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Interagency Working Group Seeks Input on Proposed Voluntary Principles for Marketing Food to Children

In an effort to combat childhood obesity – the most serious health crisis facing today’s youth – a working group of four federal agencies today released for public comment a set of proposed voluntary principles that can be used by industry as a guide for marketing food to children.

Led by former Sen. Sam Brownback and Sen. Tom Harkin, Congress directed the Federal Trade Commission, together with the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to establish an Interagency Working Group of federal nutrition, health, and marketing experts to develop recommendations for the nutritional quality of food marketed to children and adolescents, ages 2 to 17. The working group seeks public comment on the proposed voluntary nutrition and marketing principles it has developed. After public comment, the working group will make final recommendations in a report to Congress. This is not a proposed government regulation.

The proposed voluntary [principles](#) are designed to encourage stronger and more meaningful self-regulation by the food industry and to support parents’ efforts to get their kids to eat healthier foods. While the goals they would set for food marketers are ambitious and would take time to put into place, the public health stakes could not be higher. One in three children is overweight or obese, and the rates are even higher among some racial and ethnic groups.

“ Children are strongly influenced by the foods they see advertised on television and elsewhere. Creating a food marketing environment that supports, rather than undermines, the efforts of parents to encourage healthy eating among children will have a significant impact on reducing the nation’s childhood obesity epidemic,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. “ These new *Principles* will help food and beverage companies use their creativity and resources to strengthen parents’ efforts to encourage their children to make healthy choices.”

“ As a parent and grandparent, I know the power advertising and marketing can have on kids, and my hope is that the food industry will embrace these voluntary principles and apply them so parents can make informed decisions about the foods they feed their children,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

“ To their credit, some of the leading companies are already reformulating products and rethinking marketing strategies to promote healthier foods to kids. But we all have more work to do before we can tip the scales to a healthier generation of children,” said FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz. “ This proposal encourages *all* food marketers to expand voluntary efforts to reduce kids’ waistlines.”

The FTC has posted a request for comments on the [proposed principles](#) to its website. Interested parties will have 45 days to comment, during which time the working group will hold a half-day forum to provide stakeholders with a chance to comment in person. The forum will take place on Tuesday, May 24 in Washington, D.C. Additional details about the forum will be provided soon. Public comments will be considered by the agencies before the final report is submitted to Congress.

The working group proposal sets out two basic nutrition principles for foods marketed to children. Advertising and marketing should encourage children to choose foods that make meaningful contributions to a healthful diet from food groups including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk products, fish, extra lean meat and poultry, eggs, nuts or seeds, and beans. In addition, the saturated fat, trans fat, added sugars, and sodium in foods marketed to children should be limited to minimize the negative impact on children’ s health and weight. The working group proposes that industry strive to market foods by the year 2016 that meet the proposed nutritional principles and marketing criteria. For sodium, the proposal includes interim targets for 2016 and final targets for 2021.

The proposed principles are voluntary and do not call for government regulation of food marketing. They are an opportunity for food and beverage manufacturers, public health advocates, the entertainment industry, academics, and other stakeholders to provide comments that will inform the working group’ s final recommendations to Congress. Members of the Interagency Working Group will share responsibility for reviewing the comments on the proposed principles. Comments pertaining to the proposed nutrition

principles, including those about the food categories identified in the principles, will be reviewed primarily by the CDC, FDA, and USDA. Comments relating to the marketing aspects of the recommended principles, as well as general comments, will be reviewed primarily by the FTC.

The Federal Trade Commission vote approving publication on the FTC website of the request for comments on the proposed principles was 5-0. The proposal was also cleared for public comment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and by the Department of Health and Human Services on behalf of CDC and FDA.

Copies of the document mentioned in this release are available from the FTC' s website at <http://www.ftc.gov> and from the FTC' s Consumer Response Center, Room 130, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20580. Call toll-free: 1-877-FTC-HELP.

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