



## ASN Health and Nutrition Public Policy Newsletter September 19, 2007

### CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

**Senate Finance Committee Outlines Agriculture Tax Package** Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) has released an outline for an agriculture tax package of spending offsets that could add billions of dollars to finance the 2007 Farm Bill. Elements of the outline included a permanent agriculture disaster relief trust fund, conservation tax credits, rural development bonds, and energy conservation tax incentives. Baucus's recommendations currently do not provide additional funds for nutrition programs or research. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) commented that, "We are continuing discussions regarding both the details of the Finance Committee's ideas and the level of funding help they would provide toward the Farm Bill. We still have a way to go in these discussions in order to meet crucial needs for strong farm income protection and investments in conservation, nutrition, energy, rural development, and specialty crops initiatives." The Committee is expected to begin mark up of its version of the Farm Bill in October.

### ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

**The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Explores Nutrition Labeling** The FDA held a meeting on September 10 and 11 to gather comments from industry, health groups, advocacy organizations and medical experts on the use of labeling programs that use symbols and/or Guidance Daily Amounts similar to the UK's traffic light system and that are on the front of food packages. Front-of-pack labeling arose from evidence that consumers were not using the more complex back panel nutrition labeling; indeed obesity and other disease conditions had escalated since nutrition labeling was available on foods. Representatives from the UK, Canada, the Netherlands, and Thailand described the voluntary front-of-pack schemes the private and public sectors were developing; no uniformity was apparent in format, nutrition criteria, food categories covered or nutrition information.

The US has a wide variability in content of selected nutrients, categories of foods covered, symbols/graphics/ illustrations, and criteria and basis for nutrition information (e.g., per serving, per calories or per 100 grams). Many systems relied on booklets and websites to provide the transparency behind the criteria. The FDA heard comments about the impact of the labeling schemes on reformulation, consumer purchases, and cost of products carrying the icons. According to the consumer research presented, no system appears to result in consumers choosing a healthier diet or improving a health outcome. The lack of consistency in approaches has ultimately raised the risk of confusing consumers more than helping them. There was no consensus on approaches

other than to make it simple, transparent, flexible, easily updatable, consistent, voluntary and combined with widespread education.

For an archived webcast of the meeting, please visit the [FDA - CFSAN website](#).

**CDC and NCHS Advisory Committee Meeting**—On September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Advisory Committee held a public meeting to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, CDC Director, and the NCHS Director on scientific and technical program goals, objectives, strategies, and priorities of NCHS. For details on the meeting, please visit the [Federal Register](#).

**National Research Initiative (NRI) Competitive Grants Program Request for Applications** The USDA CSREES has issued a request for application for the NRI Program for 2008 to support (1) high priority fundamental and mission-linked research of importance in the biological, environmental, physical, and social sciences relevant to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural communities and (2) competitively awarded research, extension, and education grants addressing key issues of national and regional importance to agriculture, forestry, and related topics. Approximately \$190 million will be available for support of this program. For more information, please visit the [Request for Applications](#) or the [CSREES Program Summary](#).

**National Institutes of Health Campaign to Empower Individuals to Pursue Careers in Research** The NIH's *Strength in Numbers* campaign offers a renewed commitment to qualified postdoctoral scientists who are seeking careers in biomedical and behavioral research. The Loan Repayment Program (LRP) funds up to \$35,000 annually in loan repayment for qualified educational debt of health professionals pursuing careers in one of the five LRPs offered by the NIH: Clinical Research, Clinical Research for Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds, Contraception and Infertility Research, Health Disparities Research, and Pediatric Research. The programs also provide coverage for federal and state tax liabilities. To qualify, applicants must possess a doctoral-level degree, devote 50 percent or more of their time to research funded by a nonprofit organization or government entity (federal, state, or local), and have educational loan debt equal to or exceeding 20 percent of their institutional base salary. For more information, please visit the [NIH Press Room](#).

**Funding Opportunity Announcement from the CDC for Public Health Conference Support** The CDC issued an announcement for public health conference funding to provide partial support for specific non-federal conferences in the areas of health promotion and disease prevention, education programs and applied research. The closing dates for applications are December 10, 2007 for Cycle A and March 3, 2008 for Cycle B. The details about this funding opportunity can be accessed at [Grants.gov](#).

## NATIONAL INITIATIVES

**Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Study Finds Ads Seen by Kids Promote Foods High in Sugar, Fat or Sodium** A RWJF study, *Nutritional Content of Television Food Advertisements Seen by Children and Adolescents in the United States*, finds that 98 percent and 89 percent of all food advertisements viewed by children ages 2 to 11 and adolescents ages 12 to 17, respectively, were for products high in sugar, fat or sodium.

The products were particularly high in sugar: on average those seen by younger children had 46 percent of the calories from sugar while the ads seen by the older children were for products that averaged 49 percent of total calories from sugar. Researchers defined a food as being high in sugar if more than 25 percent of calories came from sugar. In addition, 98 percent of cereal advertisements seen by children ages 2 to 11 were for high-sugar (more than 25 percent of the total calories) cereals. This study is the first to use television ratings data to draw a large sample that is representative of the viewing patterns of children and adolescents and to weight the nutritional content of each advertisement, given that some ads are viewed more than others. For more information, please visit the [RWJF Newsroom](#).

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