January 10, 2003

DIRECTORS MERGE

The Food and Nutrition Service is committed to the goal of improving the Nation's nutrition and health status through the domestic nutrition assistance programs. These programs, the largest of which is the Food Stamp Program, can have a positive influence and impact on dietary choices and healthy lifestyles for the millions of people served by them. The purpose of this letter is to provide clarification about the appropriate use of Food Stamp Program funds to support nutrition education messages as part of a State nutrition education campaign.

Food Stamp Program funds may be used to provide nutrition messages about dietary choices and physical activity consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These Guidelines are the foundation for nutrition education in all nutrition assistance programs. Fact-based communications that convey the importance of variety, balance and moderation in the diet, and promote physical activity as keys to combating health concerns and obesity, consistent with the nutrition advice conveyed by the Guidelines, are appropriate and allowable. In nutrition education campaigns, these messages must clearly be targeted to low-income audiences.

However, Food Stamp Program nutrition education funds may not be used to convey negative written, visual, or verbal expressions about any specific foods, beverages, or commodities. This would include messages of belittlement or derogation of such items, as well as any suggestion that such foods, beverages, or commodities are never to be consumed.
In summary, States must carefully and thoughtfully construct fact based nutrition messages that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and appropriately targeted to low-income audiences. State Plan Guidance for Federal Fiscal Year 2004 (to be issued in March 2003) will elaborate on this clarification. In the interim, should you have any questions or concerns about allowable campaigns, please contact Mark E. Johnson at 617-565-6405.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Canavan

Robert L. Canavan, Director
Food Stamp Program
Northeast Region

Cc:  CT – William Ruffeath
     MA – Lauren Arms
     ME – Rick Morrow
     NH – Terry Smith
     NY – Ruth Ann Pickering, Sandy Borrelli
     RI – Robert McDonough
     VT – Renee Richardson

Attachment B