



FOOD JOURNAL

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NUTRITION POLICY FOR TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS ANNOUNCED

Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) Commissioner, Susan Combs, has just announced the new Texas Public School Nutrition Policy for all Texas public schools participating in the federal child nutrition programs. The policy becomes effective 08/01/04 for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and the After School Snack Program.

"This policy is the result of months of collaboration with experts and interested individuals around the state who consider children's health and education a top priority," Combs said. "We want to ensure that foods served in our schools are nutritious and balanced, and we are dedicated to promoting an environment that nurtures both mental and physical development."

The policy limits the number of grams of fat and sugar Texas schoolchildren may have each week, and allows a phase-in period to eliminate deep-fat frying in food preparation for meals, a la carte and snack items. In addition, portion sizes for food items such as chips, cookies, bakery items and frozen desserts at elementary, middle and high schools are limited.

The policy also limits the sale of foods that compete with a school's operation of the breakfast, lunch or after school snack programs. A school can lose up to \$1.20 at breakfast and \$2.19 at

lunch in federal reimbursements for each meal lost to a competitive food sale. "A majority of the state's schools will be soliciting contract bids for food and other supplies for the next school year within the next few weeks, and we wanted to release the new policy now to give them plenty of time to plan and prepare for any modifications," Combs said. "We realize it will take time for schools and the food industry to make the necessary changes to products and recipes, so we want to use this policy to phase in better nutritional guidelines," Combs said.

"I appreciate all of Commissioner Combs' hard work in developing a policy that will help our children learn how to make wiser food choices during the school day," said Senator Eddie Lucio Jr. "She was the first state official to actively support my legislative efforts of curbing obesity among our public school children through proper nutrition, and I look forward to the expertise and assistance she will provide the Joint Interim Study Committee on Nutrition and Health in Public Schools."

Dr. Eduardo Sanchez, Commissioner of the Texas Department of Health, said, "Childhood obesity and obesity-related problems are reaching epidemic levels in Texas. If we don't act now to tackle these problems, both individual Texans and the state will be faced with a healthcare crisis of enormous proportions.

"The nutrition policy from the TDA is an important first step, and I applaud the efforts and con-

tributions of all those who are working to ensure a healthy food environment in our schools," Sanchez said.

José Montemayor, Commissioner of the Texas Department of Insurance, said, "Future health-care costs for obesity and related diseases are expected to increase dramatically, having a direct impact on insurance premiums paid by individuals and Texas businesses. By addressing the problem of obesity now in our schools, we are not only promoting and encouraging a healthier lifestyle in our students, but also we are trying to keep future healthcare costs under control. I fully support the Texas Department of Agriculture and all who worked on this policy."

A copy of the revised policy is available on TDA's web site at www.agr.state.tx.us.

OVERVIEW OF THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION POLICY

Elementary Schools

- No Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) or candy at any time.
- No competitive foods at any time.
- French fries may not exceed three ounces per serving, may only be served once a week, and students may only purchase one serving at a time.

Middle and Junior High Schools

- No FMNVs or candy until after last lunch period.
- No competitive foods during meal times.
- French fries may not exceed three ounces per serving, may only be served three times a week, and students may only purchase one serving at a time.

High Schools

- No FMNVs during meal times in areas where reimbursable meals are served and/or consumed.
- No competitive foods during meal times in areas where reimbursable meals are served and/or consumed.
- New contracts starting 03/03/04 and contract renewals must expressly prohibit the sale of sugared, carbonated beverages in containers larger than 12 ounces.
- By the '05-'06 school year, the goal is to have no more than 30% of the beverages available in vending machines be sugared, carbonated soft drinks.
- French fries may not exceed three ounces per serving, and students may only purchase one serving at a time.

