

May 13, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Shelby, Hoeven, Lowey, and Bishop, and Ranking Members Leahy, Merkley, Granger, and Fortenberry:

As you craft the fiscal year (FY) 2020 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies spending bill, we respectfully request:

- \$1,000,000 for critical technical assistance to aid schools in successful sodium reduction and asking for a report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on sodium-reduction progress in the school food program, particularly in meeting Target 2 reduction levels;
- Removal of the rider (Sec. 755) blocking the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from advancing longer-term voluntary sodium-reduction targets for industry; and
- \$6,000,000 for consumer-awareness education campaigns for the updated Nutrition Facts panel (\$3,000,000) and menu labeling (\$3,000,000).

These three important actions would support efforts to address the risks from excessive sodium in food and facilitate transparency for consumers, allowing them to make more informed choices for themselves and their families about what they eat.

First, dedicated funding is needed to help schools meet recommended limits of sodium in school meals. Schools were on track to reduce high amounts of sodium by meeting three targets over ten years. Yet USDA subsequently delayed the second sodium-reduction targets (Target 2) by seven years (originally set for SY2017-2018 to SY2024-2025) and eliminated the third targets entirely (originally set for SY2022-2023). It is critical that we continue to help schools move forward to at least achieve the Target 2 reduction levels. Current levels are still well above the recommended amounts for sodium consumption for children. For example, an elementary school lunch can have up to 1,230 mg of sodium, or more than three-quarters of a day's worth for a child in a single meal. A high school lunch can have 1,420 mg of sodium, or more than 60 percent of a day's worth. For the undersigned companies, the move to weaken sodium-reduction targets incurs economic consequences for the food industry and contradicts our commitments to achieve broader sodium reduction. For public health, the move to weaken sodium-reduction targets may put children's health in jeopardy.

In addition to targeted technical assistance funding, USDA should provide a report to Congress detailing its sodium reduction technical assistance efforts and any progress being made by schools on sodium reduction, particularly in meeting Target 2 reduction levels. The transparency afforded by the report will make clear how sodium reduction efforts are progressing and allow USDA and other stakeholders to identify unique challenges, available resources, and efforts needed to safeguard child nutrition and health.

The National Academy of Medicine's Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) report on sodium, released in March, reviewed the evidence on the adverse health effects of excessive sodium and confirmed long-standing advice to lower sodium intake. In fact, the report lowered the maximum amount of levels of sodium intake for younger school-aged children: from 2,200 mg to 1,800 mg for children aged 9-13 and from 1,900 mg to 1,500 mg for children aged 4-8. This new report yet again makes clear that current amounts of sodium in school meals are increasing the risk of diet-related disease for school children. The report also reaffirmed the maximum amount of sodium for older children and adults at no more than 2,300 mg.

Second, we urge you to remove the rider (Sec. 755) that blocks FDA from moving forward with voluntary sodium-reduction targets for the food manufacturing industry and ask that no further efforts be expended on further delaying the process. We fully support efforts to inform consumers on the appropriate amounts of sodium in the American diet and believe moving forward with the voluntary targets will help facilitate those efforts. Voluntary sodium reduction targets will help continue the dialogue with FDA, create a transparent resource for consumers, and inform company decision-making about the pace and scale for innovation. Despite claims about the cost to industry even though the targets are voluntary, meeting these targets could prevent up to 475,000 cases of cardiovascular disease and save \$41 billion in healthcare costs over 20 years. At minimum, only meeting the short-term (2-year) targets still yields health and economic gains.

Each of the signed companies stand by the FDA in voluntary, industry-led efforts to reduce sodium in our food supply, thus demonstrating that sodium reduction is achievable. The undersigned public health groups support these efforts. By developing a common benchmark or target, all companies would be encouraged to improve the nutritional value of their products. While not binding, voluntary targets can help support healthier alternatives for consumers while leveling the playing field for companies. These outcomes can be a win-win for consumers and industry.

Finally, while we applaud the FDA's support for consumer-awareness education campaigns for the updated Nutrition Facts panel and menu labeling as part of its Nutrition Innovation Strategy, dedicated funding is needed to ensure that these changes are effective. These nutrition policies are powerful and will help Americans make better informed choices about what they eat while encouraging companies to provide healthier food options.

Both the Nutrition Facts panel and menu labeling are important policies for public health and consumer transparency, equipping consumers to understand the impact of their food choices. The updated Nutrition Facts panel, which updates several aspects of the label and for the first time, allows consumers to know how much added sugars is in food and beverages, goes into effect in January 2020 (for large manufacturers) and in January 2021 (for small manufacturers). Menu labeling, which requires calorie labeling for menu items and prepared foods in chain restaurants, supermarkets, and convenience stores, is in effect and enforcement will begin next month, in May 2019. FDA needs adequate funding to ensure that consumers understand and fully benefit from these policies.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Sincerely,

Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, including
member companies Danone North America,
Mars, Incorporated, Nestlé USA and
Unilever United States

American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Center for Science in the Public Interest