

Better-For-Who?

Revisiting company promises on food marketing to children



CENTER FOR
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Public Interest

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CSPI and the Nutrition Policy Project

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. Since 1971, CSPI has been working to improve the public's health through its work on nutrition, food safety, and alcohol issues. CSPI is supported primarily by the 900,000 subscribers to its *Nutrition Action Healthletter* and philanthropic foundations.

CSPI's Nutrition Policy Project is working with concerned citizens, health professionals, government officials and other nonprofit organizations to strengthen national, state, and local policies and programs to promote healthy eating and physical activity. Our goal is to help reduce the illnesses, disabilities, and deaths caused by diet- and inactivity-related diseases and conditions such as heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. For more information on our current projects and other policies to promote healthy eating and physical activity, visit <www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy>.

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Better-For-Who? Revisiting Company Promises on Food Marketing to Children
is available on line free of charge at
<www.cspinet.org/betterforwho>

***Better-For-Who?* Key Findings**

The Foods

- Products that companies identify as appropriate to market to children (approved products) met each company's own standards. However, the majority (59%) of approved products did not meet a single, third-party nutrition standard.
- The percentage of approved products that met nutrition standards varied across food product types, from 0% of puddings, fruit-flavored snacks, and sweet snacks to 73% of yogurts.
- The percentage of foods that met CSPI's nutrition standards varied across companies, from 0% to 100%. The majority of approved products from Burger King, Nestlé, Dannon and ConAgra met the standards, while the majority of products approved for marketing to kids by Pepsi, Kraft, McDonald's, General Mills, Kellogg, Unilever and Campbell failed to meet our nutrition standards.

The Ads: from 2005 to 2009

- On Nickelodeon, the most popular children's television station, ads for foods of poor nutritional quality decreased slightly, from about nine in ten (88%) to eight in ten (79%) food ads. The decrease was not statistically significant.
- While the percentage of ads for foods exceeding the recommended limits for total fat, saturated plus trans fat, and sodium *decreased*, the percentage of ads for foods exceeding the recommended limit for added sugars *increased*.
- The number of ads for foods that exceeded two or more limits for problem nutrients dropped from 29% of food ads in 2005 to 10% of food ads in 2009 (excluding brand ads).
- One-quarter of Nickelodeon's TV food ads were from companies that do not participate in the Council of Better Business Bureaus' Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). Almost no ads from non-CFBAI companies met CSPI's recommended nutrition standards for food marketing to children, while 28% of ads from CFBAI companies met the standards.

Introduction



In January 2006, the National Academies' Institute of Medicine (IOM) concluded that food marketing influences children's food preferences, requests, diets, and health.¹ One of the IOM's recommendations was that food and media companies shift the mix of foods marketed to youth toward healthier foods within two years, or Congress should act.

That fall, the food industry formed the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), a self-regulatory program administered by the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB). By June 2007, 10 companies, which together accounted for about 80% of the TV food ad expenditures to youth, released individual pledges to address food marketing to children. Since then, six more companies have joined the program.

Four companies (Coca-Cola, Hershey's, Mars, and Cadbury Adams) stated that they do not advertise any products to children (according to the CBBB definition). The remaining companies have nutrition standards for "better-for-you" foods that the companies apply to their TV, print, radio, and Internet advertising, and use of licensed characters in advertising. All companies agreed to limit elementary school advertising (though not all school food marketing) and not to seek paid product placement in media aimed at children. Most pledges went into effect in January 2008 and by January 2009, 15 company pledges were fully implemented.

The food companies' marketing pledges vary in terms of the media they cover, how they define which media are child-directed, and the details of their nutrition standards. While there are many similarities between company nutrition standards, there also are important differences. What is considered "better-for-you" by one company may not be considered "better-for-you" by another. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) provides a summary of company policies and nutrition standards at www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/decreasefoodmarketing. The CBBB also maintains a table summarizing company nutrition standards² and a list of pledge-approved products.³

Now, nearly four years since the IOM released its recommendations, **how healthy are the products that companies market to children?** The CBBB has been monitoring the CFBAI primarily using company reports, and adherence to pledges is high.⁴ However, do nutrition standards and pledge adherence translate to **fewer ads for foods of poor nutritional quality?** To answer those questions, this study analyzed the nutritional quality of foods and beverages that companies have approved for marketing to children, and tracked changes in the nutritional quality of foods and beverages marketed to children over time.