All Grade Levels

- Should eliminate deep-fat frying as method of on-site preparation.
- Portion size restrictions on chips, certain snacks and sweets, milk and fruit drinks.
- Limits on fats and sugar per serving.
- Fruits and vegetables should be offered daily on all points of service.
- Must offer 2%, 1%, or skim milk at all points where milk is served.
- Beginning with the '05-'06 school year, include trans fat information in all product specifications and, by '07-'08, reduce the purchase of any products containing trans fats.
- By the '06-'07 school year, all fruit and/or vegetable juices should contain 100% real fruit and/or vegetable juices.

COMMITTEE FORMED TO COMBAT CHILD OBESITY AND IMPROVE SCHOOL NUTRITION

The Joint Interim Study Committee on Nutrition and Health in Public Schools has been appointed. The 15-member committee was created by legislation (Senate Bill 474) passed during the 78th legislative session to give the state a forum that addresses methods to combat obesity and improve nutrition habits among public school children.

Texas State Senate members appointed to the committee by Lt. Governor David Dewhurst included Senators Eddie Lucio, Robert Deuell, M.D. (Greenville), and Jane Nelson (Flower Mound). Members appointed from the Texas House of Representatives by Speaker Tom Craddick include Representatives Jaime Capelo (Corpus Christi), Jodie Laubenberg (Parker) and Vicki Truitt (Keller). Other public officials serving on the committee are Texas Agriculture Commissioner Susan Combs, Texas Education Commissioner Shirley Neely, and Texas Health Commissioner Eduardo Sanchez, M.D. In addition, the Governor recently appointed the following public members: Physician William John Klish, from Houston; Nutrition Expert Nancy M. DiMarco from Denton; School Food Service Director Dora Rivas from San Benito; Parent Melissa Ann Wilson, M.D., from Corpus Christi; and School Superintendent Adrian B. Johnson, Ed.D. from Texas City.

"I commend Lt. Governor Dewhurst for making these appointments so that we as legislators can join forces with our three commissioners, medical experts, nutrition specialists, educators and parents to ensure that our children learn to make healthier food choices," Senator Lucio noted. "Our goal is to encourage and teach children to maintain a proper weight to help them prevent the early onset of diseases like Type II Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, asthma, orthopedic complications,

sleep apnea, gall bladder disease and certain cancers which continue to increase among our youngest populations."

"Learning to take care of our physical health and well being is a fundamental component of education, and that is why I authored legislation in 1999 to return physical education to the school day in Texas. I look forward to this opportunity to re-examine the way we are teaching our young children to make good decisions about their health," said Senator Nelson, who chairs the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services.

"As a family physician, I know that prevention works better than cures. We need to explore ways to prevent problems like diabetes and heart disease, and a good place to start is examining the nutrition our kids are getting" said Senator Deuell. "I know that the state has seen some tight financial times lately, but I believe any money we invest in the health of our kids we will get back exponentially in the coming years. We are talking about the health of Texans who be alive 60 or 70 years from now.

Senator Lucio is asking Texans to participate in the committee hearings and offer their input and express their concerns. "We want to hear of successful and innovative programs that children respond positively to regarding health and nutrition; we want to discuss with food and beverage vendors how we can stock healthy products in vending machines and in food lines; we want to hear from our school food service directors of methods that will entice our children to eat more fruits and vegetables and lower-fat meals; and we want to further the efforts and goals of the Texas Department of Agriculture's Nutrition Division."

Senator Lucio's vision includes evaluating the current School Health Advisory Committees (SHAC) and Wellness Programs in schools. Only ten percent of public school districts, or 120 districts, have active SHACs and data is not available for the Wellness Programs.

USDA SECRETARY RECOGNIZES 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF NUTRITION PROGRAM

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), a community-based nutrition education program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), targets families that are at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line (defined as an income of no more than \$18,850 for a family of four in the continental United States).

USDA Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the 2004 winners of the Excellence in EFNEP-National Awards as part of the program's 35th Anniversary Celebration.

