New American High School in 1999.

Serving as a national demonstration site for systemic school reform, Eastern Tech has hosted visitors from forty-five states and twenty-five countries. Visitors come to the school to observe outstanding instruction and a school community, which welcomes and embraces the positive influences of businesses and corporations. As a result of business partnerships, the school has a Lockheed Martin Applied Physics Lab, a Verizon Distance Learning and Telecommunications Showcase, and many curricular and co-curricular

activities sponsored by Mid-Atlantic Coca-Cola, the Baltimore Orioles, Associated Builders and Contractors, Baltimore Gas and Electric, Black and Decker US, Inc., Comcast Cable Communications, GE, Middle River Aircraft Systems, the Engineering Society of Baltimore, and over one hundred other business partners.

For a moment, I would like to focus on one type of business partnership that seems to garner more scrutiny that others, the sale of foods and beverages at school. In 2001, Maryland Senate Bill 453 was filed to ban any commercial logos and vending machines in the schools. The bill was called the "Captive Audience/Stop Commercialism in Schools Act." Parents, students, and educators from across the state shared their personal stories of the positive value of business partnerships and Senate Bill 453 was defeated. Maryland law already requires that vending machines do not compete with the school lunch program. Also, machines can be operational only at the end of the last lunch period.

In my experience, the best way to foster partnerships is for the local community to make the final decisions about vending machines in their schools. That allows the local school community to make the decision about what kind of products – water, teas, juices, sports drinks, diet and regular sodas – should be offered for sale. Most importantly, the local community makes the decision about which educational activities benefit from the revenues.

At Eastern Tech, we average about $30,000 in revenue from our partnership with Mid-Atlantic Coke. The revenue has helped support drama productions and a wide variety of interscholastic sports. It has been used to purchase computers, train faculty and staff and to pay activity fees for economically disadvantaged students.

Parental involvement and beverage choice are essential for successfully managing these powerful business/school partnerships. Educators are under tremendous pressure to improve the quality of education at the very time when financial resources are diminishing. To meet the needs of our students, we have to find ways to work with and involve businesses and corporations. Soft drink partnerships are one of the most successful models, if managed appropriately.

The partnership key is establishing an ongoing, collaborative relationship among the parents of the students, the school administration, and the business community. It is important to establish a culture of partnerships in which the school and business communities work together to best serve the needs of students. Such partnerships are social and economic structures, which empower school communities and enhance student achievement, the school environment, and pride in the public schools. This is the value and power of Business/School Partnerships.

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Opelika City Schools

Opelika, Alabama is a small city of about 24,000 people located in the east central area of the state. Opelika City Schools has an enrollment of 4500 students with approximately 63% free and reduced. Our area is predominantly blue-collar industrial, but located 7 miles from the educational community of Auburn University. We have a low unemployment rate, and an average annual family income of $46,800.00 Opelika was recently named one of the most economically appealing places to live in the United States.

Our school system is operated along business principles much like a corporation. We have never gone to our citizens for a tax referendum that did not pass. It has long been our policy to use our funding wisely to educate every child without parents being constantly asked for donations or funding. We have never allowed vending machines in our schools. Our schools do not have fund-raising drives. Our city supports our schools financially with an extra annual allocation of $1.7 million. We committed some of those funds to our schools to eliminate fund-raising by students. A few high school fundraisers are still allowed for school clubs, but this is kept to a minimum so that the schools are not a drain on family budgets.

Our Child Nutrition Program is not-for-profit, but self-supporting. We have a closed campus policy, and our program is not competing with school stores, or school vending machines. Therefore, we expect nutrition to be the focus without snack food sales to balance the budget. Participation is 90% system-wide for lunch and 33% for breakfast. Lunches are priced $1.25 for K-8 and $1.50 for 9-12. Our system participates in the Alabama statewide purchasing program, which means we get several thousand dollars back in rebates for the food we use. Our program is financially sound. We have built 6 new kitchens in the last few years, have one under construction at this time, and will remodel our high school soon. Our Child Nutrition Program pays for the equipment in new kitchens.

