

FOOD DAY

OCTOBER 24, 2011

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REDUCE DIET-RELATED DISEASE BY PROMOTING SAFE, HEALTHY FOODS

The foods we enjoy should promote, not undermine, our good health. Most Americans feast on salty, overly processed packaged foods; high-calorie sugary drinks that pack on pounds and rot teeth; and fast-food meals made of white bread, fatty factory-farmed meat, French fries, and more soda still. Such junky diets promote obesity and tooth decay, as well as diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, and cancer.

It's time to eat real and cut out (or down on) the junk and replace it with the good stuff. Use the tips below to reduce your risk of (or control) any diet-related diseases:

- 👉 Replace (or reduce) consumption of sugary beverages such as soda, fruit drinks, and sweetened teas. Tap water, seltzer water, flavored-unsweetened water, and even diet sodas are better for you than those sugar-laden drinks.
- 👉 Plan snacks and meals around fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, low-fat milk and yogurt, fish, and lean poultry. Always have the healthier food options in your refrigerator and cupboard.
- 👉 Switch from whole or 2% milk to 1% or fat-free (or to soy milk) and switch from white bread and white rice to whole wheat bread and brown rice.
- 👉 Use Nutrition Facts labels to help you choose healthier foods. In fact, you'd be best off skipping whole aisles of the supermarket altogether.
- 👉 At restaurants, don't be tempted by the huge portions. Share an entrée with a friend, ask the server to wrap up half for lunch tomorrow, skip dessert...or eat at home!
- 👉 And don't forget to exercise, starting with pushing away the plate when you're full!



National Cancer Institute

While we can choose healthier diets on our own, doing so would be a lot easier if we got more help from government health agencies and companies. Take these steps to help change environments to promote healthier eating habits:

- 👉 Urge the Federal Trade Commission to stop deceptive advertisements.
- 👉 Push for the Food and Drug Administration to stop deceptive labels and require simplified nutrition information on the fronts of food packages, limit sodium in packaged foods, and get harmful artificial trans fat totally out of food.
- 👉 Encourage your employer to make sure that the foods in the cafeteria and vending machines are healthy.
- 👉 Tell food manufacturers and restaurants to reduce sodium levels in foods and get rid of trans fat.

For more information on what you can do to take action on these issues, go to www.FoodDay.org.

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SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE FARMS AND LIMIT SUBSIDIES TO BIG AGRIBUSINESSES

Uncle Sam has long been generous to farmers, or at least some of them. All sorts of subsidies have been developed, such as payments to farmers when crop prices are low; payments regardless of whether a farmer grows anything at all; and a subsidy for crop insurance. Below are a few facts about the U.S. subsidy programs:

- Between 1995 and 2009, direct subsidies totaled some \$246 billion, or about \$16 billion per year.
- Just 10 percent of large farms rake in 74 percent of direct subsidies – with the top recipient getting \$4.8 million in 2009. Meanwhile, the average payment to 80 percent of the farms receiving the smallest subsidies was only \$572.
- Most direct farm subsidies go to growers of just five crops: corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton, and rice.



USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Some possible improvements to farm policy that could help small and mid-size family farms include:

- Sharply limit federal support to large farms** and use the savings to help smaller farms and organic farms.
- Protect small ranchers and poultry growers** from the giant meatpackers and poultry processors. The processors set prices and, in some cases, business practices in ways that make it tough for small farmers to earn a living.
- Build local food systems and support the infrastructure for making locally grown foods more available.** Most foods travel hundreds or thousands of miles to get to grocery stores. Increasing the marketing of locally grown food helps local farmers, keeps rural communities alive, and protects the environment. Promoting farmers markets, CSAs (community-supported agriculture), local food processing, and bringing more locally grown fruit and vegetables into supermarkets, schools, hospitals, and colleges are tasty ways to support local farmers!
- Promote Farm to School programs** and create a market for locally grown foods, while providing healthy meals to school-aged children.
- Improve the SNAP program.** In 2009, only 900 out of about 5,200 farmers markets accepted SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly Food Stamps) benefits. More markets need EBT machines (for the debit card-like SNAP benefit cards), which could be provided through USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program.
- Tax chemical fertilizer and pesticides** to fund sustainable agriculture programs.