"We applaud the efforts of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, which has helped citizens with limited resources improve their health by making better food choices, increasing physical activity and using safe food handling techniques," said Veneman. "Over the past 35 years, the program has helped some 26 million people build self-confidence and become leaders in their communities."

"The economic value of EFNEP to the community at large is significant," said Joseph J. Jen, Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics. "Research shows that \$1 invested in EFNEP results in \$10.64 in reduced health care costs and for every \$1 spent to implement EFNEP, \$2.48 is saved on food expenditures."

Funded by USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, EFNEP volunteers teach important skills through a series of lessons over several months. During an awards ceremony held on Capitol Hill, 24 individuals from 18 states were recognized for their efforts. The EFNEP award recognizes past adult and youth participants, the paraprofessionals and volunteers who teach the lessons, the professionals who provide leadership and champions of the program.

One of the biggest champions of youth devel-

opment and a real champion in her own right, three-time Olympian gold medal winner Jackie Joyner-Kersey was on hand via video from her hometown of East St. Louis, IL. Joyner-Kersey congratulated the award winners for making a difference in the lives of the underserved in their own communities.

The 2004 Excellence in EFNEP award winners are:

- Alabama - Debra Glenn, Birmingham
- Colorado-Karen Wilken, Fort Collins
- Connecticut -Carmen Rodriguez, Bridgeport; Zoraida Velazquez, New Haven
- Florida - Chris Clark, Escambia County
- Illinois - Robin Orr, Urbana; Ilanda McBeath, Chicago;
- Indiana - Tanya Martin, Marion County
- Iowa - Susan Uthoff, Johnson County
- Kentucky - Vella Adkins, Jackson County
- Louisiana - Carol Jenkins, Orleans Parish
- Massachusetts - Margaret Randall, Amherst
- Montana - Shirley Redding, Big Horn Country
- New York - Fran Johnson, Suffolk County; Clinton Miller, New York City
- Pennsylvania - Josefina Nieves, Lancaster County; Jan Scholl, University Park
- South Carolina - Beth Cothran, Kershaw County
- Texas - Eligio "Kika" de la Garza, retired Congressman, Texas District 15 and John David Franz, Hildago County
- Virginia -Wilhemina Jones, Chesapeake
- Washington - Steven Garrett, Tacoma; Barbara Bennett, Spokane County
- Wyoming - Linda Melcher, Laramie

For more information about EFNEP, visit www.reeusda.gov/f4hn/efnep/efnep.htm.

The Food Journal welcomes your comments and ideas for stories. To contact us, please call 462-2555 ext. 203, or e-mail comments and suggestions to foodjournal@tacao.org.

EXAMINING THE RESTAURANT CHILDREN'S MENU

Parents try to avoid fast food because sit-down restaurants will have healthier options for their kids, right? Not necessarily, warns the Center for Science in the Public's Interest (CSPI). Parents who think the food on kids' menus at table-service chain restaurants like **Applebee's**, **Chili's**, and **Outback** are healthier than fast food should think again, according to a new study published recently in the CSPI *Nutrition Action Healthletter*. The french fries, chicken fingers, burgers, and pizzas that make up the lion's share of most kids' menus have enough calories, bad (meaning saturated-plus-trans) fats, and salt to make most health-conscious parents nostalgic for the Happy Meal.

CSPI surveyed 20 of America's biggest table-service chain restaurants that offer kids' menus. All but one menu offered french fries and 85% offered burgers. CSPI commissioned independent laboratory analysis of typical foods from seven chains; **Applebee's**, **Chili's**, **Cracker Barrel**, **Denny's**, **Olive Garden**, **Outback Steakhouse**, and **Red Lobster**, to determine calories, total fat, saturated-plus-trans fat, and sodium content.

"Many parents appreciate the kid-friendly atmosphere and free crayons at places like **Applebee's**, but not many would expect adult-sized calorie counts in a children's meal," said CSPI senior nutritionist Jayne G. Hurley. "These chains should be encouraging kids to eat some of the healthy dishes they offer adults, but instead their kids' menus primarily feature oversized portions of burgers, fries, and fried chicken fingers. Now, kids come to expect that kind of junk food at school and at home."