When USDA offered the option in the early 1990's to serve meals based on nutritional standards for students rather than food groups, our child nutrition program adopted NuMenus. We turned off our fryers and purchased steamers. We did intensive training for our cooks to help them learn to cook with spices, instead of the traditional southern ham and bacon seasoning. Participation dropped the first year, then rose to higher participation than pre-NuMenus by the second year. Participation climbed from 84% in the early 1990's and has leveled at 90%. Our first concentration was on seasoning foods to taste good without the fat. We modified recipes that we already had. We learned to purchase frozen fruits and vegetables instead of canned. We served more fresh fruits, but our fresh vegetables were limited to salad bar type items because of the time involved in preparation. Two years ago, we discovered the New North Florida Farmers Cooperative. The Co-op carries liability insurance and requires their members to take classes on use of pesticides. Working through the co-op gives us a level of quality assurance that we would not have buying from a farmer off the street. They pre-process fresh collards, peas, butterbeans, and sweet potato sticks in season. We now offer this variety of fresh vegetables among our other offerings one or two times a month. Students need to see a new item about 10 times before they recognize it as familiar. We

have used over 2000 pounds of collards this school year to date. We hope to continue to expand these offerings as more small farmers join the co-op.

Our appeal to parents is that we offer their children two nutritious meals each day with numerous choices. (See brochure) If they will encourage their children to eat at school and eat a variety of what we offer, they can feel less pressured when their evening meal is a higher fat choice. We hope to continue to improve our meals everyday. We still serve pizza and hamburgers several times per month. We do not serve any one food everyday. Students can buy any regular item on the line a la carte. Ice cream and a non-carbonated sports drink are the only special a la carte items we ever offer. We have justified the ice cream choice, as a means to get students to consume more calcium because so many do not drink milk. At our high school, grades 9-12, we offer a non-carbonated sports drink.

The Child Nutrition Program in Opelika has the support of the administration, faculty, and parents. We do not have to compete with anyone for the food dollars. Our peers across Alabama, and the country have had to add snacks to keep their programs financially sound because of competition from school stores and vending. Until those funding problems are solved, child nutrition programs as a whole will be forced to be child feeding programs without focus on children's well being. A requirement to remove the snack foods from child nutrition programs without addressing the competition will be financially devastating to many systems.

Convincing the adults in schools can be just as difficult as convincing the children. The tremendous rise in Type 2 diabetes among children is staggering. Schools cannot fix all problems, but they do hold their share of blame on this issue when students have high fat, high sugar foods available all through the day. Many students can pass through school without getting any physical activity during the day. Schools are contributing to the obesity issue. Schools provide students more of their meals and snacks during the school year than they get at home. The school environment as a whole must be accountable for what they feed children. Opelika City Schools recognized our responsibility about 10 years ago and began the movement to get where we are today.

Child feeding programs are part of the problem but have the least control to fix them. Most of my colleagues would prefer to feed children healthy choices. Economics has made this virtually impossible. Many kitchens were designed with fried foods as the focal point and do not have the equipment to steam fresh vegetables. Many students have never been exposed to a fresh, cooked vegetable. They only know fried. Change will have to be made with a sound plan, and will take a great deal of work from all areas of education. It will require commitment and creativity. Most importantly, it has not been an easy transition for us and will not be easy for anyone else. Remember we were ahead of the game when we started because we did not have school stores competing with school meal dollars. All we had to worry about was not loosing participation and paying the bills.

Mandates to meet dietary standards sound like a great idea on the surface. It is easy to say if Opelika City Schools can do this everyone in the country should be able to. Many schools rely heavily on vending to pay for everything from supplies to club activities. Removing vending and high fat snack foods from cafeterias while allowing school stores to continue to sell those products will bankrupt most child feeding programs in the nation.

Opelika City School System approaches every area in education with the child's well being first. Our child-feeding program teaches nutrition by example, and is the **Child Nutrition Program.** We do not believe that offering students pizza and fries everyday for lunch supports the nutrition education information being taught in the classroom. Our goal is to always support education. Approaching child feeding from a child nutrition perspective requires re-thinking most long held beliefs about what children will and will not eat, and requires us to be the adult when it comes to balancing what is popular versus what is more nutritious. That works in Opelika, Alabama!

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

National Milk
Producers Federation

Joint Statement of the National Milk Producers Federation and International Dairy Foods Association Before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

March 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman, it is an honor to testify this morning. I am Jerry Kozak, president and chief executive officer of the National Milk Producers Federation. Today, the nation's dairy industry comes before you speaking with one voice. My testimony is offered on behalf of both the National Milk Producers Federation – which represents America's dairy farmers – and the International Dairy Foods Association – which represents the processors of fluid milk and other dairy products. Joint testimony such as we will offer today may not be unprecedented, but it is unusual for our two independent organizations.

