

« NUTRITION POLICY »

Editorial

Comprehensive policy recommendations to improve eating habits, including increasing fruit and vegetable (F&V) intake, have been made by governments and national health/scientific organizations around the world. Many countries are engaged in nutrition policy as nutrition-related diseases reach epidemic levels and become major public health concerns. Governments have many policy tools to use to improve nutrition and promote healthier food environments including: education, legislation, regulation, incentives, disincentives and legal actions. Policy changes are happening around the world, although there are many threats to progress and many unrealized opportunities. At the national level, there is often more political will to focus policy changes on improving child nutrition and creating healthier school food environments.

In this issue, Capacci provides an excellent review of European nutrition policies distinguishing between measures adopted to promote informed choice, such as nutrition education campaigns and public information, and policies for environmental change, such as regulating school meals, providing free fruit at school or taxing unhealthy foods.

Dorfman and Wootan note that food marketing to children causes them to prefer, request, and consume foods high in salt, sugar and fat and that little progress has been made by the U.S. government to set voluntary recommendations for what foods can be marketed to children.

Kraak and Story summarize progress by the U.S. government and schools to promote a healthful diet to American children, including increasing F&V availability, access and promotion, based on a comprehensive evidence review of Institute of Medicine recommendations. The most promising policy change in the U.S. - new comprehensive nutrition standards for school lunch - will double the amount of F&V served daily and improve nutrition for 32 million American children.

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Nutrition Policies in Europe: a Structure Review of Existing Measures

— Sara Capacci —

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Interventions aimed at improving people's diet have recently entered the policy agenda of most European countries. The EATWELL project¹ has produced a classification of existing public policies targeted at affecting eating behaviour by distinguishing between those measures changing the market environment and those supporting more informed choice.

Policy actions supporting more informed choice

By far the largest numbers of measures adopted in the European Union are those intended to promote informed choice. *Advertising controls* included in this category are quite common in Europe (e.g. the French law on food advertising and the United Kingdom ban on advertising of unhealthy food to children) and are normally used to protect minors through restrictions on the timing and content of television advertising.

Public information and nutrition education campaigns are by far the most common healthy eating policies. They employ respectively social marketing and education tools (training, seminars, lectures, etc.) in order to improve knowledge and awareness about healthy eating. They might address people's diet in general or focus on specific foods (e.g. the UK campaign to reduce salt intake or the 5-a-day campaigns promoting fruit and vegetables consumption). Within this category nutrition labelling is also included, however given the existence of EU regulation on labelling (Council Directive 90/496/EEC) only a few national labelling acts can be found (the most prominent ones are the 'keyhole' symbol adopted in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and the heart symbol adopted in Finland).

Nutrition information on menus also affects consumers' information. Yet, apart from some cases where the use of nutritional information on menus in restaurants or canteens is part of wider information or labelling programs (e.g. the case of the Portuguese Platform against Obesity, or the Swedish Keyhole), no specific interventions have been identified in Europe.

Policy actions aimed at changing the market environment

Within the policies that operate at market level, those *regulating school meals* (e.g. British and French ban on vending machines in schools, or provision of free fruit at

school through the EU School Fruit Scheme) and *government actions encouraging private sector commitment* (e.g. the reduction of the trans-fat and salt content in processed foods in the UK through voluntary commitment) are the most common.

Fiscal measures (taxes or subsidies) designed to change the relative prices of healthy and unhealthy foods are probably the most debated nutritional intervention in Europe. In fact a number of European countries have recently adopted a tax on some kind of "unhealthy" food:

- Denmark on saturated fats,
- Hungary on foods high in salt and sugar,
- France on caloric soft drinks,
- Finland on sweets.

Among the interventions affecting the market, *nutrition-related standards* are considered; however the Danish ban on artificial trans fats is the only mandatory standard on nutrient content of foods in Europe. Very few of the programs are also aimed at improving the *availability of healthy food for disadvantaged consumers* (two programs were identified in Scotland and Denmark).