Some of CSPI's findings include:

At the **Outback Steakhouse**, the Boomerang Cheese Burger with Fries has 840 calories and 31 grams of saturated-plus-trans fat—the fats that promote heart disease. To get an Outback

meal that bad, an adult would have to order a sirloin steak, a filet mignon, and three pats of butter, according to CSPI. Outback's Spotted Dog Sundae with chocolate sauce adds another 730 calories and 27 grams of bad fat, making it the worst kids' menu item CSPI analyzed. Any kid eating a cheeseburger, fries, Coke, and sundae at Outback will consume a stunning 1,700 calories and 58 grams of bad fat—the three-and-a-half days' worth.

The **Applebee's** Grilled Cheese Sandwich alone has 520 calories and 14 grams of bad fat. With fries, the meal has 900 calories and more than a day's worth of bad fat—the equivalent of three pork chops.

The Little Chicken Crispers at **Chili's** have 360 calories and 8 grams of bad fat. Add fries and the meal supplies 710 calories and 15 grams of saturated-plus-trans fat—the equivalent of two McDonald's Quarter Pounders.

Red Lobster revamped its kids' menu after CSPI's lab work was complete, so nutrition data for the chain's new menu items weren't available at press time. Although it still sells some of its less healthful items, **Red Lobster's** new menu is a huge step forward. The chain's free appetizer of fresh carrot sticks and cucumbers or applesauce is a great improvement over its own biscuits. And three new lower-calorie entrees—Snow Crab Legs, Grilled Mahi-Mahi, and Grilled Chicken—come with steamed vegetables.

Macaroni Grill and **Cracker Barrel** are the only other chains CSPI looked at that offer kids a choice of grilled chicken. CSPI also praised **Olive Garden** for offering a Spaghetti & Tomato Sauce kids entree, but panned that chain's Cheese Pizza, which provides eight grams of heart-harmful fat.

CSPI found dramatic nutritional differences among similar-sounding menu items at different chains, underscoring the need for nutrition information on chain restaurant menus. For instance, **Applebee's** grilled cheese has twice

the bad fat of **Denny's** grilled cheese sandwich; **Cracker Barrel's** macaroni and cheese has almost three times the bad fat of **Chili's** macaroni and cheese; and **Chili's** fried chicken fingers have three times the calories of **Cracker Barrel's** grilled ones. At **Olive Garden**, its kid-sized pizza has eight times the bad fat of its spaghetti with tomato sauce, but without nutrition information on menus, parents are just left to guess, according to CSPI.

"If kids' menus have rooms for puzzles, mazes, word games, and advertising, surely they have enough room for some basic nutrition information," said CSPI Executive Director Michael F. Jacobson. "And if chains like these are clever enough to put carbs on menus for Atkins dieters, they could find a way to put calories and key nutrients on kids' menus, so parents could help their sons and daughters avoid obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other life-threatening health problems."

Legislation that would require large chain restaurants to print nutrition information on menus is pending in five states, the District of Columbia, and in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Recently, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) announced that he is introducing the Menu Education and Labeling Act (MEAL) in the Senate. Similar legislation was introduced in the House last year by Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). "Childhood obesity is not only a growing public health problem, it's also a very expensive one," Harkin said. "With kids getting a third of their calories from restaurants, fast-food and other chain restaurants must play a role in fighting childhood obesity. Nutrition information on menus will help parents guide their kids' food choices, and their own as well."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's suggested intake for "low-active" children aged four to eight is 1,500 calories and 17 grams of saturated-plus-trans fat. Studies show that kids eat nearly twice as many calories at a restaurant than they would when they eat at home.

A NEW NAME FOR THE FOOD STAMP PROGRAM?