Our unity reflects, in large part, the importance to our industry of the child nutrition programs for which this Committee is responsible. I can sum up my entire statement in this way: **Child nutrition programs represent a national commitment to offer our young people healthy choices and a fair start toward lifelong good nutrition. Milk is a central part of this commitment and is an unparalleled source of affordable nutrients. We can and must strengthen child nutrition programs across the board – and also enhance the role of milk in assuring that the programs succeed.** The remainder of my testimony will attempt to justify these propositions.

Child Nutrition Programs: A National Commitment

Few if any federal programs enjoy such widespread support as those that are the subject of this hearing. The National School Lunch Program; the School Breakfast Program; the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children – these and other programs serve critical public interests, in the view of an overwhelming majority of Americans.

- **First, there is the simple matter of justice.** It is right that an affluent society such as ours should make provision for its children, including their nutritional needs.

- **Second, the programs help give kids a fair start.** We must all ultimately take responsibility for what we achieve in this life, but the circumstances of our formative years can make a big difference. As a society that values equal opportunity, we want to ensure that our children's potential is not limited by a lack of proper nutrition.
- **Third, child nutrition programs are demonstrably successful.** Studies show the superior nutrition patterns of children who participate in the school meal programs, compared to those who do not. The WIC Program's success has been widely documented and acknowledged.
- **Fourth, these programs help ensure the quality of our future workforce.** Children's readiness to learn improves when they eat a good, balanced diet. Of course that is important to our ability to educate kids. It is also important to the companies that will employ those children when they grow up. Indeed, nutrition programs pay dividends for our entire society: Later in this statement, we will describe how health care expenditures might be substantially reduced through increased school milk consumption and higher participation in the school meal programs.
- **Fifth, the programs help encourage good dietary habits throughout the day and throughout life.** Schools are a learning environment in which we have the opportunity to impart the principles of good nutrition and fitness. We should not just tell our children what they ought to eat – we should show them, by offering them healthy foods and beverages.

I could go on, but other witnesses have been eloquent in describing the benefits of child nutrition programs, and I probably need not convince this Committee of their merits. The programs are, of course, not perfect. One could make a list of their flaws as well as their virtues, and I know the Committee is dedicated to their improvement. But we ought not let any shortcomings blind us to the fundamental fact that these are good, successful, important programs that deserve our support.

That support must, of course, be monetary as well as rhetorical. As a nation, we need to devote the resources necessary not just to maintain child nutrition programs but to improve them further. **We believe – along with many other organizations and industries – that additional budgetary resources for these programs are justified, and should be sought.**

Part of the problem is that program resources have not fully kept up with inflation over time. For many schools in many parts of the United States, the cost of serving a school lunch exceeds the $2.14 maximum reimbursement rate. Since most school food service programs must be self-sustaining, a federal reimbursement rate that fails to meet per-meal costs will encourage schools to place more emphasis on generating additional revenues through sales of other foods and beverages which, unlike school meals, need not comply with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

There is nothing wrong with a la carte sales – indeed, they represent exciting growth potential for milk and other healthy foods. Yet there is always the danger that inadequate funding for reimbursable meals will provide unintended incentives to promote alternatives that are less nutritionally balanced. In extreme cases, schools might even be tempted to leave the federal meal programs altogether. Inadequate resources may also discourage innovation and creativity, since it is often cheaper to do things the same old way rather than trying out something new – like new menu items, more attractive surroundings or new sales venues for healthy products.

