



Testimony of
Kate MacKenzie, Director of Food and Nutrition
FoodChange

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Res. No. 267

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Good Morning. My name is Kate MacKenzie, and I am the Director of Food and Nutrition, at FoodChange. FoodChange is a twenty-six year old non-profit organization that improves lives through nutrition, education, and financial empowerment.

Thank you not only for holding this hearing to address milk implications of the NYC school wellness policy, but also for allowing the community to provide recommendations for implementation and assessment.

For the past several years, FoodChange has been a close and supportive partner of SchoolFood. We have encouraged SchoolFood to address issues of food quality and nutrition content of school meals. We strongly feel that addressing and marketing these issues will stimulate greater participation in the school meal program which will ultimately increase the amount of Federal dollars coming into NYC. Of course, this can also lead to greater utilization of New York State food product, which provides a large market to the NYS agricultural economy.

In 2004, FoodChange initiated the SchoolFood Plus initiative which provided additional support to SchoolFood to address issues and concerns around school food and nutrition environments. The overall goal of SFP is to improve the eating habits, health, and academic performance of school children within reach of the NYC school meals program, while strengthening the NYS agricultural economy. We provide educational programming in the classroom and the school cafeterias. We work with SchoolFood staff and Chef Jorge to conduct trainings for food service workers to enable them to prepare fresh foods. We also develop marketing materials that encourage the consumption of healthful foods. In 2007, we are introducing low-fat milk into these marketing materials.

Earlier this year, we were pleased and enthused to learn that SchoolFood was engaging in efforts to eliminate whole milk from its food service options. Quite simply, whole milk is by far the largest source of saturated fat in American diets. Furthermore, 1% and fat-free milk provide all the calcium and Vitamins A and D found in whole and 2% milk, but with little or no saturated fat. Given that an alternative to whole milk is readily available, and it supplies equal nutritional value, without the health-threatening saturated fat, is there any question that we should be serving it to our children? If we have the opportunity to instill lifelong healthy eating habits, should we not be taking advantage of that? I certainly think that we should. Because milk is consumed frequently by children, use of low fat milk in place of higher-fat milks offers great potential for reductions in saturated fat without negatively affecting micronutrient intake.

As part of SFP, we are undergoing a comprehensive evaluation of our efforts. A great deal of time and resources are being spent to determine consumption patterns of elementary school children. When SchoolFood announced its plan to eliminate whole milk, we thought it would be valuable to conduct some evaluation of the policy, much like City Council is currently proposing to do via Resolution 267. Our evaluation was unique in that it assessed not just individual choice of milk selection, but also actual consumption of the product. I'm sure everyone here can attest to choosing

(over)



particular foods but not actually consuming them. This short addition to the evaluation plan produced limited findings, but the process was incredibly valuable.

The policy of no whole milk was implemented before “baseline” data collection in all but one school we assessed. That one school was quite anomalous though - - it had a policy, and still does, of not having any chocolate milk, which is the dominant choice of children by far. At post-test, where no schools offered whole milk, we had weight data on 370 milk cartons: 6% non-fat, 33% 1% white, and 61% non-fat chocolate. Further, kids drank more of the chocolate. We weighed what was left, so a lower number reflects higher consumption: non-fat white 3.7 oz left, 1% white 4.5 oz left, and non-fat chocolate 3.0 oz left. The difference between chocolate and 1% white was statistically significant but the other differences were not.

As you can see, our findings are incredibly limited, and certainly can not be generalized to most schools, but I would like to offer several recommendations for evaluating milk consumption in schools based on our experiences, and the experiences of other experts from across the country.

It is incredibly important to determine baseline patterns, so that change can be evaluated accurately. Because this change in policy has been in place since early 2006, that will be extremely difficult, if not impossible to achieve. It is my understanding that schools have a record of milk purchases, but as we all know, not all students consume the milk they select from the service line. For these reasons, it is extremely important to assess actual consumption by weighing the amount of milk children leave in the carton after they finish their meals. Assessing consumption through evaluating individual selections will produce limited results.

Also, consumption should be measured at multiple points in time. Experience from other school districts across the country, and from the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity show that when whole milk is eliminated from the service line, consumption of milk does initially decrease, but then picks up to original levels, and in some cases even exceeds prior consumption levels. It is well known among nutrition and behavior experts that multiple exposures to a food item (usually 10 or more) are required before children learn to prefer foods.

Finally, it is important to allocate appropriate funds to conduct a thorough assessment of consumption patterns. The very small-scale study that FoodChange conducted cost \$15,000. To conduct a study with the power to represent the entire school system, from elementary students to high school students, will take a great deal of resources. FoodChange is happy to offer its experience and guidance to help design a comprehensive evaluation. We also offer assistance in developing materials to educate and promote low-fat milk consumption. It is critical to have an educational campaign supporting behavior change.

In conclusion, FoodChange continues to commend and support SchoolFood in taking progressive and needed actions to improve the health and nutritional value of foods served in its school meal programs. NYC sets the pace for other school districts, which look to us for leadership and action.

Thank you.