How healthy are the products that companies market to children?



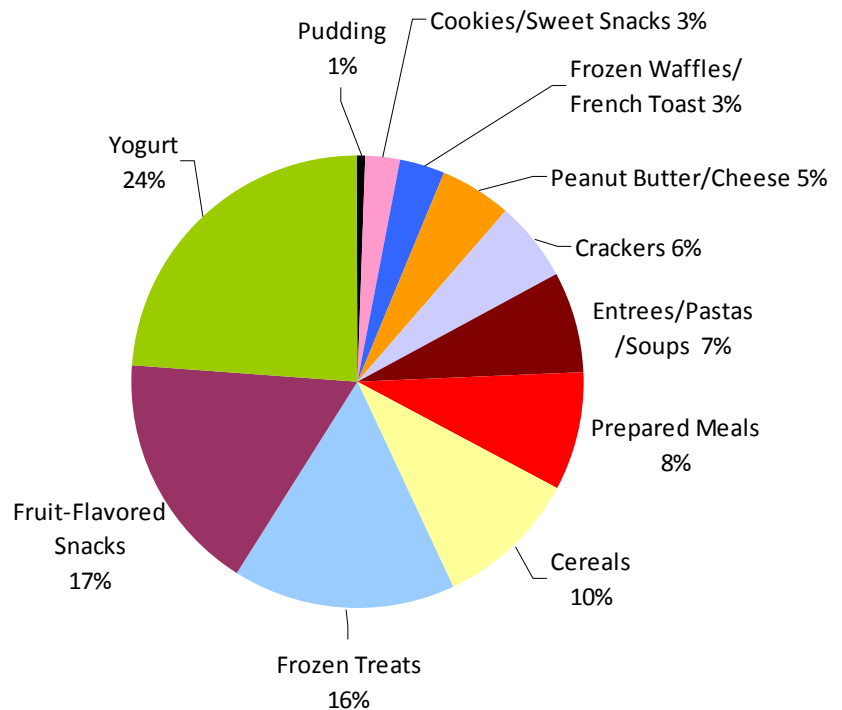
Between February and April, 2009, CSPI collected nutrition information for all flavors and varieties of products that companies reported in their CFBAI pledges met their nutrition standards for marketing to children (n=452).⁵ Nutrition information was collected from company websites or, if unavailable on-line, from product packaging found in a local grocery store in Washington, D.C. (n=20 products).

We evaluated the nutritional quality of the pledge-approved products using a set of nutrition standards for food marketing to children developed by a panel of nutrition and health experts,⁶ which were adapted from the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity's (NANA) Model School Wellness Policies on Physical Activity and Nutrition.⁷ The NANA standards are supported by more than 50 health, nutrition, and education organizations and are based on key nutrition recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.⁸

Types of Products Marketed to Children

Of the 452 products approved by companies in the winter of 2009 to market to children, 391 were foods and 61 were beverages. The most common types of foods were yogurt (24%), fruit-flavored snacks (17%), and frozen treats (16%) (see Figure 1). The most common types of approved beverages were juice drinks (48%), 100% juices (31%), and sports drinks (13%). None of the approved products were fruits or vegetables.