Of course, beyond those federal programs, we consumers could *buy more locally produced and organic fruits, vegetables, and other foods at farmers markets, farm stands, and grocery stores.*

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EXPAND ACCESS TO FOOD AND ALLEVIATE HUNGER

Some 50 million Americans are “food insecure” or near hunger, and about 11 percent of the poorest Americans without cars live in “food deserts”—where people are beyond walking distance to the nearest grocery store. Deep-seated social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, and crime, contribute to these problems, and solving them will require a variety of approaches. Education, community-engagement, job programs, and increasing the availability of healthier foods would all help. For starters, it is critically important to help eligible people take full advantage of Food Stamps (SNAP), school meals, and other federal anti-hunger programs.

The following are just a few examples of the great things that citizens and the government working together have done to improve health and food security:

- ✦ USDA’s Community Food Project (CFP) is a federal grant program designed to meet the needs of low-income people by increasing access to fresher, more nutritious food supplies.
- ✦ New York City’s Healthy Bodega Initiative has recruited 1,000 small, inner-city convenience stores to offer more low-fat milk, fruits, and vegetables, sometimes from local farms. With foundation support, the city is licensing up to 1,000 mobile Green Carts that sell only raw fruits and vegetables in low-income communities.
- ✦ The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative provides grants of up to \$250,000 or loans of up to \$2.5 million per store to bring supermarkets or grocery stores to underserved communities.
- ✦ Various initiatives across the country are being used to reward SNAP recipients for purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets (e.g., Fair Food Network’s Double Up Food Bucks, Wholesome Wave’s Double Value Coupon Program, New York City’s Health Bucks incentive).
- ✦ As a part of her Let’s Move initiative, First Lady Michelle Obama aims to eliminate food deserts in America in seven years.



New York City Department of Mental Health and Hygiene

Next Steps

Urge your Members to Congress to get on board with eliminating “food deserts” in underserved communities.

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PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT AND ANIMALS BY REFORMING FACTORY FARMS

Each year, filling the 310 million American stomachs requires about 9 billion chickens and turkeys, 114 million pigs, and 34 million cattle. The vast majority of those animals are no longer produced on picture-book farms, but on huge “confined animal feeding operations” (CAFOs), or factory farms. A single egg farm might house well over a million hens, and a large feedlot up to 50,000 cattle. Those operations cause a multitude of problems, including:

- 👉 **Harmful gases** that pollute the air and water are emitted by livestock manure. Those gases are some of the largest sources of air pollution in the United States.
- 👉 **Antibiotics** added to animal feed may lead to antibiotic-resistant infections in humans.
- 👉 **Over-fertilization and water quality** of farm fields result in polluted rivers and streams, as well as “dead zones” in the Gulf of Mexico and Chesapeake Bay.
- 👉 **Inhumane treatment** of the workers and animals of factory farms, slaughterhouses, and processing plants occur all too often.
- 👉 **Soil erosion** as a result of farming practices leads to irreversible damage caused when plants do not hold the nutrient-rich topsoil. Its loss reduces soil fertility and requires increased use of chemical fertilizers.
- 👉 **Grain-fed beef** is high in fat, which promotes heart disease. And eating any beef and pork, especially processed meats, may increase the risk of colorectal cancer.
- 👉 **Natural resources** are used up for the functioning of factory farms. On average, about one-third of a pound of fertilizer, 1,900 gallons of water, and seven pounds of grain are required to produce one pound of beef.
- 👉 **Irrigation** used for feed crops accounts for 80 percent of all the fresh water used, competing with the needs of people and industry.



USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

With that said, this is what we could do:

- 👉 Urge the enforcement or broadening of federal laws to reduce toxic air and water pollution from CAFOs, increase the amount of space provided to animals, and reduce the number of animals in CAFOs.
- 👉 Require that farm animals be treated better—bar the caging of layer hens, confinement of pigs in gestation crates, calves in veal crates, and such painful mutilations as tail-docking and hot-iron branding.
- 👉 Eat less meat, more plants! The average American eats 30 chickens, half a pig, and a tenth of a cow each year. If you do eat animal products, choose organically produced foods or buy free-range poultry and pork, eggs from cage-free hens, and grass-fed beef.

