



**GROCERY MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICA**  
**MAKERS OF THE WORLD'S FAVORITE BRANDS OF**  
**FOOD, BEVERAGES, AND CONSUMER PRODUCTS**

**Testimony of**  
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**Before the**  
**House Government Reform Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness**

**September 15, 2004**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to discuss the efforts of the food and beverage industry to help combat obesity in America. My name is Alison Kretser. I'm a registered dietitian and the director of scientific and nutrition policy for the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA).

As the leading voice of the food and beverage industry in the obesity and nutrition debate, GMA has established a long-term commitment to arrest and reverse obesity in America, and to provide consumers with the information and resources they need to establish healthy dietary habits for life. As the companies that make the food Americans choose everyday, GMA member companies recognize their role in not only developing foods that meet consumers' demands for taste, quality and convenience but also – just as importantly – health.

Today's consumer is more informed and more aware of how food can play a positive role to improve their health. However, consumers also face a deafening cacophony of nutrition information that is often confusing and conflicting.

GMA has engaged in a number of activities with the goal of providing consumers with positive messages and clear information about how to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Below I will outline some of these initiatives.

**GMA's Commitment to Solutions that Work**

On our commitment, I can assure you that I am speaking for the leadership of the grocery manufacturing industry. The CEOs on the GMA Board have adopted a global strategy on food and health that states our resolve in no uncertain terms:

"The food and beverage industry is committed to helping arrest and reverse the growth of obesity around the world. Achieving this goal will require multiple strategies, the integrated efforts of many sectors and long-term resolve. We are committed to doing our part and will support others in doing theirs."

As you know, we have already supported the efforts that Congress has undertaken. GMA was an original and enthusiastic supporter of the Congressional Fitness Caucus, chaired by Reps. Zach

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Wamp (R-Tenn.) and Mark Udall (D-Colo.). The bi-partisan caucus was created to boost understanding of physical activity's benefits for good health. So far the Caucus counts only members of the House on its roll. We encourage the members of this Committee to join the Caucus or start a similar caucus in the Senate.

We also worked with the Senate to help pass the "Improved Nutrition and Physical Activity Act," or "IMPACT Act," sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Frist (R-Tenn.) and Senators Bingaman (D-N.M.) and Dodd (D-Conn.). Companion legislation in the House is sponsored by Cong. Mary Bono and co-sponsored by 80 congressmen. The IMPACT bill provides much needed funding to develop innovative programs at the community level aimed at helping individuals eat right and become more active and ultimately to improve the overall health of our nation. The Senate passed the bill just last December. We are now encouraging Members of the House of Representatives to do the same and look forward to working with them to achieve final passage of this important legislation.

We applaud Congress for its initiatives in the form of IMPACT and the Congressional Fitness Caucus. But these are just two of many strategies that GMA believes the country should consider. There is a great deal more that we can do. And there is an important role for everyone – manufacturers, employers, educators, nutrition and health experts, public health officials, parents and, of course, children. GMA is working and will continue to work long and hard with every sector of society to battle obesity.

### **GMA Is Doing Its Part**

The food and beverage industry can make a significant contribution by intensifying our efforts to provide a wide range of nutritious product choices and marketing these choices in ways that promote healthy lifestyles. We are committed to using our scientific knowledge and technological expertise to continue to research, develop and offer, in all distribution channels, a range of food products to meet many consumer needs, including nutrition, taste, convenience and value.

Maintaining a healthy weight and achieving optimal health and wellness throughout life requires a balance of healthy eating and physical activity, tailored to meet each individual's needs, preferences and lifestyle. Balancing calorie intake and energy output is essential to maintain a healthy body weight. We recognize that "food" is the "energy input" side of the healthy weight equation and will work with other stakeholders to promote improved understanding of nutrition. Our communications take many forms:

- We communicate clearly in labeling, packaging and advertising to enable consumers to make informed choices that best meet their lifestyle needs and physical activity levels.
- We employ a variety of communication tools, including nutrition labeling, in-store communications, customer care line and web-site information.
- We advertise responsibly, and will continue to take into account the special needs of children. We will encourage effective voluntary, national self-regulatory mechanisms promoting responsible advertising and marketing.