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, state administrators, and anti-hunger advocates have all raised the possibility of a new name for the federal Food Stamp Program (FSP). The two major factors that are driving the interest include:

- 1) benefits no longer come in the form of "stamps," but are delivered via Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT); and
- 2) a new program name might lessen perceived stigma and better position the FSP with clients and the public.

In recent years, three states have renamed the Food Stamp Program. In Michigan, the name has been changed to the "Food Assistance Program," for Minnesota, it's the "Food Support Program," and in Washington state, it's "The Basic Food Program."

Informal program rebranding is also occurring in some other media markets. For example, many recent Kansas state government materials refer to the "Food Assistance Program."

In 2003 Wisconsin conducted some research in preparation for renaming the program; after learning of federal interest in a new national name, however, the state decided to await further USDA action.

Noting the switch to EBT benefit delivery and use of an ATM-like card for program benefits, advocates in New York City have begun promoting participation through the "Food Card".

In 2003, the Texas-based Center for Public Policy Priorities web site (www.cppp.org) featured an on-line survey to solicit name recommendations from advocates and other stakeholders. Of the 230 votes cast, 41% were for "Food Support Program." Runner up names received the following allotment of votes: "Nutrition Assistance Program" received 29% of votes and "Food Assistance Program" got 7% of votes.

FUNDING AVAILABLE

The Congressional Hunger Center and Victory Wholesale Grocers of Springboro, Ohio, and Boca Raton, Florida, are announcing the 2004 "Victory Against Hunger Awards." The awards are twenty-five \$1,000 grants to be presented to anti-hunger and community-based organizations around the country engaged in the fight against hunger.

A panel of hunger experts will choose the winners based on their success in achieving the goal expressed by this year's theme, "Fighting Hunger through Improving Access to the Food Stamp Program." Despite a strong overall economy, hunger and food insecurity abound in communities across the country. Currently, thirty-one million Americans live in hunger or on the edge of hunger. Organizations that can demonstrate innovative food stamp outreach campaigns in low-income communities which result in more individuals and families enrolling in the Food Stamp Program, thereby reducing hunger in their communities, are eligible for a Victory Against Hunger Award.

Under the Hunger Awards program, local agencies may only be nominated by a member of Congress. The application process consists of a one or two page letter from a member of Congress to the Congressional Hunger Center highlighting the nominee's efforts in "Fighting Hunger through Improving Access to the Food Stamp Program." The nomination period is April 5th through May 31st with the awards being made in July. Congressional nomination letters should be addressed to Victory Against Hunger, c/o Congressional Hunger Center, 229 1/2 Pennsylvania Ave, SE, Washington, DC 20003. The name and telephone number, including area code, of a contact person from the Congressional office must accompany each nomination.

***For additional information, go to
www.hungercenter.org.***

FEDERAL UPDATE

Budget Update

On March 12, by a vote of 51-45, the Senate passed the Senate Budget Resolution. Included in the Resolution was an amendment by Senators Dole (R-NC) and Leahy (D-VT) that includes "instructions to seek funding" (for five years) to increase the free meals category from 130 to 140 percent of poverty.

The Senate also adopted a Sense of the Senate amendment by Senator Lugar (R-IN), which instructs the Senate Agriculture Committee to seek funding to expand the Lugar Summer Food Pilots to all states and all sponsors (at a cost of \$15 million in FY2005 and \$127 million from FY 2005-2009).

Child Nutrition Reauthorization Update

The following amendments to Child Nutrition reauthorization passed in the Full Committee on March 10th:

Lugar Pilot Projects- Authorizes three additional states to the current 14 Summer Food Service Program pilots; private non-profit sponsors, which were previously ineligible, would now be eligible for all the pilot states;

Summer Food Area Eligibility Demonstration- Rural areas in Pennsylvania will be eligible for the Summer Food Service Program if at least 40 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; and

Seamless Summer Administration- Allows schools to feed children during the summer through the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs (NSLP). Schools receive the NSLP free reimbursement rates provided during the school year for the summer meals served under this provision.

