



BACKGROUND PAPER

Submitted by the

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MOBILISING THE FOOD CHAIN FOR HEALTH

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The Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA)¹ is pleased to see recognition of the multidimensional problems responsible for contributing to health and diet issues globally. The stated goal of the OECD Food Chain Analysis Network is to, “bring together stakeholders to discuss how they might craft new approaches and partnerships to improve the food chain’s contribution to improving health through better nutrition by addressing the nature and extent of nutrition-related health issues, differences across countries at different levels of income, the outcomes of public and private sector initiatives and what further actions and partnerships at different levels in the food chain might contribute to nutrition outcomes.” Therefore, it is important to consider what has already been done by various sectors in the entire food chain. The OECD should consider instances that best practices already exist, what progress has been made, and reach out to other sectors to share data, in order to identify where gaps exist today and identify clear goals for that sector. Gaps in some sectors may exist and basic understanding of the sector is important to this task. When taking on the task, it is important to identify the goals for the other sectors. We will provide you a list of some of the major initiatives already underway by the food and beverage industry.

¹ GMA represents the world’s leading food, beverage and consumer products companies. The association promotes sound public policy, champions initiatives that increase productivity and growth and helps to protect the safety and security of the food supply through scientific excellence. The GMA board of directors is comprised of 48 chief executive officers from the Association’s member companies. The \$2.1 trillion food, beverage and consumer packaged goods industry employs 14 million workers, and contributes over \$1 trillion in added value to the nation’s economy.

Obesity is a Multidimensional Problem:

It is agreed that the rise in obesity is a multidimensional problem; a number of factors, including the increased availability of lower-cost food, changes in the energy density profile of foods, changes in labor markets, and government policies in areas such as agriculture, transportation, and urban planning all have played a role shaping life-styles in which people consume too many calories and undertake too little physical activity.

Co-operation between governments and the food industry is necessary to the adoption of a multi-sector approach to address non-communicable diseases. Consumer understanding and adoption of recommended amounts of physical activity, along with a total diet approach that promotes healthy consumer choices, behaviours, and lifestyles is key to reducing current rates of overweight and obesity and preventing future incidence of chronic disease.

The Food and Beverage Industry's Fight against Obesity

America's food and beverage companies are committed to providing consumers with the products, tools and information they need to achieve and maintain a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. In January 2011, we launched Facts Up Front, a voluntary front-of-pack nutrition labeling system designed to help busy consumers—especially parents—make more informed decisions when they shop in response to First Lady Michelle Obama's request that the industry move farther, faster in our efforts to help consumers construct a healthy diet for themselves and their families.

We have introduced more than 20,000 new product choices with fewer calories, reduced fat, sodium and sugar, and more whole grains. The Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation, an innovative partnership of more than 60 major food and beverage manufacturers, retailers and advocacy groups, has committed to a \$20 million multi-year initiative designed to help kids and adults achieve a healthy weight. The centerpiece of the program is a public education campaign aimed at 6–11 year olds and their parents that teach them about the importance of energy balance (calories in, calories out). Through the Foundation, we have pledged to remove 1.5 trillion calories from the food supply by 2015. We have voluntarily adopted strict advertising criteria so that 100 percent of ads seen on children's programming now feature healthy products and healthy lifestyle messages.

Consumer communications regarding appropriate diet are part of the solution. OECD members should consider releasing guidance on how to eat a balanced diet, not what to eat. A difference should be made between commodities whose consumption is invariably unhealthy (e.g. tobacco) and commodities whose impact on health depends on how they are consumed (food). Consumers should be encouraged to enjoy food, share meals with family and friends, and eat slowly and deliberately.

Communication on a healthy diet is an important component of improving health and wellness. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has found that consumers respond best to positive

and encouraging dietary messages². Given the wide array of nutrients receiving negative attention today and the proliferation of confusing dietary advice in the media, any dietary guidelines should focus on positive messaging that is actionable for consumers and based in strong science. For example, recommendations should include language such as “Choose foods higher in...” and “Increase intake of foods that contain...” instead of restrictive instructions about specific foods and nutrients to limit. Such messages were tested and created for consumers in the public education brochure to accompany the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, *Finding Your Way to a Healthier You*, and remain current today.