- **Milk and milk products** account for 72% of the calcium, 32% of the phosphorus, 26% of the riboflavin, 22% of the vitamin B-12, 19% of the protein, 16% of the magnesium and 15% of the vitamin A available in the U.S. food supply.
- Yet milk and other dairy foods such as cheese and yogurt contribute only 9% of the calories available in the food supply. Our products are, therefore, **nutrient-dense** in relation to their caloric density.
- **Few of our young people are getting enough calcium.** According to USDA, among children 6-11 years old, 71% of the girls and 62% of the boys fail to meet calcium recommendations. These figures rise to even more alarming levels among adolescents 12-19 years old, with 88% of females and 68% of males not meeting the recommendations.
- Milk is, therefore, the best answer to a calcium crisis that manifests itself ultimately in the bone fractures and other consequences of osteoporosis. But as we have seen, **milk is much more than calcium.** It is also an important source of phosphorus, potassium, Vitamin A, Vitamin B-12, riboflavin, and other nutrients.
- **Milk is, in fact, a marker for a healthy diet.** Thus, the federal government's "Milk Matters" campaign emphasizes the need for growing children and teens to consume more milk for healthy bones. That campaign is run by the **National Institute of Child Health & Human Development**, part of the National Institutes of Health. In a similar way, the **American Academy of Pediatrics** urges its physician-members to recommend their patients get enough milk, cheese, yogurt and other calcium-rich foods to help build bone mass.
- Emerging scientific evidence suggests that **milk is an important part of the solution to our nation's obesity crisis.** A variety of studies have shown an inverse relationship between dairy food intake and obesity. Evidence is building that increased dairy consumption may be one of the dietary patterns that can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Dairy products are important components of a healthy diet for all age groups. Of course, we know they are especially important for our children. Therefore, we would expect that milk would be a central part of society's efforts to support child nutrition. It is, and was from the beginning.

Ever since the establishment of the federal school lunch program in 1946, milk has been required as part of the meal. This unique place reflects milk's critical role in young people's diets. And the evidence bears out the wisdom of putting milk front and center. For example, a recent investigation of children 5-17 found that only those who drank milk at the noon meal met or exceeded recommended calcium intakes for the day. In contrast, children in the study who drank other beverages at lunch did not meet daily calcium requirements.

We noted earlier that many other beverages compete for a share of children's stomachs. As children's consumption of other beverages has increased, their consumption of milk has decreased. All of us – including our industry – need to do a better job of making milk attractive to kids. But surely it is clear that in light of the calcium crisis, the obesity epidemic and other health challenges, it would be foolish to abandon the requirement to offer milk in our meal programs. Similarly, it is our view that any changes to the mix of foods in the WIC program should be made so that dairy foods

are not sacrificed at the same time we are augmenting other foods that we can all agree should be promoted.

Increasing School Milk Consumption

Declining milk consumption statistics can be depressing – not just to dairy farmers and processors, but to health professionals and parents. At NMPF and IDFA, we feel a special responsibility to be part of the solution: to offer accurate diagnoses of the problems, and put forward innovative solutions.

If we can improve milk consumption in the schools, there are of course profound and immediate nutritional benefits to our children – and that is the primary reason it is important. Yet the benefits go even further than that.

- If students have a positive experience of drinking milk in school, they are **more likely to remain milk drinkers** throughout life.
- If we improve the quality of milk in schools, kids will be **more likely to choose milk outside school.**
- If we can make a variety of attractive milk products available at venues throughout the school, that will help **build the image and sales potential of new, innovative milk products.**
- And higher-quality, more-attractive milk can help **build participation in school meal programs,** increasing children's consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other healthy foods.

These are not simply speculative statements. In recent years, a variety of studies have demonstrated the potential for increasing students' milk consumption in the cafeteria, through a la carte sales, and through vending machines.

The most recent, and largest-scale, of these studies is the **School Milk Pilot Test** carried out by the National Dairy Council® and the American School Food Service Association. This test involved 100,000 students in 146 schools in 18 school districts. Although the test involved a variety of improvements, and several different combinations of changes, the basic upgrades were simple:

- **Add an extra flavor** besides white and chocolate – usually strawberry.
- **Keep the milk cold,** in new and more accessible coolers.
- **Put the milk in plastic containers** rather than cardboard.
- In addition to upgraded milk on the meal line, offer larger age-appropriate servings of milk **a la carte** and through **vending machines.**

The results of the test substantially exceeded expectations.

- **Milk sales increased 15%** in elementary schools, **22%** in secondary schools.

- In secondary schools, **average daily participation (ADP)** in the school meal programs **increased 4.8%.** In elementary schools, where ADP is already very high and thus harder to increase, ADP still rose marginally.
- Milk **"plate waste"** – the portion of their milk that children take but don't finish – **fell** 7.2% in elementary schools and 5.5% in secondary schools.

Thus, improved milk not only has the potential to get kids to drink more milk – something we all support – but also can bring more kids into the school cafeteria, where they will eat a more balanced diet involving many different healthy foods, not just dairy products.