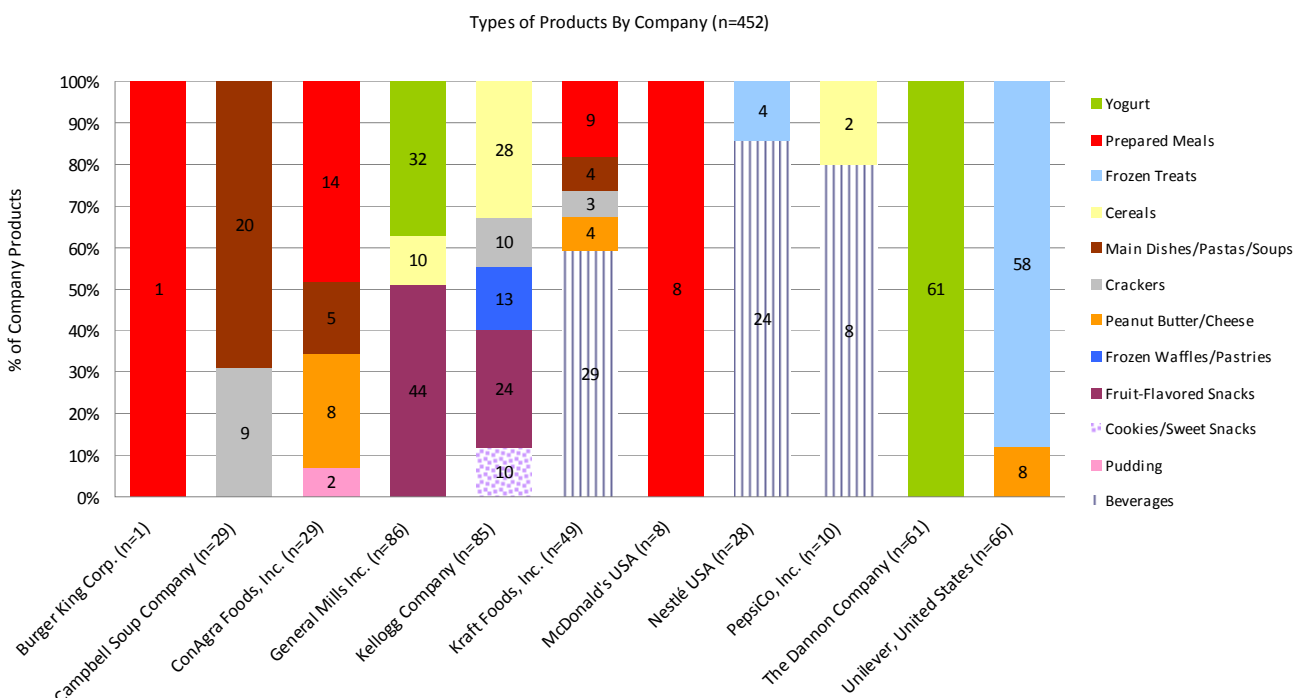
Figure 1: Categories of Foods Marketed to Children



Products Approved for Marketing to Children

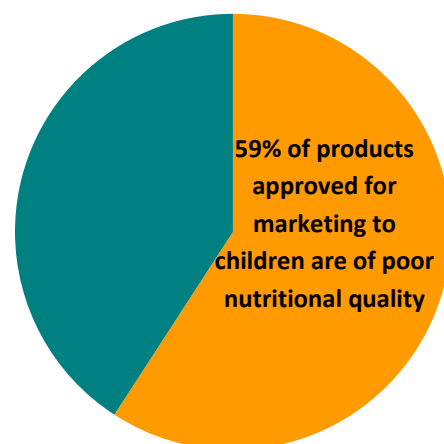
General Mills had the most pledge-approved products (n=86), followed by Kellogg (n=85) and Kraft* (n=49) (see Figure 2). As the chart below illustrates, the number of categories of approved products for individual companies ranged from one (Burger King*) to five (Kellogg and Kraft). Three companies (Kraft, Nestlé, and PepsiCo) had approved beverages. Two companies (Dannon and General Mills) had yogurts, two companies (General Mills and Kellogg) had fruit-flavored snacks, and two companies (Nestlé and Unilever) had frozen treats.

