

May 16, 2022

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 Andy Harris  
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 Harris:

As you craft the fiscal year (FY) 2023 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill, the undersigned companies and public health groups respectfully request:

- \$5,000,000 for critical technical assistance to aid schools in meeting the school meal nutrition standards and for a report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on these efforts, particularly in meeting Target 1a sodium reduction levels for school lunch (the FY22 omnibus provided \$2,000,000 in technical assistance including \$1,000,000 for sodium reduction);
- \$1,000,000 to aid the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in assessing progress and working with industry on meeting the short-term (2.5 year) voluntary sodium reduction targets, released after a long delay in October 2021 and which are to be

achieved by industry in 2024, and setting a timeline for establishing interim and long-term voluntary targets with accompanying report language; and

- \$6,000,000 for consumer-awareness education campaigns for the updated Nutrition Facts panel (\$3,000,000) and menu labeling (\$3,000,000). The House FY22 bill, but not the final FY22 omnibus, included \$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. We were pleased that the FY22 omnibus provided \$2,000,000 in technical assistance including \$1,000,000 for sodium reduction. Schools were on track to reduce unhealthy amounts of sodium by meeting sodium-reduction targets over ten years. In February 2022, the USDA established an interim sodium-reduction target for lunch only (Target 1a) in place of these targets, which is a ten-percent reduction in sodium by SY 2023-2024 (effective July 1, 2023), and committed to addressing longer-term sodium reduction in the future. For sodium consumption, the 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that no more than 2,300 mg/day sodium is safe for ages 14 years and up and reduced the amount of sodium considered safe for children ages 4-8 years to  $\leq 1,500$  mg/day and to  $\leq 1,800$  mg/day for children ages 9-13 years based on the 2019 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) report for sodium. That report established a Chronic Disease Risk Reduction (CDRR) level for daily sodium intake; exceeding these levels would increase chronic disease risk within a healthy population. The interim target for a high school lunch (Target 1a) only brings down the amount of sodium allowable to 1,280 mg, or still more than half a day's worth for a high school teenager. We encourage you to continue to include technical assistance funding for school meal programs to help them be successful in meeting nutrition standards, especially for sodium.

In addition to targeted technical assistance funding, the USDA should provide a report to Congress detailing its technical assistance efforts, particularly in meeting Target 1a reduction levels. The transparency afforded by the report will make clear how sodium reduction efforts are progressing and allow the USDA and other stakeholders to identify unique challenges, available resources, and efforts needed to safeguard child nutrition and health.

Second, we urge you to provide \$1,000,000 to aid the FDA in working with industry and measuring progress on meeting the voluntary 2.5 year sodium reduction targets, and setting a timeline for establishing interim and long-term voluntary targets that would bring overall sodium levels in the food supply down to levels that help consumers meet the Dietary Guidelines, as originally intended. The FDA did not update or finalize the 2016 draft guidance on longer-term voluntary targets that would fully meet the Dietary Guidelines. Specifically, we would like the FDA to identify which data sources it will use, and how the FDA will collect and analyze data toward meeting the voluntary 2.5 year targets. Even though the targets are voluntary, meeting longer-term targets could prevent up to 475,000 cases of cardiovascular disease and save \$41

billion in healthcare costs over 20 years<sup>1</sup>, yielding health and economic benefits. In addition to this funding, the FDA should report to Congress on these efforts.

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 signed public health groups also support these efforts. With a common benchmark, all companies are now 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, we urge you to provide \$6,000,000 to ensure that these changes are effective. These nutrition policies are powerful and will help consumers make better informed choices about what they eat while encouraging companies to provide healthier food options.

Both the Nutrition Facts panel and menu labeling are important policies for public health and consumer transparency, equipping consumers to make informed choices that are 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 are 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. The FDA needs adequate funding to ensure that consumers understand and fully benefit from these policies. While we applaud the House for providing \$3 million for these efforts in the FY2022 spending bill, we were disappointed that the funding was not included in the final omnibus bill and encourage Congress to include our request for \$6,000,000 in the FY2023 appropriations bill.

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  
American Public Health Association  
Center for Science in the Public Interest

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<sup>1</sup> Pearson-Stuttard J, Kypridemos C, Collins B, et al. Estimating the health and economic effects of the proposed US Food and Drug Administration voluntary sodium reformulation: Microsimulation cost-effectiveness analysis. *PLoS Med.* 2018;15:e1002551. Published 2018 Apr 10. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.