



# CSPI's 2023 ACTION PLAN & CASE FOR SUPPORT

The Center for Science in the Public Interest is among the nation's oldest independent, science-based consumer advocacy organizations. With contributions from dedicated supporters like you, CSPI holds government and corporations to account to move toward a healthier and more equitable food system.

CSPI puts science at the forefront of all we do. And because we accept no direct government or corporate grants, we maintain an objective independence and serve as a trusted and reliable resource to policymakers and the media.

Our wins keep consumers safe... in the grocery store, at restaurants, and in our children's schools. We secure policies and provide resources that help more people gain access to safe and healthy foods and the information they need to make healthy choices.

The following are brief summaries of some of the coming year's main campaigns for which we are seeking support. Thank you for considering a financial commitment to CSPI—and to a healthier, more informed, and more resilient nation.

## OUR MENU OF CAMPAIGNS

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### Expanding Nutrition Access

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) is the nation's largest federally funded food assistance program. More than 40 million people rely on SNAP benefits to purchase food and beverages each month. It's a critical safety net that aims to reduce food insecurity and lift millions of families out of poverty every year.

In addition to protecting families from hunger, SNAP promotes nutrition security through access to healthy, safe, affordable foods. But generations of discriminatory policies, compounded by targeted food industry marketing has fostered widespread inequities in access to nutritious foods. These forces

contribute to a serious problem: inequitable access to nutritious foods is a leading contributor to death and disability in the U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), members of low-wealth and some racial and ethnic minority communities are more likely to experience preventable, diet-related diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and some cancers.

**SNAP should be accessible to all people in need, provide adequate benefits, and encourage nutritious food purchases.** CSPI is leading efforts to increase SNAP participants' spending power for nutritious foods by expanding fruit and vegetable incentive programs. CSPI is coordinating with anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocates to improve access to SNAP benefits through expanding eligibility (to college students, ex-felons, residents of U.S. Territories, etc.) and increased benefit amounts. We are asking federal regulators to raise stocking standards for grocery stores that accept SNAP payments, ensuring that when SNAP participants shop, they can find a variety of nutritious foods wherever they choose to use their benefits. We are exploring research pilots for innovative strategies to improve nutrition and access for SNAP. And we are building the advocacy capacity of community-based organizations and SNAP participants to advance policies that promote nutrition access across the country.

CSPI is holding listening sessions with communities to identify effective ways of increasing nutritious food access for households in need, taking into account the cultural, geographic, and food system barriers that are unique to these groups. This collaborative learning helps to identify culturally specific food needs and provides a forum to discuss other nutrition equity issues.

**CSPI advocates for access to nutritious options within the charitable food system.** For some people, SNAP benefits are inaccessible or insufficient to make ends meet. More than 50 million people rely on the charitable food system for their next meal. CSPI is working to support food banks as they shift to sourcing more nutritious food to better meet their clients' needs. We are pressing the USDA to adopt nutrition guidelines for food distribution programs, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand farm-to-food bank programs. These efforts help ensure that healthy options are available wherever people get their food.

## Increasing Public Awareness of Dangerous Sodium Levels

High-sodium diets are a major cause of health problems, like heart disease. Indeed, cutting sodium consumption by half would save about 100,000 lives each year in the United States.

New York and Philadelphia now require chain restaurants to label items containing more than 2,300 mg of sodium—the recommended daily limit of

sodium listed in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This is a great step forward in allowing consumers to make informed decisions about their purchases and their health—and avoiding the worst offenders. But this is only a beginning.

**CSPI is urging the FDA to set longer-term voluntary sodium reduction targets for food manufacturers and require front-of-package food labeling to promote the public's health.**

The United States is lagging behind Europe, Mexico, Canada, and other nations in food labeling systems. In those parts of the world, manufacturers are required to label foods boldly and clearly on the front of the package if they contain excessive sodium, saturated fat, or added sugars.