Indeed, a study commissioned by NDC and ASFSA – and included with ASFSA's testimony this morning – showed that if the School Milk Pilot Test could be implemented nationwide, some 430,000 students who do not now participate in the school meal programs would begin to do so. In addition, 2.1 million students who already participate, but do not drink milk, would become milk drinkers.

And potentially, these 2.6 million students would reap lifelong health benefits, as would society. The direct and indirect costs associated with diet-related health conditions could fall by as much as $800 million - $1.1 billion per year over the students' lifetimes.

We are not arguing that the upgrades in the School Milk Pilot Test are a panacea. First, they are not cost-free – schools need to be able to afford high-quality products, and that may imply not only a need for additional resources, but substantial changes in the way schools approach milk procurement. Second, schools need to be free to innovate. The improvements we have described are not necessarily the only ways to increase school milk consumption. And third, many variables – including product availability, local tastes and preferences, the characteristics of local retail demand and others – will play a part in determining how each school works with its local dairies to upgrade products. Still, it is hard to argue with success, and we believe a growing body of evidence – and not just from the School Milk Pilot Test – tells us the time is ripe to give our kids better milk and that a variety of benefits will flow from that decision.

Dairy Producers and Processors: Common Priorities

We have argued that Congress should allocate additional budgetary resources for child nutrition programs. We have also described the important place of milk in our children's diets, and in child nutrition programs. Finally, we have asserted that it is possible to increase school milk consumption, and that such consumption increases would have important benefits for meal program participation and the overall quality of children's diets.

Now we would like to suggest four ways that this Committee, as it reauthorizes child nutrition programs, can enhance the role of dairy products, especially in school meal programs. We believe these four steps will not only lead to increased milk consumption – a desirable objective in and of itself – but also encourage more children to participate in school meal programs and achieve balanced diets.

- *First, Congress should seek to increase school milk consumption with higher meal reimbursement rates or other incentives to schools by using model standards and specifications that may include, but are not limited to, increased standard serving size for middle and upper level schools, packaging, flavor variety, merchandising, refrigeration, and handling practices.*

- *Second, Congress should provide expanded opportunities for commercially branded milk to be made available to children at an increased number of venues throughout the school environment, including availability in immediate physical proximity to the milk offered as part of a reimbursable meal.*

- *Third, Congress should reject attacks on milk's role in child nutrition programs, and turn back any efforts to repeal the statutory requirement for milk to be offered in school meals; any attempts to prohibit schools from offering certain types of milk; and any proposals to otherwise compromise the integrity of milk's critical role in the programs.*

- *Finally, Congress should assure through legislation that schools may permit milk to be offered anytime, anywhere on school premises and at school events.*

NMPF and IDFA have mutually agreed on these four principles as our priorities in reauthorization legislation. We developed the principles together, in a cooperative effort that reflects the importance we attach to child nutrition programs. We stand ready to work with this Committee and its members to achieve these principles.

Conclusion

We are proud of our industry. The producers and processors we represent are likewise proud of the healthful, nutritious products they make and sell. We are not only producers and processors, however. We are also parents and citizens. We support our Congress – and you on this Committee – in your efforts to give all the nation's children a fair start, an opportunity to make healthy choices.

The work you are doing is important and we would like to be helpful to you in any way we can.

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
From: Dennis J. Heiman, Principal, Muscatine High School
Date: March 4, 2003
Re: Fruit and Vegetable Program

As you establish priorities and funding, I understand this committee has a very difficult job. As a High School Principal, I respect and understand the differences between offering suggestions and making decisions. With that said,

"Feed the Children"

You may bring in nutritional specialists to tell you the advantages of healthy food in regard to energy, life span, etc., I can tell you of our experience and growth while participating in this pilot project. At first, we too, looked at the base nutritional advantages of fruits and vegetables, but we have gained so much more. We looked at the best time to feed the students to maximize the natural sugar high, identified what our most challenging academic classes were, when the most students were in an academic setting (not a study hall) and lastly, so it would not affect their lunch appetite.

We felt this presented the opportunity to increase our Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITED's) results, as we strive to reach the goals established by No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

With all the adult generated data, we realized – ask the customer – our students. Their response was "mid-morning, that's when we are hungry." Which makes greater sense.