Diets with demonstrated efficacy, such as the DASH diet, are good starting examples of total diets to encourage consumers to follow. Recommendations should complement and reflect the way people live, many of whom have limited time and resources. Dietary patterns that rely heavily on fresh produce and preparation from scratch may be unrealistic and unachievable for many people. Dietary guidelines should contain positive and non-judgmental total diet recommendations that encourage incremental changes that will help consumers build healthier diets. Guidelines should make it clear to policymakers and consumers that healthful diets can be built from all types of foods.

GMA believes that encouraging an overall reduction in the prevalence of obesity through improved energy balance, dietary patterns and positive lifestyle changes including physical activity, are means to ameliorate the negative morbidity and mortality outcomes of obesity and diet related chronic diseases. In this respect GMA notes that the total diet approach focusing on the importance of meeting food groups, instead of nutrients, is a realistic, practical and simple approach for consumers to follow, to adhere, and most importantly to enjoy, on a daily basis. This approach must be flexible, adapting to consumers taste, culture, lifestyle, family dynamics and socio-economic level. Member States should explore opportunities for encouraging greater physical activity among populations through civic planning, education, transportation and collaboration with other stakeholders, and for the sports and exercise industry to play an active role.

America’s food and beverage companies have a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, and we will continue to leverage this capability to empower consumers to live healthy and active lifestyles.

Responsible Marketing

In partnership with the Council of Better Business Bureaus, GMA and its member companies launched the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). Working through CFBAI, the food and beverage industry voluntarily adopted strict advertising criteria so that today, 100 percent of ads seen during children’s programming promote healthier diet choices and better-for-you products. The industry has extended its nutrition standards for marketing to children to include social media, mobile device advertising and video games.

² American Dietetic Association. 2007. ADA Position. Total Diet Approach to Communicating Food and Nutrition Information. J Am Diet Assoc. 107(7):1224-1232.

GMA members believe in the responsible marketing of products. New research shows dramatic shifts in advertising to children in the U.S. The average number of food and beverage commercials viewed by children on children's shows has fallen by 50 percent between 2004 and 2010. The number of commercials for cookies, candy, soda and snacks fell even more dramatically. Many of the changes in advertising on children's programming can be attributed to the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), a self-regulatory program created in response to a 2005 FTC report.

Taxes and Restrictive Marketing Measures are Not the Answer

Taxes and restrictive marketing measures are not the most cost-effective tools for addressing NCD's and can have unintended negative consequences. Addressing the complex issue of poor eating habits by some people through "population-based" policies such as higher taxes, restrictions on how and where food and beverages can be sold, and prohibition is problematic for many reasons.

These types of policies ignore the fact that most people who eat and drink moderately do not encounter health problems as a result of their consumption and should not be unduly penalized by restrictive measures. Resources should not be spent on inappropriate broad-based policies at the expense of targeted evidenced-based programs that have been shown to have significant and long-lasting impact.

The most effective interventions for deterring poor eating habits are the ones that combine different approaches in target areas where harm is most likely to occur. They also focus on modifying eating and drinking cultures, through the implementation of local policies and interventions. Targeted interventions have several advantages over population-based measures in that they are sensitive to cultural differences, responsive to local needs and priorities, flexible to accommodate changing drinking patterns and issues, focus resources on addressing harm where it occurs and make use of available resources and expertise.

Addressing this problem effectively requires a cooperative approach by government and all stakeholders, including business.

Summary

GMA believes that nutrition is a serious issue and everyone – industry, government, parents, communities, healthcare providers, and the entire supply chain – must do their part to solve obesity and build healthier lifestyles. The learnings of the food and beverage industry could be used in other contexts.