Figure 2: Types of Foods Approved for Marketing to Children



Nutritional Quality of Products Approved for Marketing to Children

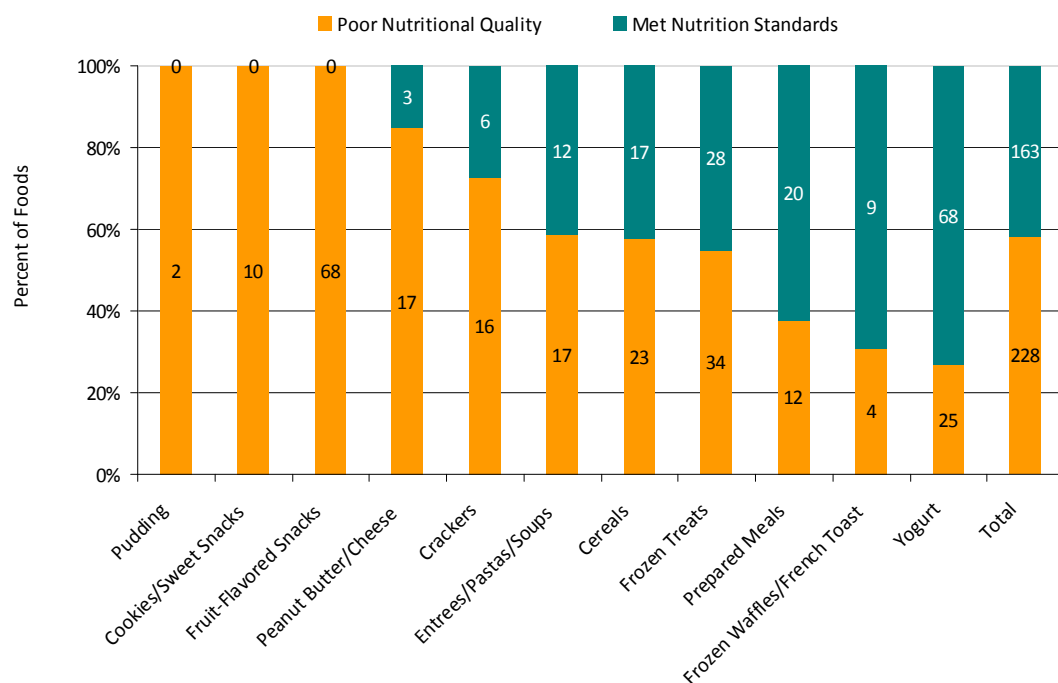
Overall, 267 of 452 (59%) products approved by companies for marketing to children did not meet CSPI's recommended nutrition standards. Among *foods*, 228 of 391 products (58%) did not meet the standards. All of the fruit-flavored snacks (n=68), cookies and sweet snacks (n=10), and puddings (n=2) failed to meet our standards (see Figure 3). On the other hand, 73% of yogurts met the standards. Other pledge-approved food products that met our standards included Nabisco Teddy Grahams, Kellogg Frosted



* In April 2009, after data collection was completed for this study, Burger King and Kraft Foods, Inc. added additional approved meals or products to their marketing pledges. Those meals were not included in this analysis.

Mini-Wheats cereal, a number of Unilever popsicles, several varieties of Kellogg Eggo Waffles, a number of varieties of Campbell's chicken noodle soup, Skippy Reduced Fat peanut butters, and several Kid Cuisine frozen dinners.

Figure 3: Foods of Poor Nutritional Quality by Product Category



Thirty-nine of 61 (64%) approved beverages did not meet the recommended nutrition standards. Beverages that did not meet the standards were juice drinks that contained less than 50% juice or that contained added sweeteners (79% of nutritionally poor beverages), sports drinks (20.5%), and high-fat milk (0.5%). Beverages that met the standards were 100% juices (86% of beverages that met standards) and low-fat milk (14%).

Nutrient Standards

Between 4% and 25% of foods exceeded recommended limits for problem nutrients, including total fat, saturated plus trans fat, sodium, and added sugars (see below).

Foods that exceeded recommended limits for...

Total fat	4% of all foods
Sodium	10% of all foods
Saturated plus trans fat	21% of all foods
Added sugars	25% of all foods

Most of the foods that met the standard for providing positive nutritional value did so because they contained at least 10% of the DRI for a key vitamin or mineral (84% of foods). Few of the pledge-approved foods contained at least a half a serving of a fruit or vegetable (10% of foods) or were whole grain (6% of foods).

