

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USDA Announces Effort To Strengthen Nutrition Among Young Children, Create Healthy Habits Early

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ST. CROIX -- Today U.S. Department of Agriculture Undersecretary Kevin Concannon announced strengthened nutrition standards for food and beverages served to young children and others in day care settings at the annual conference of the National Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Sponsors Association, according to U.S.D.A. press release.

According to the release, young children and adults in day care will now receive meals with more whole grains, a greater variety of vegetables and fruits, and less added sugars and solid fats. The science-based standards introduced in this final rule will elevate the nutritional quality of meals and snacks provided under the CACFP to better align with the

Dietary Guidelines for Americans and to be consistent with the meals children receive as part of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

“Research indicates that America's obesity problem starts young, with obesity rates in preschoolers more than doubling over the last three decades and one in eight preschoolers classified as obese,” said Mr. Concannon. “Since taste preference and eating habits develop early in life, CACFP could play a crucial role in the solution. This final rule marks another important step toward ensuring young children have access to the nutrition they need and develop healthy habits that will contribute to their well-being over the long term.”

The new meal patterns will improve access to healthy beverages, including low-fat and fat-free milk and water, and encourage breastfeeding for the youngest program participants. These standards reflect the nutritional improvements seen in children across the country since the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

CACFP provides aid to child and adult care institutions and family or group day care homes for the provision of nutritious foods that contribute to the growth and development of children and the health and wellness of older adults and chronically impaired disabled persons. Through the CACFP, over 4 million children and nearly 120,000 adults receive nutritious meals and snacks each day as part of the care they receive.

This is the first major revision of the CACFP meal patterns since the program's inception in 1968 and will require meals and snacks provided through the CACFP to better reflect the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the nutritional issues facing young children and adults today. These changes are a meaningful first step in improving CACFP participants' access to nutritious foods. Since the inception of CACFP, the most prevalent nutrition-related health problems among participants have shifted from malnutrition to overconsumption, including calories, saturated fats, added sugar, and sodium. These vulnerable populations also tend to under consume of fiber and other essential nutrients.

The new standards were carefully designed to make significant, achievable, and cost-neutral improvements to the nutritional quality of the meals and snacks served through CACFP. USDA focused on incremental changes that balance the science behind the nutritional needs of the diverse CACFP participants and the practical abilities of participating centers and day care homes to implement these changes. By setting an implementation date of October 1, 2017, the final rule provides ample lead time for centers and day care homes to learn and understand the new meal pattern standards before they are required to be in full compliance. USDA will provide in-person and online trainings and is developing new resources and training materials, such as menu planning tools, new and updated recipes, and tip sheets, to ensure successful implementation of the new nutrition standards.

This announcement is part of USDA's continued commitment to ensuring children and families have access to a healthy diet. Over the past seven years, USDA has enhanced federal nutrition programs, providing a critical safety net for millions of American children and families. Some examples include, updated nutrition standards for school nutrition, the updated WIC package to include whole grains, low-fat dairy, fruits and vegetables, expanding the scope of the SNAP nutrition education program, and supporting an

unprecedented growth in the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP and WIC benefits. By expanding access to nutritious foods and increasing awareness about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, USDA programs have made a real difference in the lives of many, promising a brighter, healthier future for our nation.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program is one of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service's 15 nutrition assistance programs, which also include the National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Together, these programs comprise America's nutrition safety net.

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