

# National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity

## Promoting Fruit and Vegetable Intake in Schools

- ❖ Eating enough fruits and vegetables is important for preventing cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and other diseases.
  - One-third of cancer deaths could be prevented by healthy diets.<sup>1</sup>
  - People who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day have half the cancer risk of those who eat fewer than two servings per day.<sup>2</sup>
  - Every year, cancer costs \$172 billion<sup>3</sup> and coronary heart disease costs \$130 billion<sup>4</sup> in medical costs and lost productivity.
  
- ❖ **“Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids Initiative”**: Provide \$10 million annually for grants to states or school districts for the “Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids Initiative” for educational/promotional materials, salad/garden bars, prepackaged salads and fruit cups, innovative vending options, farm to school programs, cold storage and other infrastructure, and other creative ways to help schools encourage children to consume more fruits and vegetables.
  - **Rationale**: Providing a wide variety of appealing and nutritious fruits and vegetables in the school setting would help students make healthier food choices.
    - The average 6 to 11 year old eats only 3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, achieving only half the recommended seven servings per day for this age group.<sup>5</sup>
    - Fewer than 15% of elementary school-aged children eat the recommended five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily.<sup>5</sup>
    - On any given day, 45% of children eat no fruit, and 20% eat less than one serving of vegetables.<sup>5</sup>
  - Research has shown that schools with salad bars offer a significantly wider range of fruit and vegetable choices than other schools; items offered include green salads, raw vegetables, fresh fruit, canned fruit, and dried fruit.<sup>6</sup> For example, placing garden bars in the primary schools of one school district resulted in a tripling of the amount of fruits and vegetables served over a period of three years.<sup>7</sup>
  - A number of successful approaches have been implemented in schools across the country and have resulted in increased awareness and consumption of fruits and vegetables. For example, in four school-based fruit and vegetable promotion studies funded by the National Cancer Institute, fruit and vegetable intake increased in children by an average of a half serving per day.<sup>8</sup> However, the initial costs for salad bars and other fruit and vegetable initiatives are often cited as barriers to such programs. With minimal resources and start up funds, more schools across the country could develop and implement initiatives to promote a wider variety of appealing fruit and vegetable choices to students.
  
- ❖ **Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (DoD Fresh)**: Expand the DoD Fresh Program up to \$100 million annually (from \$50 million) to help improve the quality of produce available to schools.

- **Rationale:** The joint USDA/DoD Fresh Program provides a mechanism for delivering fresh fruit and vegetables to schools and Indian reservations utilizing DoD's efficient and expansive food distribution system. The DoD Fresh program has been successful because the fruits and vegetables arrive in good condition and in manageable quantities that can be used in the planned school menus while they are still fresh. Increased funding for this program would allow more schools to participate and receive high-quality fruits and vegetables, which are more likely to be consumed by children.
  
- ❖ **Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program:** Expand the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program, which provides free fruit and vegetable snacks to school children, to a national pilot. The pilot program should be expanded to approximately 25 schools in each state, or to reach 1 million students nationwide (\$75 million per year).
  
- ❖ **Commodity Purchases:** Require USDA to write a report to Congress within six months of enactment to assess current commodity purchasing practices and how purchasing decisions are made, and develop recommendations including a plan of action to align those purchases with dietary recommendations.
  - **Rationale:** The gap between the federal government's recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption and the current consumption rates is substantial and could take up to 128 years to close.<sup>9</sup> Federal dietary guidance urges Americans to consume more fruits and vegetables:
    - The *2000 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* urges consumers to "choose a variety of fruits and vegetables daily" as part of a healthy diet.
    - USDA's *Food Guide Pyramid* recommends that Americans should consume 5 to 9 daily servings of fruits and vegetables.
    - The Healthy People 2010 report also has as a goal for Americans to consume more fruits and vegetables.
  
  - According to a study done by the Produce for Better Health Foundation, although fruits and vegetables comprise 33 percent of the total food intake recommended by USDA in the Food Guide Pyramid, only 4.5 percent of total USDA spending in 2000 directly or indirectly promoted consumption of fruits and vegetables.<sup>9</sup>
  
  - A system whereby USDA commodity purchases are better aligned with federal dietary guidance would help Americans, especially those benefiting from USDA's nutrition assistance programs, to achieve public health goals related to fruit and vegetable intake.
  