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- We work with partners, including retailers, government and health professionals to extend the healthy lifestyle message.
- We support efforts to increase physical activity, and to enhance nutrition education through partnerships with other stakeholders including public health authorities, healthcare, educational, government and others.

As we intensify our efforts to communicate the benefits of healthy lifestyles, let us not lose sight of a very simple but essential truth – food is not just the source of the energy we need to live; it is one of the things that brings joy to our lives. Remember the first bites we persuaded our babies to eat, the birthday cakes our children shared with their excited friends, the trick-or-treat bags they brought home on Halloween, the Thanksgiving dinners, the summer picnics, or just one of those many meals that brought the family together for a little while. These are things people have been enjoying for centuries. GMA member companies want to make sure our consumers continue to enjoy them, and we will strive to provide and promote the foods and beverages that make eating not only healthy, but enjoyable.

**Revising the Dietary Guidelines and the Food Guide Pyramid**

As the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services (USDA and HHS) revise the Dietary Guidelines for American and the Food Guide Pyramid, we have an unprecedented opportunity to explain to Americans how they can take simple but effective steps to improve their diets and health.

In comments submitted over the past year, GMA has emphasized the need to provide Americans with dietary guidance that incorporates the best science but that is also realistic and achievable. We must take into account the fact that time-pressed consumers need nutrition information that they can use easily when buying foods and preparing meals. That means creating information tools that are relevant to all segments of the American population.

To accomplish this goal, we need to apply marketing expertise to promote healthier eating by describing the features of the guidelines (e.g., serving size, number of servings, food groups) and emphasizing the benefits (e.g., better health, weight management). Core messages must recognize and build on the factors consumers apply in choosing foods and a diet – taste, convenience, cost, relevance, and cultural characteristics – in order for the guidance to be actionable.

GMA suggests that HHS and USDA make it easier for consumers to follow the revised nutrition guidelines by prioritizing the changes consumers can make to their diets for maximum health gains. In addition, HHS and USDA must set achievable dietary goals for healthy Americans that take into account the diversity of American socio-economic and cultural circumstances. It is critical to the success of the revised Dietary Guidelines and the Food Guide Pyramid that individuals experience the reward of success relatively early in the process and build from there with additional improvement in their dietary habits.

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GMA also advocated for USDA to retain the current shape of the Food Guide Pyramid. As an image and as a brand, the Pyramid is well recognized among consumers. What is less understood by consumers is the science and the dietary recommendations that give the Pyramid its shape. To better utilize the Food Guide Pyramid as a communications tool, GMA has recommended that the USDA create a standardized Pyramid by matching the serving size recommendations – both the size of the serving as well as the number of servings – inside the Pyramid to the Nutrition Facts box, which is based on a 2,000 calorie diet. A standardized Food Guide Pyramid would reinforce the USDA’s basic nutrition messages while allowing consumers to customize their diets based on their personal nutrition goals and food preferences.

By creating a standardized Food Guide Pyramid in tandem with the Nutrition Facts box, USDA would give consumers clear and consistent dietary advice. The standardized Pyramid could appear on educational posters, food labels and other places where only one graphic is appropriate. While just one image of the Food Guide Pyramid cannot educate consumers about all aspects of the USDA’s dietary recommendations, it can – when used on food labels and elsewhere – serve as a reminder of what a healthy diet looks like.

### **Improving Nutrition and the Food Supply**

The food and beverage industry acknowledges the role it plays in providing consumers with the many foods and beverages they enjoy everyday, and is committed to doing its part to help consumers to better understand how they must balance what they eat with what they do.