## Reducing Levels of Added Sugars

CSPI will host a major national Sugar Summit for advocates, researchers, and supporters in the spring of 2023. The Sugar Summit is part of a broad policy campaign we are leading to reduce added sugars in food and beverage products and ensure that consumers are aware of added sugar content.

For example, added sugars thwart consumers' health efforts when they dine at chain restaurants. Most "small" fountain drinks at restaurants have more added sugar in a single drink than the Federal government advises for a day—50 grams, or twelve and a half teaspoons. Regular consumption of menu items like these can raise the risk of diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems.

Due to CSPI's activism, chain restaurants are required to list calories on menus and to disclose saturated fat, sodium, and other key nutrients upon request. In January, we petitioned the FDA to also require chains to disclose added sugar. Other initiatives, like our push for front-of-package labeling, will also help consumers clearly see added sugar amounts. In response to CSPI's advocacy, the FDA recently announced it will explore establishing added-sugars reduction targets for food manufacturers, similar to what the agency is doing for sodium.

Already, we helped convince New York City to pass the Sweet Truth Act, the country's first law requiring warnings on high-sugar prepackaged items sold in chain restaurants, like bottled soda. We're now working to expand the warnings to non-prepackaged items, including fountain soda. We are assisting advocates in other states to enact similar legislation to require warnings on items that contain unhealthy amounts of added sugars.

CSPI is targeting the high-sugar content of breakfasts served at elementary, middle, and high schools. And we are working with college students to end or amend exclusive pouring rights contracts with PepsiCo and Coca Cola at public

universities which, our published research shows, often provide universities with financial incentives to increase sugary drink consumption.

With your support, CSPI will continue to work with lawmakers, as well as manufacturers, to help consumers scale back the dangerous levels of sugar that are too often a part of American diets.

## Demanding Stronger Protections for Food Safety

Foodborne pathogens cause an estimated 48 million illnesses each year. Food poisoning and foodborne bacteria impact hundreds of thousands of Americans and many develop long-term conditions, like severe organ damage. But today there is little that regulators can do to identify and prevent potential outbreaks before they occur.

**Sounding the Alarm on *Salmonella*.** In the United States, rates of *Salmonella* contamination have not improved in twenty years.

CSPI recently filed a regulatory petition demanding that the USDA do more to stop these dangerous pathogens before they end up on families' plates—resulting in a landmark move by the agency, which announced in October a proposed new regulatory framework to reduce *Salmonella* illnesses caused by poultry.

CSPI is continuing to work with USDA and stakeholder partners to ensure the swift development of a final framework that is achievable, science-based, and meets the needs of consumers and the public.

**Stronger Prevention of Zoonotic Disease.** Diseases that pass from animals to humans (zoonotic diseases) pose an ongoing public health threat. Three out of four new or emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals.

These zoonotic disease threats can include new strains of viruses like influenza, foodborne illnesses like *Salmonella*, and animal diseases spread by insects, like Lyme disease. But right now, the Department of Agriculture only has authority to address diseases spread by animals when they threaten animal health . . . not when they put human health at risk. It is vital to address zoonotic diseases given many of the worst epidemics and pandemics in recent history, including COVID-19, the Ebola virus, avian influenza, and SARS, likely spread from animals to humans.

CSPI's advocacy team helped introduce a new bill into Congress—the Mitigation of Emerging Zoonotic Diseases Act (MEZDA)—which would give USDA more power to effectively address zoonotic diseases, similar to what the agency already does for animal diseases. This legislation encourages better data collection and

enhanced transparency in zoonotic disease programs, which would benefit both the agricultural industry and public health.

## Keeping Children Healthy

Throughout the pandemic, millions of school children received free, nutritious meals—even when school buildings remained closed. While the circumstances that prompted these novel policies have changed, the benefits of providing free and healthy meals for all kids have become clearer than ever before.

When all children have access to free meals, they have a better chance at success. The stigma associated with free- or reduced-cost meals disappears, and academic performance rises when kids are well-fed.

