

Harris Cutler Testimony
2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Sessions
USDA/FNS
August 6, 2008 Baltimore, MD

Good morning. I am Harris Samuel Cutler, President of Philip G. Ball Company and Race-West Company, both located in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, which is outside of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Our companies have been distributing fresh fruits and vegetables all over the United States since 1944. I am here today because of my personal concerns for the health and well being of the children of this great country.

The 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act provides a significant opportunity to improve children's eating habits by: (1) including more fresh fruits and vegetables in school meals and (2) increasing the reimbursement rate to cover this cost.

The school lunch program today is falling short in providing the recommended minimum servings as outlined by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. Improving the school lunch programs diet is a great first step toward better health and nutrition awareness for our young citizens.

School Breakfast should include at least two servings of fruit and/or vegetables every day.

School Lunch should include at least three servings of fruits and/or vegetables every day.

America's children eat less than half of the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. School meals that provide the minimum dietary recommendations will go a long way to improving nutrition and health for our children.

We recommend:

1. Every school set up a salad bar. Students have shown a great interest in salad bars that allow them to pick from a variety of quality fresh vegetables and fruits. Salad bars increase student's consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables
2. Increase reimbursement rates to cover the costs of including more fruits and vegetables in the menus.
3. Non-food assistance grants should be made available to low income schools to purchase refrigeration and salad bar equipment.

4. 50% of USDA commodity purchases should be fresh and fresh cut fruits and vegetables. Currently, only 3% of the fruits and vegetables purchased by USDA commodity programs are fresh fruits and vegetables.

5. Increase funding for the Department of Defense Fresh Purchase Programs, or a comparable USDA or private sector fresh produce delivery program to schools. We have to make it easy for schools to purchase a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables at the lowest cost, delivered directly to the school.

Improving the healthfulness of school breakfasts and lunches must be a goal of the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Making more fresh and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables and salad bars available to students and providing schools with the necessary financial resources will go a long way to accomplishing that goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

Child Nutrition Reauthorization Background

Every 5 years all child nutrition programs are reauthorized by Congress; current authorization expires on 9/30/09. Child Nutrition Programs include: School Lunch and Breakfast, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, WIC, Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Program.

The 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (CNR) provide a significant opportunity to improve children's eating habits by (1) emphasizing the importance of serving more fruits and vegetables in school lunch/breakfast; (2) emphasizing that students like fresh fruits/vegetables and will increase their consumption when salad bars and fresh and fresh-cut fruits and vegetables are available; and (3) increasing the reimbursement rate for school meals so that schools have the funding to cover the cost of serving more fruits and vegetables.

By law, school lunch and breakfast must be consistent with the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans. However, school meals have not been revised for 13 years. Currently, school lunch provides 1-2 fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day than recommended by the 2005 Dietary Guidelines; school breakfast currently provides one less serving than recommended.

Congress will start to hold Hearings on various aspects of the 2009 CNR in the summer of 2008; Congressional activity will increase after the Presidential elections and once a new Administration is in place. In Congress, the two authorizing committees, Agriculture in the Senate and Education and Labor in the House, will take the lead. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) will and House Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (D-CA) and Ranking Member Bud McKeon (R-CA) are critical to our efforts.

United Fresh Produce Association's top policy priorities will focus on school lunch and school breakfast. United Fresh is working within the NANA Coalition to ensure fruit and vegetable priorities have broad public health support.