Policy effectiveness and evaluation deficiencies

Consolidated and systematic healthy eating policy actions other than information campaigns are confined to a few cases in Scandinavian countries and the UK, with France as a newcomer. The Mediterranean countries have only a recent history of policy action, mostly limited to information and education measures. While some impact evaluations of nutrition policies in Europe exist, in most cases they suffer from important deficiencies (they are often confined to changes in attitudes rather than in behaviour, and they fail to account for confounding factors potentially affecting the impact).

Yet, existing evaluations suggests that nutrition labelling and advertising regulations to children generate a positive behavioural response^{2,3}. The impact of information campaigns on attitudes and intentions is also significant, while the effects on behaviour are still rather limited⁴ and the body of evidence about fiscal measures suggest that small taxes result in small behavioural responses, but large taxes might have a substantial impact on consumption and health^{5,6}.

BASED ON: Capacci S, Mazzocchi M, Shankar B, Brambila-Macias J, Verbeke W, Pérez-Cueto FJA, Kozioł-Kozakowska A et al. Policies to promote healthy eating in Europe: a structured review of policies and their effectiveness. *Nutrition Reviews* 2012;70:188–200.

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Little Improvement on Food Marketing to Children

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The threat of food marketing on childhood obesity

Food marketing has never been more important, as childhood obesity rates in the United States and around the world remain high, and food and beverage marketing takes on ever new and more sophisticated forms.

In 2006, the U.S. National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) threw down the gauntlet with its seminal report¹, *Food Marketing to Children: Threat or Opportunity?* After evaluating more than 300 studies, the IOM determined that food marketing causes children and adolescents to prefer, request, and consume foods high in salt, sugars, and fats. The report made 10 recommendations for how the food industry and the government could reverse this situation.

The current marketing environment still puts at risk children's health

After two comprehensive reviews assessing progress on the IOM's recommendations for parents, schools, food and beverage industry, and government, there has been little progress. In those studies, Vivica Kraak and her colleagues² found that "the prevailing marketing environment continues to threaten children's health and miss opportunities to promote a healthful diet and create healthy eating environments."

Children in the U.S. continue to grow up in environments saturated by food and beverage marketing, the bulk of it for foods low in nutrients and high in calories, sugars, salt or fats. With Kraak et al's studies, we learn that government has not done what it can to protect children from marketing that infiltrates family life and interferes with good health. This lack of progress undermines parents' ability to feed their children well and puts children's health at risk.

Just one example: with no progress on the IOM's recommendation for a national social marketing campaign, our government is ceding education about nutrition to the food and beverage industry, which spends \$2 billion annually inundating children with enticements to eat and drink the wrong foods. That amounts to more than \$5 million every day in the U.S. alone, \$360 million of it for toys fast-food restaurants give away with kids' meals.

Efforts in nutrition education are thwarted by advertising and unhealthy foods

According to Kraak and colleagues, the best news for progress on food marketing comes from schools³, where there has been moderate progress in establishing nutrition standards for competitive foods. In 2010, Congress passed a law that requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set nutrition standards for vending machines, school stores, and other foods sold outside of the school meal programs. USDA should set strong standards; and state child nutrition programs, boards of education, and school districts should implement them. Those standards

should apply to all food and beverage marketing in schools. The marketing and sale of unhealthy foods undermine nutrition education, children's diets, and parental authority over their children's food choices.

State and local governments should set nutrition standards for those children's meals that can be sold with toys. Such policies address a major form of marketing (incentive items) for meals that too often consist of burgers, chicken nuggets, and pizza. By default these meals are served with a side of fries and a soda; defaults should be for healthier items like low-fat milk or water instead of soda. National, state and local governments also should ensure that healthy options and calorie labeling are available for foods sold through vending machines, cafeterias, and food programs on public property.

