



# CANFIT

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## Healthy Habits: The Role of Snacks in Child Nutrition Reauthorization Policy Brief

We snack everyday, but rarely think about how or where we learned to snack. For most of us, the snacks that we select as adults are the ones that we ate as children - Especially the snacks that we turn to for comfort. Our snacks nourish us, soothe us, and define us.

Think of the last time you ate a snack - Was it grabbed as you rushed out the door? Eaten during an afternoon meeting? Something that you brought from home and stashed for later? Was it a piece of fruit? Or something high in fat or sugar? Did you eat it because you were hungry or was it because you were frustrated or anxious? Did your snack nourish you? Comfort you? Or both? Was it a favorite snack from your childhood?

We now have an opportunity to influence millions of children to develop the habit of eating nutritious snacks that will support their growth and a healthy body weight by providing healthy snacks through the federal child nutrition programs. Imagine what would happen if children received a daily snack that supports their health, maintains a healthy weight, and models the types of foods that all Americans should be snacking on.

Two federal child nutrition programs, the Child and Adult Care Food (CACFP) program and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), provide over 2 billion snacks and meals to approximately 3 million children,<sup>i</sup> most of them from low income and disadvantaged communities. Children are learning what to snack on from eating the foods they receive from federal programs. Unfortunately, foods that should be eaten once in awhile - day old pastries, sugary beverages, candy, flaming hot Cheetos - are provided daily. The result is that our youth learn to associate snacks with eating a variety of foods that aren't healthy, leading to the development of poor eating habits and, at worst, chronic diseases.

Healthy snacks like fresh fruit, whole grains and fresh vegetables don't have to be boring, and can even reflect a variety of cultural backgrounds - e.g., a soft taco filled with shredded cabbage, chicken, cilantro and salsa; buckwheat noodles with peanut sauce; or fresh fruit with cheese. These types of snacks are served in other countries, and could also be served in United States child nutrition programs.<sup>ii</sup>

We have a golden opportunity to improve the lives and health of millions of children by providing high quality snacks within the federal child nutrition programs. The following recommendations can help us achieve this goal, and should be considered as you review child nutrition program re-authorization legislation.



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## Policy Recommendations:

*Improve food quality by applying uniform national standards to the CACFP and SFSP, specifically:*

- Require nutrition standards consistent with U.S. Dietary Guidelines within one year of publication of these guidelines.
- Reduce frequency of juice served and increase frequency of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Require that whole wheat bread and other whole grains are served daily.
- Add an additional (third) component to the after school snack program in order to enable sponsors to serve fresh fruit daily.
- Provide at least 50% of foods produced without pesticides, chemicals, antibiotics and synthetic hormones.
- Ensure that at least 10% of fresh fruits and vegetables served are local/regionally produced.
- Align community nutrition program foods and menus with the cultural food patterns of participants.

*Support improved food quality with the following funding strategies:*

- Increase CACFP afternoon snack for school aged children to three components and increase funding commensurately.
- Provide higher reimbursement to community nutrition programs which meet higher nutrition standards.
- Provide incentives for increasing fresh fruits and vegetables in meals and snacks through Farm-to-Institution programs.
- Create incentives for switching from juice to fresh, whole fruits and vegetables.
- Increase funding for staff training and kitchen renovations to support cooking of whole foods.
- Provide funding for demonstration projects to improve food and beverage quality.

## About CANFIT

CANFIT helps bridge the gap between communities and policymakers. Since 1993, CANFIT has been at the heart of the movement to improve healthy eating and physical activity environments for adolescents in low income communities and communities of color. *For more information, visit [www.canfit.org](http://www.canfit.org).*

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Child Nutrition & WIC Reauthorization 2009 Talking Points, Food and Society Policy Fellows, 2009

<sup>ii</sup> Rome, Italy: A Model in Public Food Procurement. What Can the United States Learn?, Toni Liquori, [www.sustainablefoodlab.org/filemanager/download/4177/](http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org/filemanager/download/4177/)