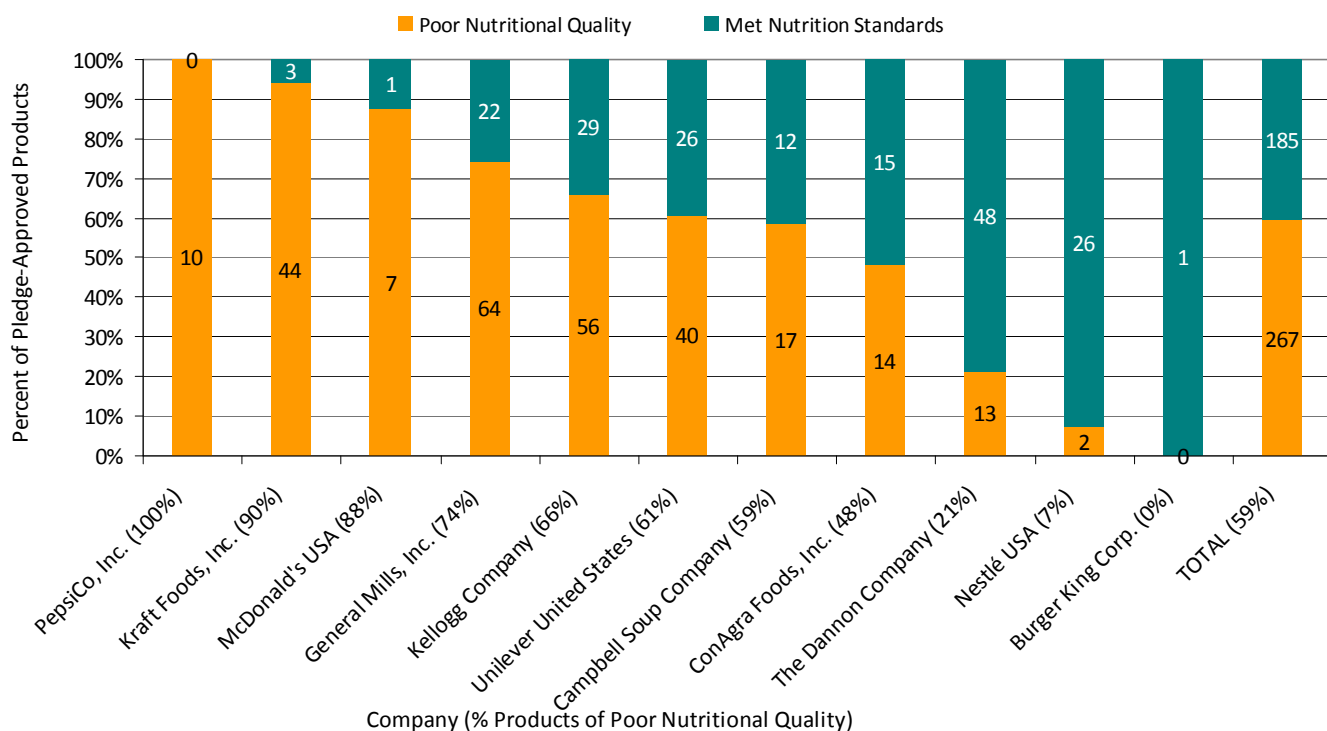
Foods that met recommendations for...

Key vitamins and minerals	84% of all foods
Fruits and vegetables	10% of all foods
Whole grains	6% of all foods

Nutritional Quality by Company

The companies with the largest proportions of products approved by the company for marketing to children that did not meet CSPI's recommended nutrition standards were PepsiCo (100% of products), Kraft (90%), and McDonald's (88%) (see Figure 4). Burger King's one approved meal met the recommended standards. The majority of ConAgra's, Dannon's, and Nestlé's pledge-approved products met the nutrition standards.