- ❖ **Fruit and Vegetable Research Agenda:** Require USDA to develop a fruit and vegetable research agenda that coordinates research between the Economic Research Service, Food and Nutrition Service, Agricultural Research Service and other USDA agencies. That agenda should include research on how best to promote fruit and vegetable intake to children and their caregivers including through marketing, food pricing, and environmental strategies and should be developed in coordination with the produce industry, nutrition and health organizations, school food service professionals and other stakeholders.

➤ **Rationale:** The 5 A Day Memorandum of Understanding signed by USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services provides impetus for USDA to expand the research base for fruits and vegetables. The Food and Nutrition Service, in conducting studies and evaluations of the nation's food and nutrition assistance programs, plays a critical role in helping to shape policy, improve program effectiveness, and guide future research.

- Fruits and vegetables comprise 33 percent of the recommended food servings of the Food Guide Pyramid. Despite the importance of fruits and vegetables to public health and the public statements of federal officials in support of increased consumption, an analysis of USDA funded projects revealed that only 11 percent of active agricultural, food, and nutrition research projects reported in 2000 focused on fruits and vegetables,<sup>3</sup> and the vast majority of those research projects were on farm production.

In 2000, of active research projects by USDA and current awards by NIH:

- Only one percent of publicly-funded, active agricultural, food, and nutrition research projects were on fruits and vegetables;
- Only 9.2 percent of those fruit and vegetable research projects were devoted to diet and health issues; and
- Only 1.9 percent of fruit and vegetable research projects were devoted to increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

❖ **National 5 A Day for Better Health Program Coordinators:** Urge the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint or identify a 5 A Day Coordinator at the national level and urge FNS to appoint or identify a 5 A Day Coordinator in each of the seven FNS regional offices to coordinate and expand USDA efforts to promote fruit and vegetable intake.

➤ **Rationale:** The National 5 A Day Partnership was established in January 2001 in response to recommendations based on the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) 5 A Day for Better Health Program Evaluation Report. The Partnership is working to guide the 5 A Day program into the future by involving an expanded base of health-oriented government agencies, businesses, and non-profits, including USDA. The partnership is dedicated to developing a comprehensive, coordinated, national campaign infrastructure that increases fruit and vegetable consumption to 5 A Day for 75% of Americans by 2010.

➤ USDA has, over the years, actively included 5 A Day messages in nutrition assistance programs and encouraged Americans to consume more fruits and vegetables through the *Dietary Guidelines* and the Food Guide Pyramid. As part of the expanded 5 A Day partnership effort, USDA representatives now serve on the Steering Committee of the National 5 A Day partnership. USDA representatives also serve in various capacities on the subcommittees that make up the Partnership. In addition to these partnership activities, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established in April 2002 between the Department of Health and Human Services (National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and USDA (Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services, Research, Education and Economics, and Marketing and Regulatory Programs). **In order for USDA to fulfill its commitment to implement 5 A Day programs on its own and coordinated with other agencies, USDA needs staff dedicated to 5 A Day activities and to working with other 5 A Day partners at the national and regional level.**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, 1988.

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<sup>2</sup> Block G, Patterson B, Subar A. "Fruit, Vegetables, and Cancer Prevention: A Review of the Epidemiological Evidence." *Nutrition and Cancer* 1992, vol. 18, pp. 1-29.

<sup>3</sup> American Cancer Society (ACS). *Cancer Facts & Figures 2003*. Atlanta, GA: ACS, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> American Heart Association (AHA). *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics -- 2003 Update*. Dallas, TX: AHA, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III*. Washington, D.C.: 1994.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation. *Changes in Children's Diets: 1989-1991 to 1994-1996*. Washington, D.C.: USDA, January 2001. Report No. CN-01-CD1.

<sup>7</sup> Presentation by Brenda Padilla of Vacaville Unified School District to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, February 20, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Potter J, Finnegan J, Guinard J, et al. *5 A Day for Better Health Program Evaluation Report*. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Produce for Better Health (PBH) Foundation. *The Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Challenge – Executive Summary*. Wilmington, DE: PBH, 2002.

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