Sugary drinks are the largest source of calories in children's diet

As pricing is a key marketing strategy, governments should tax sugary drinks. Sugary drinks are the largest source of calories in children's diets and are directly linked to obesity. Tax revenues could be used to support a range of nutrition and physical activity policies and programs in the communities that suffer the highest rates of chronic disease.

In the U.S., the food industry has railed against even voluntary recommendations for what foods should be marketed to children, spending \$37 million to lobby Congress to oppose voluntary guidelines. This considerable opposition reveals the significant hurdle governments face in addressing food marketing.

Success requires an international effort

However, history shows that most meaningful nutrition policies, including trans fat labeling, menu labeling in restaurants, and national standards for school vending, faced such opposition in their formative years. To be successful, we will need a strong international effort to educate and mobilize organizations, health professionals, and parents in support of healthy food marketing policies. Without such a commitment to addressing food marketing to children, we are likely to see more sugary drinks than fruit in children's diets and see their long-term health suffer as a result.



BASED ON: Dorfman L. and Wootan M. [2012]. The nation needs to do more to address food marketing to children. *Am J Prev Med*; 42(3):334–335.

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U.S. Progress to Promote a Healthful Diet to American Children and Adolescents

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Context

In 2005, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report assessing food and beverage marketing practices on the diets and health of American children¹. The report concluded that the prevailing marketing practices did not support a healthful diet and offered recommendations to promote a healthful diet. The IOM report documented that most American youth have inadequate intakes of nutrient-dense foods, including fruits and vegetables (F&V).

Evaluating Progress of Public-Sector Stakeholders

From December 2005 to January 2011, a comprehensive evidence review was undertaken to evaluate progress made by private and public-sector stakeholders toward the IOM food marketing report recommendations. This article focuses on school and government progress² and summarizes the findings relevant to F&V availability, access and promotion to young people.

Government and School Progress

The IOM report recommended that government partner with the private sector to create a long-term, multi-faceted and financially sustainable social marketing program to promote a healthful diet. In 2007, the CDC partnered with the Fruit & Veggies More Matters social marketing campaign that reinvigorated the Five-a-Day brand. However, government made no progress to create an adequately funded “healthy eating” campaign that had a reliable and sustainable funding stream. Indeed, the National Fruit & Vegetable Alliance released a report card in 2010 that gave several D and F grades for food marketing activities, nutrition education spending, and the failure of children and adults to meet the government recommendations for F&V servings.

Government was also charged with using all public policy tools (including subsidies, taxes, legislation and regulation) to expand F&V availability and access. Promising progress was made through several efforts:

- the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act provided one billion dollars in state grants to expand fresh produce to school-aged children through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program,
- the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act enabled the government to distribute millions of dollars in state and community grants in 2010 to increase fresh F&V availability,

- the 2010 Healthy Food Financing Initiative proposed \$400 million dollars in tax credits for food retailers to increase F&V availability,

- the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 provides \$4.5 billion to improve school meal nutrition standards in 2012.

Despite this progress, the evaluation found that legal ordinances were underutilized at state and local levels to expand healthy mobile markets and attract farmer’s markets to promote F&V consumption. It also found that government failed to use policy tools to fund initiatives promoting F&V according to diet-related health. A federal government spending analysis of F&V across the USDA, CDC and NIH found that only 2.8 percent of the combined budgets were used for F&V-related activities. To align spending in ways to address diet-related chronic diseases, USDA would need to double its spending for F&V from \$3.4 billion to \$7.0 billion dollars. NIH and CDC would require an additional \$107.5 million and \$44.7 million dollars, respectively, to address F&V research gaps.



Accelerating Government and School Progress to Promote F&V to Young People

There are many unrealized opportunities for schools and government to promote F&V. Several new alliances and partnerships are underway to work toward this goal.

At the start of the 2012 school year, U.S. school districts are implementing healthier school meal guidelines nationwide, including a requirement that school districts serve F&V to children daily in order to receive federal reimbursement for school meals. Other promising initiatives include the USDA’s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Chefs Move the Schools Program, Farm-to-Schools Grant Program, school gardens, and the Let’s Move! Salad Bars to Schools Program.

