



Mr. Robert M. Eadie
Chief, Policy and Program Development Branch
Child Nutrition Division, Food and Nutrition Service
Department of Agriculture
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 640
Alexandria, VA 22302-1594

October 15, 2008

Dear Mr. Eadie,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the reauthorization of the child nutrition programs. As the Director of Milk Procurement for Lactalis American Group, I would like submit the following comments on behalf of Lactalis Americas.

Lactalis Americas owns and operates five cheese production facilities across the United States, including the states of New York, Wisconsin, Idaho, and California. Annually, we produce or market over 300 million pounds of cheese through retail outlets, foodservice (including schools), and further processed food manufacturing.

We are concerned for the place cheese will hold in the reauthorization of certain child nutrition programs, such as the school lunch and school breakfast programs.

Proper nutrition for children is an important part of growing the next generation of healthy Americans. Dairy products such as cheese have an important role in accomplishing this goal. The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends three daily servings of lowfat and fat-free milk, cheese, or yogurt as part of an overall healthful diet. This report also identified nutrients that Americans need to get more of in their diets. Dairy products are an excellent source of three (calcium, magnesium, and potassium) of the five nutrients identified as lacking in children's diets. This is why organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Hispanic Medical Association, and the National Medical Association support initiatives to get more lowfat and fat-free dairy into children's diets.

Cheese is an integral part of child nutrition for two reasons, as identified in the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. First is the nutrient density of cheese. For example, a single serving (one ounce) of part skim mozzarella cheese packs 6.9 grams of protein, 18.3% of the recommended daily allowance of calcium, and smaller but significant amounts of Niacin, Iron, and Vitamin E. One service provides all this with less than 3 grams of saturated fat. In fact, cheese supplies 27% of the calcium in the US diet while contributing less than 12% of the saturated fat.

The dietary guidelines also highlight food groups that should be encouraged. One of these is lowfat and non-fat dairy. In fact, lowfat and non-fat dairy has its own 'wedge' in the USDA food pyramid. Maintaining availability of cheese in the school nutrition programs and WIC will encourage the continued, and possibly increased, consumption of cheese by children in America.

The only critique against cheese is that it has a fat content. This is why Lactalis Americas and other cheese manufacturers have developed lowfat and non-fat products to market into the school feeding programs. Products such as shredded cheeses for pizzas, tacos, and salads, slices for cheeseburgers and other sandwiches, and string cheeses for snacking all have fat-reduced versions available to programs for children. These products limit the fat intake of children while protecting the nutrient profile kids need and the taste they enjoy.

Cheese continues to be a favorite among children. It provides a healthy addition to their diet, providing nutrients that are, on average, lacking. Encouraging cheese consumption through continued support in these nutrition programs should remain a priority for USDA.

Sincerely,

John D. Rutherford, Jr.
Director, Milk Procurement
Lactalis American Group