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PROMOTE HEALTH BY CURBING JUNK-FOOD MARKETING TO KIDS

The soaring rate of childhood obesity—tripling since 1980—has rung the warning bell for health experts and parents alike. In fact, some experts predict that the current generation will be the first to live shorter lives than their parents.

The sad thing is that kids are actively encouraged to eat unhealthy foods and rarely prompted to eat healthy foods. Most of the foods marketed to kids are mediocre fast foods, sugary breakfast cereals, and candies. Many of them are based on white flour, sugar, fat, and salt, plus a sprinkling of artificial colorings and flavorings. Food companies use some of the most advanced neuromarketing techniques to get inside children's developing brains and encourage them to prefer those disease-promoting foods. Industry's marketing efforts include:

- 👉 Television advertising
- 👉 Advergaming web sites
- 👉 Cartoon characters on packages
- 👉 Toys included with nutritionally poor fast-food meals such as the Happy Meal



Jorge Bach, CSPI

Fortunately, progress is being made. Some cities and states, including California, Oregon, and Kentucky, have banned the sale of sugary drinks (but sometimes allow sports drinks) and snack foods in schools. Aided by First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign, in 2010 Congress passed a law that will lead to the first-ever national nutrition standards for foods sold out of school vending machines and stores. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is developing regulations that will improve the nutritional quality of foods in school meals. But still, with the exception in some families, kids are rarely encouraged to eat healthy foods—fruits, vegetables, beans, non-fried seafood, low-fat milk and yogurt, and lean poultry in particular.

Although strides are being taken, there is still more that needs to be done. Below are a few actions that you could take to encourage less junk-food marketing to children and healthier diets.

- 👉 Encourage major food and beverage companies to adopt higher nutrition standards—reducing their use of white flour, synthetic dyes, and other questionable ingredients.
- 👉 Urge your members of Congress to support the Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children's voluntary nutrition guidelines.
- 👉 Urge the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to ban partially hydrogenated oil (the source of artery-clogging artificial trans fat), limit sodium in packaged foods to safe levels, and ban food dyes.
- 👉 Initiate community-wide campaigns—involving teachers, parents, pediatricians, and health departments—that focus on both healthier diets and more physical activity.

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SUPPORT FAIR CONDITIONS FOR FOOD AND FARM WORKERS

Few consumers who chew on a bright red apple or dig into a juicy steak think of the workers who grow, harvest, and process that food. Even worse, federal labor protections, such as minimum wages, overtime pay, and mandatory breaks for rest or meals, are not provided to farmworkers and workers of poultry and meat processing plants. Slaughterhouses and processing plants sometimes operate 24 hours a day, where some 500,000 workers kill and process hundreds or thousands of animals each hour in hazardous conditions. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has separate and more relaxed standards for those work environments. Too many workers endure terrible working conditions, suffer higher rates of injury, are subject to long-term exposure to pesticides, and have fewer legal protections than just about any other workers.



Vera Chang, Bon Appétit Management Company Foundation

Hundreds of thousands of children and youth farmworkers lack adequate protections. At age 16, a youth can operate heavy farm equipment or apply toxic agricultural chemicals. Meanwhile, the minimum legal age for comparable work in most other industries is 18. As with other farmworker laws, enforcement of child labor laws in agriculture is weak.

At the better farms and factories, workers enjoy safe conditions, decent salaries, and union representation. And thanks to citizen pressure, companies' voluntary adherence to stronger standards and government intervention, have become more common. Some states, such as California, Oregon, and Washington, have more-protective laws, but may be poorly enforced.

Next Steps

Our nation's access to affordable food should not be at the expense of the health of those who labor to bring it to us. Conditions for agricultural and food-processing workers can be improved both through the enforcement of existing regulations and the enactment of stronger protections. Considering the historic inadequacies of governmental protections, the most effective means of winning better working conditions would probably be to increase unionization of those who endure the backbreaking work of harvesting crops and of those who process meat and other foods.

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