Figure 4: Foods of Poor Nutritional Quality by Company



Overall, about six in ten products that companies deemed appropriate to market to children did not meet CSPI's recommended nutrition standards for food marketing to children. Products were often too high in added sugars, saturated fat, or sodium, and few contained significant amounts of fruits, vegetables, or whole grains. Despite the industry's pledges to improve the balance of foods marketed to youth, foods and beverages of poor nutritional quality still make up the majority of foods marketed to children. The findings do not reflect the frequency with which foods of poor nutritional quality are marketed to children, however. That issue is addressed in the second part of this report.

Have child-directed TV ads for foods of poor nutritional quality decreased?



To determine whether the food-advertising environment has improved, CSPI analyzed the change in the nutritional quality of foods advertised on Nickelodeon television between 2005 and 2009. Nickelodeon is the most-watched children's television station in the United States.⁹ For each time point, we reviewed all food ads aired during a 28-hour period over two days. We then collected nutrition information for advertised products from food company websites and analyzed the products' nutritional quality using the nutrition standards described earlier in this report.⁶

The total number of food ads during the 28 hours of television stayed fairly stable over the years, with 168 food ads in 2005 and 161 food ads in 2009. In 2005, the most frequently advertised foods were breakfast cereals (29% of food ads), fast-food and other restaurants (19%), and pastries (12%). In 2009, the most frequently advertised foods were fast-food and other restaurants (38%), breakfast cereal (30%), and yogurt (8%). The proportion of ads for beverages increased from 1% of all food ads in 2005 to 3% in 2009. Brand ads, which focused on a brand with little or no depictions of food, also increased, from about 10% of food ads in 2005 to 27% in 2009 (mostly for fast food).

Adherence to Company Nutrition Standards

During our first study of Nickelodeon advertising in 2005, only Kraft Foods had guidelines for food marketing to children. In January 2009, 15 companies had CFBAI pledges for food marketing to children.

In 2009, we found that 74% of Nickelodeon television food ads were by CFBAI-participating companies and 100% of those ads adhered to each company's own nutrition standards. The remaining 26% of food ads were by non-CFBAI companies: Chuck E. Cheese's (26 ads), Post

Foods[†](7), IHOP restaurants (7), Barilla Pasta (1), and Pharmavite/Soy Joy (1). The proportion of ads for foods that did not meet our recommended nutrition standards differed between CFBAI and non-CFBAI companies; 72% of CFBAI companies' ads were of poor nutritional quality compared to 98% of non-CFBAI companies' ads (see Figure 5).

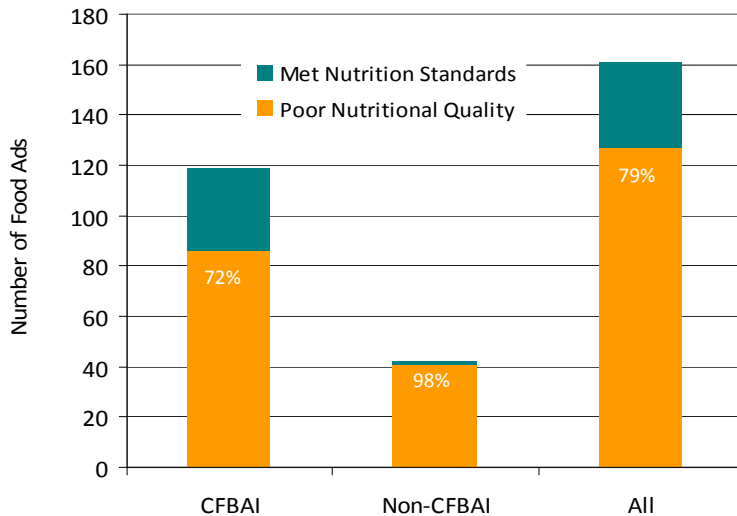


Figure 5: TV Ads for Foods of Poor Nutritional Quality: CFBAI vs. Non-CFBAI Member Companies (2009)

The proportion of ads for foods that exceeded the recommended levels for total fat, saturated plus trans fat, or sodium decreased between 2005 and 2009 (see Table 1). However, the proportion of ads for foods that exceeded the recommended level for added sugars increased over time (though the absolute number decreased slightly). The proportion of ads for foods that met positive nutrient criteria for whole grains and vitamins and minerals increased over time.

