

June 23, 2021

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Vice Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop Jr.
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Leahy, Baldwin, DeLauro, and Bishop, Vice Chairman Shelby, and Ranking Members Hoeven, Granger, and Fortenberry:

As you craft the fiscal year (FY) 2022 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill, we respectfully request:

- \$3,000,000 for critical technical assistance to aid schools in successful sodium reduction and asking for a report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on sodium-reduction progress in the school food program, particularly in meeting Target 2 reduction levels;
- Report language directing that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) finalize guidance for industry regarding short-term voluntary sodium reduction targets; and
- \$6,000,000 for consumer-awareness education campaigns for the updated Nutrition Facts panel (\$3,000,000) and menu labeling (\$3,000,000).

These three important actions would support efforts to address the risks from excessive sodium in food and facilitate transparency for consumers, allowing them to make more informed choices for themselves and their families about what they eat.

First, dedicated funding is needed to help schools meet recommended limits of sodium in school meals. Schools were on track to reduce high amounts of sodium by meeting three targets over ten years. Yet in 2018, USDA delayed the second sodium-reduction targets (Target 2) by seven years (originally set for SY2017-2018) and eliminated the third targets entirely (originally set for SY2022-2023). While a federal district court struck down the 2018 final rule in April of 2020, progress towards Target 2 was significantly delayed and it is critical that we continue to help schools move forward to achieve the Target 2 reduction levels as quickly as possible. For example, per Chronic Disease Risk Reduction (CDRR) levels defined by the National Academies under Breakfast and Lunch Sodium Targets implemented in school year 2014-2015, an elementary school lunch can have up to 1,230 mg of sodium, or more than three-quarters of a day's worth for a child in a single meal. A high school lunch can have 1,420 mg of sodium, or more than 60 percent of a day's worth.

In addition to targeted technical assistance funding, USDA should provide a report to Congress detailing its sodium reduction technical assistance efforts and any progress being made by schools on sodium reduction, particularly in meeting Target 2 reduction levels. The transparency afforded by the report will make clear how sodium reduction efforts are progressing and allow USDA and other stakeholders to identify unique challenges, available resources, and efforts needed to safeguard child nutrition and health.

The National Academy of Medicine's 2019 report, Dietary Reference Intakes for Sodium and Potassium (DRI) report on sodium, reviewed the evidence on the adverse health effects of excessive sodium and confirmed long-standing advice to lower sodium intake. In fact, the report lowered the maximum amount of levels of sodium intake for younger school-aged children: from 2,200 mg to 1,800 mg for children aged 9-13 and from 1,900 mg to 1,500 mg for children aged 4-8. This new report yet again makes clear that current amounts of sodium in school meals are increasing the risk of diet-related disease for school children. The report also reaffirmed the maximum amount of sodium for older children and adults at no more than 2,300 mg.

Second, we urge you to consider adding report language that would direct FDA to finalize guidance for industry regarding short-term voluntary sodium reduction targets. Voluntary sodium reduction targets will help continue the dialogue with FDA, create a transparent resource for consumers, and inform company decision-making about the pace and scale for innovation. Even though the targets are voluntary, meeting these targets could prevent up to 475,000 cases of cardiovascular disease and save \$41 billion in healthcare costs over 20 years¹. At minimum, only meeting the short-term (2-year) targets still yields health and economic gains.

Each of the signed companies stand by the FDA in voluntary, industry-led efforts to reduce sodium in our food supply, thus demonstrating that sodium reduction is achievable. The under-signed public health groups also support these efforts. By developing a common benchmark or

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5892867/>

target, all companies would be encouraged to improve the nutritional value of their products. While not binding, voluntary targets can help support healthier alternatives for consumers while leveling the playing field for companies. These outcomes can be a win-win for consumers and industry.

Finally, while we applaud the FDA's support for consumer-awareness education campaigns for the updated Nutrition Facts panel and menu labeling as part of its Nutrition Innovation Strategy, dedicated funding is needed to ensure that these changes are effective. These nutrition policies are powerful and will help Americans make better informed choices about what they eat while encouraging companies to provide healthier food options. We fully support efforts to inform consumers on the appropriate amounts of sodium in the American diet and believe moving forward with the voluntary targets will help facilitate those efforts.

Both the Nutrition Facts panel and menu labeling are important policies for public health and consumer transparency, equipping consumers to make an informed choice that is right for themselves and their families. The updated Nutrition Facts panel, which changed several aspects of the label and, for the first time, allows consumers to know how much added sugars is in food and beverages, went into effect in January 2020 for large manufacturers and in January 2021 for small manufacturers. Menu labeling, which requires calorie labeling for menu items and prepared foods in chain restaurants, supermarkets, and convenience stores, came into effect and enforcement in May 2019. FDA needs adequate funding to ensure that consumers understand and fully benefit from these policies.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, including
member companies Danone North America,
Mars, Incorporated, Nestlé USA and
Unilever United States

American Heart Association
Center for Science in the Public Interest