Around the country, companies are:

- Reformulating products to reduce calories, fat and sugars;
- Reformulating products to increase fiber and whole grains, and add vitamins and minerals;
- Offering new choices for smaller product serving sizes;
- Reducing and eliminating the amount of trans fats in products; and,
- Promoting nutrition education and physical activity, particularly in schools and local communities.

In recent months, the industry has made great strides in many of these areas. For example, companies such as Campbell Soup Company, The Coca-Cola Company, ConAgra Foods, Inc., General Mills, Inc., H.J. Heinz, Kellogg Company, Kraft Foods, Inc., Mott’s, PepsiCo and others have introduced products with improved nutritional profiles. These include new milk-based drinks for students, reduced calorie juices, reduced or trans fat-free snacks and entrees, new choices for smaller product servings – to name just a few.

Numerous other industry efforts are underway that you will never read about in the newspaper or even notice in the grocery store. They include reviewing and adjusting the nutritional profile of many categories of products without changing the taste of consumers’ favorite brands. These are the types of “small steps” that HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson is encouraging, and that we believe will result in a giant leap forward in the fight against obesity.

**Responsible Advertising and Marketing Practices**

Food advertising will play an important role in the battle against obesity. GMA members are constantly researching and developing new ways to improve nutrition without sacrificing the enjoyment of eating – again, the success of a healthy diet depends on the satisfaction that the food delivers. The examples described in Appendix B are just a few of the thousands of products that provide options for consumers looking for ways to incorporate variety, balance and moderation in their diets. And you are going to see many more – if we can tell our consumers about them.

Informing consumers about products and services available to them is essential if they are to enjoy the benefits of the options that food companies provide. Educating consumers, especially parents and their children, how to meet their individual needs, tastes and preferences through the proper balance of activity and nutrition empowers consumers to maintain a healthy weight. Advertising is an important means of communicating that information and a critical element of the competition that drives innovation.

Every advertiser knows that effective advertising depends on consumers' trust and respect. Accordingly, the members of GMA have a longstanding commitment to responsible advertising and marketing practices. The food industry is continuing to ensure that its communications with consumers accurately portray the products, their intended uses and the benefits they deliver.

The industry is continuing to ensure that its advertising and marketing practices do not encourage overeating or inappropriate consumption of foods. In addition, the industry is seeking ways to utilize its marketing capabilities to communicate healthy lifestyle messages to consumers through multiple media (from labeling to advertising to websites) and many channels (from retail customers to workplace environments).

The self-regulatory system managed by the National Advertising Review Council (NARC) deserves much of the credit for the truthful and responsible advertising that consumers see today. In the food sector, voluntary compliance with the decisions of the National Advertising Division (NAD) and the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) ensures that advertising meets the highest standards of truth and accuracy. Moreover, adherence to CARU's Self-Regulatory Guidelines of Children's Advertising has fostered advertising that promotes balanced diets and healthy life styles. No wonder that Federal Trade Commission officials have praised NAD and CARU as the best system they have seen.

Despite these successes, the public is largely unaware of CARU's positive impact on children's advertising and NAD's influence on advertising to general audiences. The effectiveness of self-regulation derives from stakeholders' appreciation of its role and advertisers' participation in its procedures. To this end, GMA has sent a formal request to NARC asking that it embark on a campaign to raise the visibility of its role and to expand its monitoring of food and beverage advertising through the NAD and CARU. More specifically, we urged CARU to publish a white paper explaining its principles, guidelines and decisions applicable to food advertising. The final white paper was published by CARU in June of this year.

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GMA has also urged all of its members to support CARU, and to adhere to CARU's "Self-Regulatory Guidelines for Children's Advertising," several of which apply directly to diet, health and nutrition.

