

Healthy Beverage Initiative

April 10, 2013

Dear Supermarket CEO:

The undersigned local and state health officials and nonprofit organizations are deeply concerned, as we suspect you are, too, about America's obesity epidemic, particularly among children. Over the last 30 years, obesity rates in children have tripled and in adults have doubled. About one-third of children and two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese.

That is why we are reaching out to you to discuss with you ways in which your company could encourage customers to purchase healthier, no- and low-calorie drinks in place of higher calorie sugar drinks to improve your customers' health, as well as boost your company's reputation for social responsibility and caring for the health of its customers.

Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated that sugar drinks (carbonated or not) are a major contributor to the obesity epidemic. Sugar drinks are the single largest source of calories in many Americans' diets and are the only food or beverage that has been directly linked to obesity. One study found that each extra soft drink consumed per day was associated with a 60 percent increased risk of overweight in children.

Each 20-ounce soda has about 16 teaspoons of sugar and more than 230 calories. That's more than the U.S. Department of Agriculture's and the American Heart Association's recommended limits for daily sugar consumption.

High consumption rates among children are especially troubling, with 46 percent of two- and three-year olds consuming sugar drinks each day, and 20 percent of those children drinking an average of seven ounces of sugar drinks per day. Sadly, the negative health consequences of obesity mean that young people today may have shorter life spans than their parents. Type 2 diabetes, a disease that used to be seen primarily in adults over 45, is now becoming more common among teens. It's no surprise that the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the federal government's basic nutrition policy, and health experts and officials around the country recommend that people "[r]educe intake of sugar-sweetened beverages." The American Medical Association reached the same conclusion at its June 2012 policy meeting.

With supermarkets selling the lion's share of sugar drinks, your company and others clearly have an opportunity to promote your customers' health by encouraging customers to switch from high-calorie to low-calorie drinks. Possibilities include limiting sugar drinks in check-out aisles, posting signs in the soft-drink aisle to encourage people to switch to drinks with few or no calories, featuring primarily non- and low-sugar soft drinks at end caps and in "spectacular" displays, giving greater prominence to lower-calorie drinks in your advertising, and adjusting prices to encourage the purchase of non- and low-caloric drinks.

Improving sugar-drink marketing practices could play an important role in reversing the obesity epidemic and improving public health. We view this as a win-win situation, in which your company could do well by doing good.

We hope that you'll meet in person with our representative group of health officials soon to explore those and other ways that your stores could help shift consumers from sugar to non-sugar drinks (if only in limited test markets). Please respond to our contact person, Dr. Jim Krieger at the Seattle/King County Public Health Department (206-263-8227; james.krieger@kingcounty.gov) to set up a meeting at a convenient time and place, or we will contact you. We look forward to talking with you and to working together to improve the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Boston Public Health Commission

Maricopa County Department of Public Health

California Center for Public Health Advocacy

New York Academy of Medicine

Center for Science in the Public Interest

Philadelphia Department of Public Health

ChangeLab Solutions

Public Health – Seattle & King County

City of El Paso, Department of Public Health

Santa Clara County Public Health Department

Kansas City Missouri Health Department

Southern Nevada Health District

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity

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