

Comments of the National Consumers League on the Voluntary Principles for Marketing Food to Children proposed by the Interagency Working Group

July 14, 2011

The National Consumers League¹ supports the Voluntary Principles for Marketing Food to Children that have been proposed by the Interagency Working Group made up of four federal agencies: the Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the US Department of Agriculture. These principles were written in response to a 2009 Congressional directive from a bi-partisan group of members of Congress, spearheaded by then-Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

These four agencies propose that food and beverages marketed and advertised to children should meet basic nutritional standards. The guidelines encourage food manufacturers to curtail the marketing of food and beverages that contain excessive levels of salt, sugar and fat to children.

NCL, along with our colleagues in the health care and consumer advocacy communities, are concerned about rising obesity rates among children. Today one in three children is either overweight or obese. That percentage is growing and we need to work to reverse the trends. We are disappointed to learn that the food and advertising industries have launched a multi-pronged campaign to weaken this critical initiative.

According to a July 9, 2011 article in The Washington Post, the food industry spends \$2 billion annually on marketing food products to children. Many of these products are high in salt, sugar and/or fat. The industry's own voluntary attempts at self-regulation have been modest and by most accounts, ineffective. Studies have found that there is a positive correlation between the number of advertisements for unhealthy food products targeted toward children and the rate of childhood obesity.²

The National Consumers League believes that the principles are entirely reasonable, they are voluntary and are not laws or regulations, as some in the industry have asserted, and their purpose is to encourage food manufacturers to make their products more healthy, not to prevent them from selling to children.

¹ The National Consumers League, founded in 1899, is America's pioneer consumer organization. Our mission is to protect and promote social and economic justice for consumers and workers in the United States and abroad. For more information, visit www.nclnet.org.

² Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation, "The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity," February 2004, <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/The-Role-Of-Media-in-Childhood-Obesity.pdf>.