Some of the unintended consequences of this program are:

Teacher- student camaraderie ie: Teachers discuss their individual food preferences. This reduces the wall that sometimes is present between adults and students. Once this is done the teacher is seen as a human with likes/dislikes and feelings. I have heard more "friendly" conversation between adults and students than at any other time in my 30 plus years of education.

Peer acceptance ie: Some of the students who assist in delivery of the food have special needs. The delivery group is more recognized and accepted by others. In a population of nearly 2000, too many are simply unrecognized faces in the crowd. Our delivery group is publicly thanked and talked to in public, this may be the first time this has happened in their school career.

Team building - how to deliver, how to hand out, how to pick up ie: The logistics of delivering 2000 pieces of food to over 100 locations caused a building wide involvement: Cafeteria workers, teachers, custodians, administration - everyone. Our first attempt was not totally successful. The first week we attempted this, we had three time schedules. What a learning experience.

Once the food was delivered, each classroom established a process to dispense, gather remains, and clean up. The increase in garbage bags, cleaning supplies, custodian time, and related costs was not anticipated. Once again our students solved the problem. Plastic grocery sacks were brought from home and a used spray bottle and a towel are used by each student to wash his/her desk. Teachers wash the towels and bring them back. Problem solved – low expense.

Peer pressure ie: Occasionally a new food was not well received. We found the evidence in waste cans, hallways, etc. One announcement was made "If you don't want to eat it, don't take it. If messes continued we will stop the program." There has been no problem since. Students offer their serving to another student. Informal observations indicate more student interaction than before. In larger schools students may not know each other at any level. This program has removed social/economic, ethnic, and academic barriers.

I think I just described what is now being pushed as Character Education. Understanding, caring for, and working with others to solve common problems.

In another light, this program is better than the proposed tax cut. This program places money in local control, stimulates local economy, and eliminates the wide social/economic disparity. Everyone here receives the same benefit at the same time in the same manner.

My wife is a kindergarten teacher and her building also received a grant. While her building is nearly 50% free and reduced, the nutritional food is a tremendous value. They too experienced the same unintended consequences of this program.

I read in a recent article over 25% of the free/reduced recipients may be falsifying their income level. If there are people in American hungry enough to lie for food – feed them.

As we grew, our parents and grandparents taught us we were never really accepted in a house until food or beverage was offered. You have made each classroom a warmer, more welcoming, environment. Thank you.

Other unintended consequences include:

* Removal of a candy machine because of an overall drop in sales of 48%.
* Removal of a pop machine/replaced by a milk/juice machine.

And to think I came here to speak of food and told you this program crosses all aspects of character education and will make our schools a better place.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

MARCH 4, 2003

Senator Patrick Leahy
Child Nutrition Hearing
March 4, 2003
Witness Questions

Panel II

Question for Mr. Robert Greenstein, CBPP:

1) In your testimony, you convincingly highlight the potential negative impact that changing the income verification and application process for free and reduced price lunch certification will have on the numbers of eligible schoolchildren who could be effectively be kicked off the program. What do you estimate to be the indirect impacts of changing the certification process on other federal funding streams targeting low-income children and families that are allocated based on the rates of free and reduced price eligible kids?

Panel III

Question for Ms. Susan Borra, ADA:

2) In your testimony, you state that nutritional "standards alone are not enough" to promote healthy meals in our schools. You go on to say that school systems should be certified by dieticians. Is there a resources problem here as well? In your opinion, can schools afford to purchase the fruits, vegetables, and other health foods needed to produce well-balanced and appealing meals?

3) You also mentioned the effects of competitive foods in schools. How crucial is it to our fight against obesity to maintain high nutritional standards not only within the cafeteria, but also throughout the school environment?

Question for Mr. Robert Kemmery, Baltimore County Public Schools:

4) You have highlighted the importance of school/business partnerships in the successful turnaround of your school, particularly as related to soft drink partnerships. Have you tried partnering with business to offer kids healthier beverage and snack choices rather than soft drinks? It has been demonstrated in many areas of the country that schools can benefit from these options as well as students. If you have not considered this option, why not?

Question for Ms. Melanie Payne, Opelika, AL Schools:

4) The Opelika City Schools have had great success in providing students with nutritious foods at school. Have you been able at all to witness or monitor improved health benefits among your students from the time before Opelika committed itself to it this program?