CSPI played a significant role in pushing for universal school meal legislation. However, many of the provisions from last year came with expiration dates. We successfully pushed to extend the timeline, but once the summer ended, so too did these school meal extensions.

Now, many of those children are in limbo. Without a permanent solution for free school meals for all, families once again must apply for free- or reduced-price meals—an administrative burden on schools and a setback for families with fewer socioeconomic resources. Kids will be forced yet again to stand in different lines or receive different meals from their classmates. And once again, families will face school meal debt.

Some states, like California and Maine, have already adopted universal free meals. CSPI is supporting two state campaigns this year – New York and Colorado. Meanwhile, CSPI is also pushing Congress to help children receive free, healthy meals nationwide because every child should have access to a healthy school meal.

## Safeguarding Consumers from Supplements

The dietary supplements industry is the Wild West of health. Although the FDA regulates the marketing and content of foods and drugs, it has limited resources and limited authority to track dietary supplements, some of which are tainted with illegal drugs or tout dangerous or misleading claims. CSPI is a leading advocacy voice for consumers, urging regulators to fix the laws that permit deceptive marketing and, when necessary, taking supplement makers to court.

This year, for example, both New York and California introduced bills that would ban the sale of weight loss supplements to minors. While these products claim to promote healthy weight loss, many are not only ineffective, but they are often laced with dangerous chemicals, including banned laxatives and stimulants.

CSPI was a lead voice for dietary supplement reform in the current Congress, advocating in particular for a requirement that companies list all their approved products with FDA. (Yes, unbelievably, there is no such requirement at present.) That legislation is very much in limbo, but a hard push at the end of the current Congress could still secure its passage.

## Advancing New Projects and Initiatives

CSPI believes that science should be used to promote the public good. We are constantly exploring new areas where our work can make a real difference in improving people's lives. In addition to our longstanding work as the nation's food and nutrition watchdog, we are identifying areas where our expertise can do even more to protect consumer health.

Scientific integrity has eroded in recent years, due to the increasing number of public officials who have dismissed, suppressed, or misused science to justify policies that are not supported by evidence. CSPI's **Standing Tall for Science** initiative defends scientific rigor and transparency in U.S. public health policy. This work, which reaches beyond our historic focus of food and nutrition, was significant in exposing and dispelling misinformation around COVID-19 and purported treatments. We were also active in trying to enhance FDA regulation of diagnostic tests, an area of regulatory weakness exposed by the pandemic.

Our science department team has been working to ensure appropriate regulation of the emerging field of **Precision Nutrition**—individualized, actionable dietary recommendations that help each person decide what, when, and how to eat to optimize our health. CSPI is developing a strategy to understand the current landscape of precision nutrition companies and FDA's regulation of them, and advocate for consumer protections. For the moment, claims greatly outstrip the available evidence.

We will also be launching a **Food and Environmental Sustainability Initiative** to improve farming and food production practices, lower food waste, and address climate change. An underappreciated contributor to global greenhouse emissions is our food system, accounting for more than one-third of all GHG emissions, according to a recent United Nations report. The ways we produce, process and package food are becoming more energy and resource intensive. And in the U.S., an estimated 30 to 40 percent of the food supply ends up as waste. Meanwhile, more than 10 percent of US households (13.8 million people) were food insecure at some point in 2020. There's a clear connection between reducing wasted food and opportunities to support food insecure households with quality food.

## The Role You Can Play

Your support profoundly influences the practices of the food industry and bolsters the commitment of policymakers to preventive health policy.

Thank you for considering the full range of campaigns that your support can make possible in the year ahead.

For more than five decades, CSPI has been fighting to keep your food safe and nutritious. We take no direct grants from government or corporate sources, so our work remains free from political and corporate influence. Instead, we rely on generous, tax-deductible contributions from supporters like you. And please make your voice heard by calling on companies, restaurants and institutions, and our government to insist on a better food system for all.

Your investment fuels our campaigns to keep consumers safe, informed, and healthy—today and into the future.