Additionally, following the March 2<sup>nd</sup> testimonies of GMA's President & CEO C. Manly Molpus and Association of National Advertisers (ANA) President & CEO Bob Liodice before the Senate Commerce Committee, GMA and ANA commissioned Nielsen Media Research to quantify the number of food advertisements children have viewed during the time period of 1993-2003. The research was submitted to Senator Gordon Smith (R)-OR) who placed it in the Congressional Record

According to the Nielsen data, food advertisers are, in fact, spending less in real dollars on TV advertising and kids are seeing fewer commercials for products to consume and for places to eat. Real expenditures (measured in 1993 dollars for consistency) on food and restaurant advertising on all television have fallen in the last decade. In 1994, expenditures reached \$5.92 billion in 1994 and dropped to \$4.98 billion in 2003. Over the last four years (2000-2003), annual expenditures have averaged \$4.92 billion per year. Despite the assertion of some critics, advertising expenditures cannot explain the obesity trends in the United States.

### **Improving Food Labels**

Last year, FDA announced two significant changes in food and beverage labeling: mandatory quantitative labeling of trans fat and voluntary qualified health claims. GMA is fully supportive of these initiatives as they have already begun to spur additional competition among food companies to develop more and better foods to meet consumer demand for nutritious foods and beverages. In addition to providing specific comments to FDA, GMA is conducting consumer research regarding consumer perceptions of calories and serving sizes, which should provide valuable assistance in developing labels that consumers can comprehend.

We also support FDA's other efforts to improve nutrition labeling, including setting regulatory standards for low-carbohydrate nutrient content claims.

*Food Label Consumer Research* – As with other aspects of the label, calorie and serving size information within the Nutrition Facts panel must be conveyed to consumers in a way that is meaningful and relevant. In order to address emerging questions about perceptions of the Nutrition Facts box, calories and servings sizes, GMA is conducting consumer research that will explore several points, including:

- How consumers use the food label to obtain calorie information.
- How to more effectively communicate calories in single serving packages.
- How calorie labeling might impact consumer behavior.

*Nutrient Content Claims* – For years, our member companies have quietly and consistently reduced the level of calories and certain nutrients in brand-name products. For examples, this includes finding ways to make incremental, continued reductions of sodium, fats and sugars in foods. GMA believes that these incremental changes, when adopted broadly, will have a significant impact on consumer health and has encouraged FDA to examine this issue.

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*Identifying Trans Fats* – In the case of trans fatty acids, GMA supports FDA’s decision to require quantitative labeling of trans fat as a separate line within the Nutrition Facts box. We believe this regulation provides consumers with concise information about the content of trans fat in their foods, and will allow them to make informed choices about which products to purchase based on their own preferences and health needs.

*Carbohydrate Nutrient Content Claims* – GMA has petitioned the FDA to set regulations for a full-range of nutrient content claims that will allow food companies to make accurate statements about carbohydrate content. Rather than focusing on only one type of claim, GMA has recommended that the FDA establish federal standards for “carbohydrate-free,” “low carbohydrate,” “good source of carbohydrate” and “excellent source of carbohydrate.” By requesting labeling standards for the entire range of nutrient content claims, we hope to establish a level playing field to communicate with consumers about the amount of carbohydrates in certain foods and beverages.

As detailed in the National Academy of Sciences’ Macronutrients Report, carbohydrates are a key component of good nutrition. In fact, the NAS recommends that carbohydrates contribute 45 percent to 65 percent of total caloric intake for healthy Americans. It is therefore important to establish accurate and consistent nutrient content claims for a range of products that not only meet the needs of dieters following a low-carb regimen, but also fit the diets of consumers looking for good sources of nutrient-rich carbohydrates.

These claims are, in effect, flags to alert consumers about the particular characteristics of a product. As with other nutrient content claims such as “low fat” and “excellent source of fiber,” carbohydrate labeling claims are meant to help consumers identify products that suit their individual needs and preferences.

Carbohydrate labeling claims will also make in-store comparisons between products easier by providing consumers with science-based information about carbohydrate content. By setting rational definitions, we will be able to guarantee that all consumers have consistent information about carbohydrate content for a wide range of foods.

