

# Food for Thought

## Interagency Working Group Proposal on Food Marketing to Children

- Cookies and cakes, pizza, and soda/energy/sports drinks are the top sources of calories in the diets of children 2 through 18. Chips and french fries comprise half of all the vegetables kids eat.
- The food industry spent more than \$1.6 billion in 2006 alone to market messages to kids promoting foods that often are high in calories and low in nutrition. Their campaigns use television, the internet, social media, video games, movies, sports and music events, in-store displays and packaging, and even schools.
- Recent surveys show that childhood obesity has become parents' number one health concern – ahead of smoking and drug abuse — and that parents consider “TV ads promoting junk food” to be a big part of the problem.

Childhood obesity is the nation's most serious health threat. One in three children is overweight or obese, and at greater risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma and other diseases. These children are likely to have a shorter life span than their parents.

In an effort to find solutions to the problem of childhood obesity, Congress directed the Federal Trade Commission, together with the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to establish an Interagency Working Group of federal nutrition, health, and marketing experts. Congress tasked the Working Group with developing a set of principles to guide industry efforts to improve the nutritional profile of foods marketed directly to children ages 2-17 and to tap into the power of advertising and marketing to support healthful food choices.

The proposal is designed to encourage children, through advertising and marketing, to choose foods that:

- make a meaningful contribution to a healthful diet; and
- contain limited amounts of nutrients that have a negative impact on health or weight (saturated fat, trans fat, added sugars, and sodium).

The proposal seeks to advance current voluntary industry efforts by providing a template for uniform principles that could dramatically improve the nutritional quality of the foods most heavily marketed to children — and the health status of the next generation. The agencies recognize that the goals for industry are ambitious, and that adopting the principles will require phased implementation over a reasonable time. Indeed, marketing that shifts

from focusing on foods of little or no nutritional value — like cookies, candy and sugar-sweetened soda — to foods that are more healthy — like whole grain cereals, low-fat yogurt, and peanut butter — can have a significant impact on public health.

Industry has the resources and creative know-how to encourage children to make better choices: 17 major companies already are reformulating

foods to make them healthier and cutting back on their marketing of less healthy options to children. The agencies believe the proposed principles, summarized below, can help guide the food industry in determining which foods would be appropriate and desirable to market to children to encourage a healthful diet — and which foods the industry should voluntarily refrain from marketing to children.

## Preliminary Proposed Nutrition Principles for Marketing Foods to Children Ages 2-17

By the year 2016, all food products within the categories most heavily marketed directly to children and adolescents ages 2-17 should meet the two basic nutrition principles set out below. As industry develops new products and reformulates existing products, it should focus its efforts on foods most heavily marketed to children. These include breakfast cereals; snack foods; candy; dairy products; baked goods; carbonated beverages; fruit juice and non-carbonated beverages; prepared foods and meals; frozen and chilled deserts; and restaurant foods.

### Principle A: Meaningful Contribution to a Healthful Diet

Foods marketed to children should provide a meaningful contribution to a healthful diet, with contributions from at least one of the following food groups:

- fruit
- vegetable
- whole grain
- fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk products
- fish
- extra lean meat or poultry
- eggs
- nuts and seeds
- beans

### Principle B: Nutrients with Negative Impact on Health or Weight

Foods marketed to children should be formulated to minimize the content of nutrients that could have a negative impact on health or weight. With the exception of nutrients naturally occurring in food contributions under Principle A (for example, the saturated fat and sodium naturally occurring in low-fat milk would not be counted), foods marketed to children should not contain more than the following amounts of saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and sodium.

- Saturated Fat: 1 g or less per RACC and 15% or less of calories
- Trans Fat: 0 g per RACC
- Added Sugars: No more than 13 g of added sugars per RACC
- Sodium: No more than 210 mg per serving

Note: The goals summarized here are for individual foods. The RACC, established by federal regulation, refers to the “reference amount customarily consumed” per eating occasion and is not necessarily the same as the labeled serving size. The proposal includes additional recommendations for foods with a small serving size and for main dishes and meals. The proposal also calls for additional reductions in sodium by the year 2021.

For more information, visit [www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/04/foodmarket.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/04/foodmarket.shtm).