The government could raise public and private sector funding to develop and implement a sustained ‘healthy eating’ social marketing campaign; and to use policy tools to provide incentive for increased F&V intake, including federal subsidies to support farmers’ production of F&V. These initiatives are feasible through government funding, innovative partnerships, legislation and education. Evaluations are needed to socially normalize F&V availability, access and consumption to move millions of children and adolescents toward consuming the recommended servings of F&V every day.

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Healthier U.S. School Lunches: More Fruits and Vegetables

— Lorelei DiSogra —

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Policy Change

In January 2012, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released new federal regulations "Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs," to align school meals with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for America. The new nutrition standards are comprehensive and require schools to:

- increase the availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free and low-fat milk in school meals;
- reduce the levels of sodium, saturated fat, and trans-fat in meals;
- meet the nutrition needs of school children within their calorie requirements.

The new nutrition standards are based on recommendations made by the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences.

This policy change is very significant for public health. First, school meals had not been updated for more than 15 years and were not consistent with current nutrition science. Second, more than 32 million school children eat lunch every day at school in the U.S. Therefore, healthier school meals have the potential to improve the nutrition and health of 32 million American children, helping them establish healthier eating habit for life.

More Fruits and Vegetables in School Lunch

One of the primary objectives of the new school lunch standards was to increase children's fruit and vegetable (F&V) consumption, a key recommendation of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for America. In the U.S., the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is intended to nourish children and help them develop healthy eating habits that will reduce their risk of obesity and other chronic diseases. Specifically for F&V, the new school lunch standards are:

- Double the amount of F&V served every day.
- Require both a fruit and a vegetable be served every day.
- Require that students select at least ½ cup of the fruit or vegetable as part of their meal.
- Require that a colorful – dark green, red, and orange – variety of vegetables be served every week.
- Encourage schools to use salad bars to enhance the variety of vegetables.
- Fruit can be fresh; canned in fruit juice, water or light syrup; frozen without added sugar; or dried. Schools should offer fresh fruit whenever possible.
- Vegetables can be fresh, frozen or canned.
- Schools may offer 100% juice, but no more than half of the fruit per-meal may be juice.
- Require ¾ cup-1 cup of vegetables and ½ cup-1 cup of fruit to be served every day, based on age/grade groups K-5, 6-8 and 9-12.

Implementation

All 101,000 U.S. schools participating in the NSLP were required to implement the new nutrition standards by the beginning of the 2012-13 school year. The increase in whole grains and reduction in sodium is phased-in over two and ten years, respectively.

Since 2005, USDA has encouraged schools to make school meals healthier. Prior to the federal policy regulation going into effect in 2012, many schools nationwide made incremental improvements such as serving more fresh F&V, whole grains and less processed foods, salt and fat. However, other schools will require more time, training and technical assistance to meet new school lunch standards and promote healthier foods to students.

More Funding for Healthier School Meals

Beginning October 2012 schools that meet the new nutrition standards will receive an additional \$.06 per lunch to cover costs related to implementing healthier school lunches.

Increasing Kids Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

Fresh produce is the way for schools to deliver on taste, flavor, color, variety - elements critical to encouraging kids to eat more F&V. Serving more fresh produce has also become a tangible example of a school's commitment to wellness. Salad bars, also growing in popularity, are one of the most effective ways for schools to meet the new F&V standards that emphasize variety, color and behavior change. And, students are responding positively especially when they can choose for themselves what F&V they want to eat. Schools offering a wide variety of F&V every day enhances the opportunity for students to "make ½ their plate F&V," a key message of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines. A key goal of the new school lunch standards is to increase children's F&V consumption and help them develop healthier eating habits. Future research will determine the success of this very comprehensive national policy change, but in the meantime, increasing children's access to fresh F&V every day at school is already making a big difference!