Senator Patrick Leahy
Child Nutrition Hearing
March 4, 2003
Witness Questions

Questions for Mr. Jerry Kozak, National Milk Producers Federation

6) There are a number of studies in the field that have shown that milk consumption is strongly associated with an overall good diet. I know that Dr. Rachel Johnson of the University of Vermont, a respected voice in this field, has recently conducted a study showing that offering a variety of flavored milks to children does not increase their total daily average sugar consumption. Can you comment on this finding as it relates to the pilot program conducted by the National Milk Federation and the American School Food Service Association?

7) I know that for the last decade, USDA has put in a lot of effort to improving the quality of food served at lunches. For instance, USDA improved standards for peanut butter, making it less runny. This has led to more consumption and more balanced meals. Has the Department made similar efforts to improve the quality and, for lack of a better word, desirability of milk at lunch? And if not, do you know why not?

Questions for Mr. Dennis Heiman, Muscatine, IA High School

8) At the end of your written testimony, you noted that you removed a candy machine because of a large drop in sales, and replaced a soda vending machine with a milk/juice dispenser. How have sales been with the new, more nutritious, vending machine? What do you think the benefits have been of eliminated non-nutritious options from your school environment?

9) You also mentioned that the fruits and vegetables pilot established in the Farm Bill supports local economies. Is the program in your school utilizing local produce? If so, what barriers have you found to introducing local produce into your school? Have there been any other unintended consequences due to the use of local foods?

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Division of Curriculum & Instruction
Department of Student Support Services

Joe A. Hairston, Superintendent
Christine M. Johns, Deputy Superintendent
Robert J. Kemmery, Executive Director

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March 20, 2003

Question for Mr. Robert Kemmery, Baltimore County Public Schools:

Q: "You have highlighted the importance of school/business partnership in the successful turnaround of your school, particularly as related to soft drink partnerships. Have you tried partnering with business to offer kids healthier beverage and snack choices rather than soft drinks? It has been demonstrated in many areas of the country that schools can benefit from these options as well as students. If you have not considered this option, why not?

Response:

Children and adults should have a wide variety of beverages from which to choose. At Eastern Tech, we worked with our local Coca Cola bottling company to provide refreshment AND nutritional beverages, including regular and diet soft drinks, 100% juices, bottled water and soft drinks. These options are available to students after 1:30 p.m. Maryland law does not permit competitive foods or beverages until after the last lunch shift each school day.

Rather than restricting specific foods or beverages, I believe we should provide a wide variety of options and then educate students about how all foods and beverages can be part of a balanced diet.

It is imperative that parents and local educators—not the federal government—make the decisions about business-school partnerships for their local school. Schools will benefit greatly from business—school partnerships as long as they are free to shape them as they wish, free of mandates from the federal government.

Robert J. Kemmery

Robert J. Kemmery

March 18, 2003

Question: The Opelika City Schools have had great success in providing students with nutritious foods at school. Have you been able at all to witness or monitor improved health benefits among your students from the time before Opelika committed itself to this program?

Response: Opelika City Schools has not collected any scientific data, weight charts, or statistics of diseases. However, we can make a few observations. First, most school districts in a fifty mile radius had a flu epidemic this year resulting in school closings. We did not have a large number of sick children, and did not have to close school. This tells us that our children are healthier for some reason. Personally, I have observed sporting events with districts that I know serve fries and pizza daily. Our student spectators and athletes have a lower percentage of overweight. We still have overweight children and adults in our system, but we are not the leading cause. This has become a point of pride for me. We are not fanatics here. We give our children burgers and pizza at times. We simply practice moderation.

I have not received a large number of special diets for diabetic children. Part of this is that food choices for the older age levels enable students to monitor their own acceptable food plan. Secondly, I strongly believe that we have not contributed to Type II diabetes in our students.

One can never be certain that students benefit from what we do. However, we can assure that we do not cause harm with excessive high fat, high salt and sugar choices. Our town is blue collar, industrial. Most dining out is in a fast food establishment or a Mom and Pop restaurant with fat-back seasoning. We are introducing foreign items like fresh pears and broccoli. Many households in our area would never shop for fresh fruits or vegetables because of cost.

This is a rambling answer to your question. We do not have data from pre-NuMenus to facilitate a comprehensive study. An area that could be explored would be comparisons between the populations of our district and a district that mostly fries and offers vending breaks.

Melanie Payne
Child Nutrition Program Director
Opelika City Schools

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