

Testimony
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2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Session
USDA/FNS Baltimore, MD
August 6, 2008

I am Diane Kurrle, Director of Public Affairs for the U.S. Apple Association. USApple is the national trade association representing all segments of the apple industry. Members include 36 state apple associations representing 7,500 apple growers throughout the country, as well as over 300 individual firms involved in the apple business.

USApple and our members strongly support expansion of fruit and vegetable purchases for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast program and other federal feeding programs.

With more children facing adult-onset diseases like heart disease and type II diabetes, we are raising a generation of children whose life expectancy may be shorter than their parents.

The 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act provides an opportunity to bring today's school meals into compliance with the Dietary Guidelines and in turn significantly improve the eating habits and ultimately the health of the next generation.

To meet the Dietary Guidelines schools must serve at a minimum two servings of fruits and vegetables at breakfast and three servings of fruit and or vegetables at lunch. This represents a significant increase over current practice.

Yet, we know there is a strong link between proper nutrition, consumption of fruits and vegetables, and good preventative health. For example, research has suggested that both fresh and processed apples may help to protect against certain forms of cancer, and reduce the risk of heart disease, asthma, and diabetes.

This past November, USDA released a report showing the antioxidant levels of nearly 300 foods. Apples topped the list, with more antioxidants per serving than even the highly-touted red wine and dark chocolate. There is more and more evidence that antioxidants like those found in apples can be beneficial in preventing chronic disease.

However, studies also show that on any given day, 45% of children eat no fruit at all and 20% eat less than one serving of vegetables. What better place than school to reverse this trend and create life-long consumers of fruit and vegetables?

For many students, those two school meals each day are their primary source of nutrition. This means they are not currently meeting the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables in the Dietary Guidelines.

Experience with the fruit and vegetable snack program has shown that children do like fruits and vegetables and will eat them. Many participating schools report that their students not only try

new fruits and vegetables as part of the program, but that they also ask their parents to purchase those fruits and vegetables at the grocery store. Unfortunately, not all schools have access to the snack program, making it that much more important there be an increase in fruits and vegetables at meal times.

USApple Recommends:

1. The National School Lunch and Breakfast Program meal standards should be revised to include more fruits and vegetables consistent with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines.
2. Build on the programs that are already working. Expand the DOD Fresh program and the Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. The DOD program enables schools to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the lowest cost, delivered straight to their door. The program has been a “win-win” for schools and producers alike.
3. A wide variety of fruits, vegetables and juices should be offered to allow schools maximum flexibility in meeting the Dietary Guidelines. Canned and dried fruit, 100% juice, and products such as apple sauce can and should play an important role in serving students and meeting the dietary guidelines.
4. Encourage innovations in how fruits and vegetables are served in the federal meals programs. USDA is in the process of launching a fresh apple sliced pilot program. Apple slices which are already being sold in many school snack bars have revolutionized the industry. This is a product that kids will eat and as a result, McDonald’s is now the largest purchaser of apples in the country. Fresh sliced apples are great for kids that have braces or for students on the go. Studies have shown that students consume more of the apple when it is offered sliced and ready to eat.
5. Provide funding for non-food assistance grants to enable schools to purchase equipment such as refrigeration necessary to serve fresh fruits and vegetables.
6. Increase reimbursement rates and tie them to the Dietary Guidelines. These healthy changes cannot be made without proper funding. Schools are already struggling with increased food prices and complying with the Dietary Guidelines will only further increase costs.

USApple and our members urge Congress and the Department to use this opportunity to bring the school meals into compliance with the Dietary Guidelines. With some easy and common sense approaches, we can improve the nutritional quality of today’s school meals and the health of tomorrow’s leaders.

Thank you.