

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Suite 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Breakfasts and lunches served in the school setting are important components of the diets of school age children. Improving the nutritional profile of meals served in schools and maintaining participation rates are important priorities. We share your commitment to continually improving the contribution of the school meal to the nutritional needs of school children and to encourage healthy lifestyles for children that are built on a foundation of sound nutrition and physical activity.

USDA recently published a proposed rule on school meal plans to reflect the Dietary Guidelines. That proposal was based in great part on a study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) commissioned by USDA. The recently released 2010 Dietary Guidelines identified potassium, fiber, vitamin D and calcium as nutrients of concern for all Americans, including school age children. Changes to the school meal plans should take steps toward increasing the consumption of these key nutrients by increasing student access to fruits and vegetables that are either "excellent" or "good" sources.

Changes to the school meal plans must consider the constraints faced by school lunch providers. School lunch providers need to offer nutritious affordable options that children will eat and that will encourage continued high rates of participation in both breakfast and lunch programs. For many children, the school meals are their prime source of nutrition for the day. Changes that discourage participation will reduce the overall health and wellness of American children.

As we continue to follow the development of the next generation of school meal plans, we would appreciate your thoughts on the following questions:

In the proposed rule, USDA indicates that implementation of the proposal will result in \$6.8 billion in increased costs over five years and that small entities will incur 80 per cent of that increase. Do you have estimates on the impact of these cost increases on participation among reimbursed, partially reimbursed and paying participants?

Potatoes are rated as an "excellent" source of potassium and a "good" source of fiber. According to a recent article in the March 2011, USDA magazine, *Amber Waves*, potatoes deliver these nutrients at a very low cost. What is the rationale for eliminating potatoes from the breakfast

meal and limiting them to one cup a week when they provide cost effective access to two key nutrients of concern identified by the IOM?

By limiting access to potatoes and other starchy vegetables, the proposed meal plans seem to advance the notion that this will increase the consumption of the orange, green and other types of vegetables otherwise offered. Is there science to support the theory that consumption of orange, green and other types of vegetables will increase if offered more often? What science exists that measures this type of vegetable menu change on nutrient delivery?

The starchy vegetable category includes vegetables with a variety of nutritional characteristics. What are the key characteristics that USDA identified which link the vegetables placed in this category, and how are they distinct from other vegetables excluded from the starchy vegetable category?

According to nutrition experts, bananas and potatoes are very similar in their nutritional makeup. This goes beyond both being rich in potassium. It includes similarities in carbohydrates, dietary fiber and other nutrients. Should both bananas and potatoes have serving limits in the proposed meal plans?

The meal plan acknowledges a preference for orange and dark green vegetables. Is there sufficient science to support such a preference for orange and dark green vegetables? Would Irish potatoes with yellow, purple or other flesh color be considered starchy vegetables?

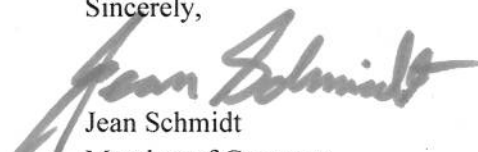
According to the proposed rule, lima beans in the fresh, canned or frozen form are considered starchy vegetables. In dried form they are legumes. Are there nutritional changes between the forms that support such a distinction?

The proposed meal plans are based on consumption data available from 2002 that was reviewed by the IOM for their report. Did USDA evaluate the applicability of that consumption data on potatoes and other starchy vegetables, given changes in preparation methods for products currently offered in schools?


Are the serving limits on starchy vegetables, and potatoes in particular, based primarily on the nutritional profile of the product or on the preparation methods for the product?

Thank you in advance for your feedback to our questions. We look forward to working with you toward our common goal of improving the well-being of our nation's school children.

Sincerely,



Jean Schmidt
Member of Congress

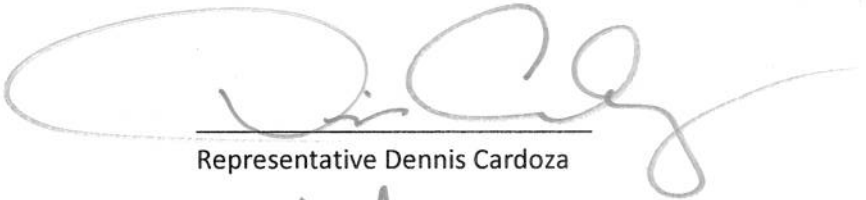


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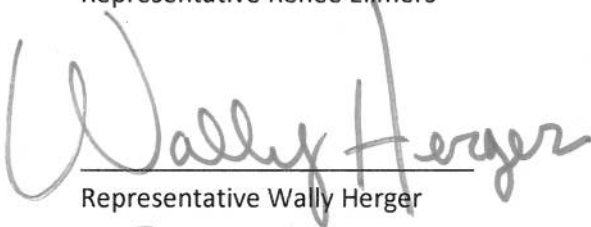

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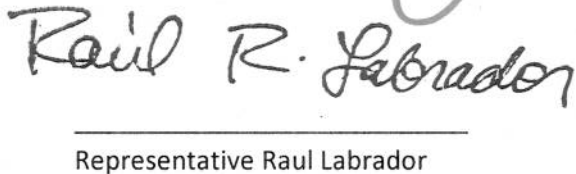

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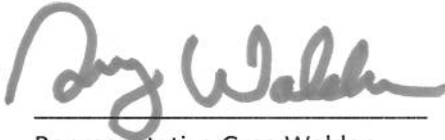
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