Ads for foods that exceeded two or more limits for problem nutrients dropped from 29% of food ads in 2005 to 10% of food ads in 2009 (excluding brand ads, such as ads for Chuck E. Cheese's, which didn't show specific food products). Overall, ads for foods of poor nutritional quality decreased slightly, from 88% of food ads in 2005 to 79% in 2009. This change was not statistically significant (by t-test).

Ads for foods of poor nutritional quality decreased slightly, from 88% of food ads in 2005 to 79% in 2009.

[†] Since our study was conducted, Post Foods joined CFBAI.

Table 1: Children’s Television Food Ads: Changes in Nutrient Content, 2005-2009

Year	Total Food Ads	Ads in Analysis*	# (%) Exceeding Recommendation				# (%) Meeting Recommendation		
			Total Fat	Sat + Trans Fat	Sodium	Sugars	Whole Grains	Vitamins & Minerals	Fruit or Vegetable
2005	168	148	13 (9)	55 (37)	50 (34)	56 (38)	13 (9)	119 (80)	18 (12)
2009	161	112	0 [^] (0)	14 (13)	17 (15)	52 [^] (49)	37 [^] (35)	102 [^] (97)	13 (12)
% Change in # of Ads	-4	-24	-100	-75	-66	-7	+185	-14	-28
%-Point Change			-9	-24	-19	+11	+26	+17	0

*Only food ads are included in this table. The analysis excluded brand ads and beverage ads (which use a different set of nutrition standards than foods). The number of food ads in the analysis for a few categories was 105 in 2009, because nutrition information was not available for that nutrient category [those are noted with a (Λ)].

It is important to note that this study assessed marketing in only one medium (television). There are other media covered by CFBAI pledges (such as, print, radio, and Internet). However, several other media, including product packaging, in-store/restaurant displays, in-school marketing in middle and high schools, sponsorships, etc., are not covered by the CFBAI.

***Better-For-Who?* Key Recommendations**

- Chuck E. Cheese’s, Perfetti van Melle (maker of Air Heads candy), IHOP restaurants, Topps Candy (maker of Baby Bottle Pop candy), YUM! Brands (KFC, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut), and all other food and beverage companies that market to children – through television or any other media – should join the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI).
- The Council of Better Business Bureaus should revise its CFBAI guidelines to include a set of nutrition standards, which all participating companies must comply with, such as those being developed by the Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children (see below).
- Nickelodeon and other media companies should have comprehensive policies for marketing to children that cover all their media and should air only ads aimed at children for foods that meet strong nutrition standards.

During the four years since the Institute of Medicine released its report on food marketing to children, the nutritional quality of foods advertised on children's television has improved. However, too many unhealthy foods are still marketed to children. In 2009, eight in ten advertised foods during children's programming on Nickelodeon were of poor nutritional quality.

This study suggests that self-regulation is having a modest, positive impact. However, as currently practiced, it is not sufficient to address food marketing to children. One weakness is that each company has its own nutrition standards for food marketing to children. While there are a number of similarities among those nutrition standards, some companies have self-serving loopholes that let through too much marketing of foods of poor nutritional quality. For example, McDonald's has no sodium standard and several cereal manufacturers have weak sugar standards. In addition, a number of companies that market food to children still have not adopted policies or nutrition standards for marketing to children.

Currently, an Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children, including representatives from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is developing recommended nutrition standards for food marketing to children. The report is due out in July 2010 and should provide a model for the CFBAI and companies to adopt.

Given the high rates of childhood obesity and prevalence of poor nutrition among children, the small magnitude of changes in the nutritional quality of foods marketed to children is unacceptable.

In order for self-regulation to result in more than incremental change, all food and media companies that market to children should adopt a uniform set of strong nutrition standards and apply them to their full range of marketing to youth. Without more significant progress, the country will need to rely on government regulation rather than self-regulation as the means to address food marketing to children.



References

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⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2005. Available at: <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/default.htm>.

⁹ Nielsen's data. Reported on Viacom's web site. Available at:

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