*Qualified Health Claims* -- GMA strongly supports FDA’s pre-market notification system for proposed qualified health claims submitted by food companies and others. As longtime supporters of qualified health claims for foods, GMA firmly believes this system will allow the food industry to get the newest health information on to the food label and into the hands of consumers – empowering them to make in-store comparisons. More importantly, the ability to use qualified health claims (e.g.; “Scientific evidence suggests but does not prove that eating 1.5 ounces per day of most nuts, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease.”) will provide food manufacturers with yet another incentive to develop and market new nutritious products.

In each of these initiatives, GMA’s recommendations are based on a fundamental objective – empower consumers to make smart choices by providing clear, accurate information about nutrition. The ultimate decision-makers in the battle against obesity are the consumers themselves. They have heard the news about obesity and its consequences, and they want to do

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something about it. We believe their interest in nutrition is keen, and that they will look for additional information about it. We all can help in getting that information to them.

**American Council for Fitness and Nutrition**

As a founding member of the American Council for Fitness and Nutrition (ACFN), GMA is one of 91 companies and organizations that are working towards comprehensive and achievable solutions to the nation's obesity epidemic. Launched in January 2002, ACFN is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health of all Americans, especially children, by encouraging a health balance between nutrition and fitness. ACFN is led by Dr. Susan Finn, a past president of the American Dietetic Association, and is guided by an Advisory Board of 27 experts in the fields of nutrition, physical activity and behavior change.

Since its launch, ACFN has played an important role in raising awareness about the critical need for energy balance – that is, calories consumed must equal calories burned – if Americans are to maintain a healthy weight. ACFN works directly with policy makers at every level of the government and with community leaders to encourage the development comprehensive solutions to the obesity epidemic.

For example, this summer ACFN launched two pilot programs targeting the specific needs of the Hispanic and African-American populations, which are disproportionately impacted by obesity and related diseases.

In partnership with the National Supermarket Association, which comprises nearly 400 independently-owned, Hispanic grocery stores, ACFN hosted *Salud: Un Ingrediente Para La Familia*. This educational festival provided residents of Corona, Queens, N.Y. with information about ways to address the growing overweight and obesity problem. It featured healthy cooking segments and physical activity demonstrations. Additionally, Dr. Finn and ACFN Advisory Board member Cecilia Pozo Fileti, both widely published health and nutrition experts, provided expert advice and to answer questions.

Additionally, ACFN unveiled a new nutrition education and physical activity initiative designed to empower Baltimore youth to make more informed healthy lifestyle choices. Emphasizing the importance of regular physical activity and balanced nutrition, *Summer Fun, Food & Fitness* is an eight-week summer program developed by ACFN in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Central Maryland and the Baltimore International College School of Culinary Arts. The program featured weekly interactive cooking segments and nutrition tips to help children and families incorporate healthy eating into their daily lives. With a trip to the NFL's Baltimore Ravens Training Camp and an event paying homage to the Summer Olympics, *Summer Fun, Food & Fitness* also encouraged children to become more physically active by demonstrating that fitness is fun and achievable both in school and at home. The program was complemented by a nutrition and health curriculum using [Kidnetic.com](http://Kidnetic.com), an online education tool for children, families and schools.

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ACFN will maintain the success and momentum of these programs by developing and distributing Resource Kits that will allow other organizations to replicate these programs in their communities.

**Conclusion**

Consumers today are clamoring for information about how they can improve their health and lifestyles through the foods they eat and the activities in which they participate. It will be up to the collective efforts of the government, industry and other stakeholders to ensure consumers receive information that will be understandable and achievable on leading healthful lives.

GMA and its member companies are committed to working with government and other stakeholders to help Americans lead healthy and active lives by giving them the information they need to create a healthy diet and to balance what they eat with what they do.

We look forward to working with this Committee, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.