For a complete listing of amendments and an analysis of the reauthorization bill, go to www.frac.org.



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THE FOOD STAMP EDUCATION AND OUTREACH PROGRAM CONTINUES IN TEXAS

Since January 2002, the Texas Association of Community Action Agencies, Inc. (TACAA) has been administering a statewide food stamp outreach initiative entitled the Food Stamp Education and Outreach Program (FSEOP). Through FSEOP, funded by the Texas Department of Human Services (DHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), TACAA is facilitating increased participation in food assistance, also referred to as the Food Stamp Program, in Texas.

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is the nation's frontline defense against hunger, providing a nutritional "safety net" to households making the difficult transition to self-sufficiency. It enables eligible low-income households to purchase food needed for good health. Despite the program's benefits, food assistance is vastly underutilized in Texas, largely because many low-income people do not know that they may be eligible. The need for food assistance in Texas remains high.

Changes in the Food Stamp Program have made it easier than ever to qualify for food assistance. For example, low-income people can now own a car worth \$15,000, have \$5,000 in resources, and still be eligible for benefits. It also is easier for applicants to qualify for telephone interviews and exemption from finger-imaging. There is a new simplified program for elderly SSI recipients not receiving food stamps. The changes in immigrant eligibility means that nearly all legal immigrants who have lived in the United States (US) for five years or more will be eligible for benefits if their incomes are below a certain level. Also, food assistance benefits are issued electronically in the form of the plastic Lone Star Card, making use of the benefits simpler since the card operates like a credit/debit card that can be used in grocery stores.

During the initial contract period, FSEOP was highly successful. Compared to the remainder of Texas, the counties with an active FSEOP had a substantially higher rate of food stamp applications (6-7% more applications). TACAA is fortunate to be re-funded to continue subcontracting with six community-based organizations in **Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Hidalgo, and Tarrant** counties to conduct local outreach and food stamp application assistance. FSEOP activities will continue through January 2005.

Through their community outreach efforts, the FSEOP subcontractors promote a positive image of the FSP. TACAA subcontractors provide assistance with application completion, interview information, and general information about food assistance requirements. Subcontractors reach potentially eligible households by conducting education and outreach sessions, going door-to-door in low-income housing complexes, facilitating information booths in the community, and partnering with other agencies to reach low-income families and individuals.

If you are part of an organization that works with low-income populations and are located in any of the target counties, you are encouraged to refer clients to the FSEOP subcontractor in their area for food stamp application assistance and general information. For information on subcontractors' local efforts, or to coordinate outreach activities, contact the subcontractors listed on the reverse side:

TACAA FOOD JOURNAL

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San Antonio Food Bank, Inc.
4311 Director Dr.
San Antonio, TX 78219
(210) 337 - 3663

Dallas County

Urban League of Greater Dallas and North Central Texas
4315 South Lancaster Road
Dallas, TX 75216
(214) 915-4690

El Paso County

Project BRAVO, Inc.
4838 Montana Ave.
El Paso, TX 79903
(915) 562 - 4100

Harris County

Families Under Urban and Social Attack, Inc.
2206 Dowling St., Suite 201
Houston, TX 77003
(713) 651-1470

Hidalgo County

AVANCE, Inc.
500 S. 10th Street
McAllen, TX 78501
(956) 618 - 1642

Tarrant County

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Fort Worth, Inc.
1404 Hemphill
Fort Worth, TX 76104
(817) 921 - 5381

If you are not in one of the six target counties, you can get more information by contacting DHS at 1-877-556-2200 or by looking online at www.lonestarcard.info.

For additional information on FSEOP, please contact Pam Lawrie at (800) 992 - 9767 extension 503, or via e-mail at pam@tacaa.org. You also can visit TACAA online at www.tacaa.org.