

October 9, 2017

House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Protecting Nutrition Education Funding in the Upcoming Farm Bill

Dear Chairman Conaway and Committee Members,

We attended the House Agriculture Farm Bill Listening Session in Cobleskill, NY on behalf of the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy, part of the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University, to urge the Committee to maintain nutrition education funding in the upcoming farm bill.

What we eat is making us sick. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), seven of the top 10 causes of death in the United States are due to diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, Type II Diabetes, heart disease and chronic kidney disease. Treatment for these diseases accounts for 86% of national health care costs. Over 12 million children and more than 78 million adults nationwide are obese. Obesity-related health care costs alone add up to \$147 billion US dollars every year.¹

To help Americans eat well, we must provide access to healthy foods; we must ensure those foods are affordable; and we must provide great nutrition education. Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), ensure that Americans have access to- and are able to afford healthy foods. These programs are changing the health landscape of our country, but we must not neglect the third piece of this equation: education. **Nutrition education is key to maximizing the investment of government food assistance.**

SNAP-Ed is the largest nutrition education and obesity prevention initiative in the country. Nutrition Education is more than just handing out information about nutrients; it is providing individuals with the motivation, skills and knowledge to address the multitude of factors that determine their diet, including: cultural traditions, personal preferences, habits, values, cost, availability, convenience, perceived health benefits and marketing.

We know these programs work. SNAP-Ed participants have reported eating more vegetables, consuming fewer calories from added sugars, and cooking more frequently.²

Nutrition education testimonials:

This past June, Marta Blanco, Bilingual Nutritionist, with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County took on the challenge of educating a group of over 30 young men at a residential drug and alcohol rehab facility called Phoenix House (ages from 18-30 years old), using a USDA curriculum which emphasizes fruits & vegetables, whole grains, healthy

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/dnpao.htm>. Published October 24, 2016. Accessed September 29, 2017.

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. SNAP-Ed Success Stories 2017. <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/success-stories>



fats, protein and physical activity. The young men were very involved, had many questions and learned how to hydrate and make healthier nutrient dense beverages without added sugars or caffeine. Upon first interacting with the young adults at Phoenix House, it was very clear that their key interest was in how to build muscle and many felt the way to do that was through protein powders and large amounts of protein. Marta had to re-educate them on the components of a balanced meal and a healthy lifestyle. One young man expressed how he looked forward to the nutrition class and how much he learned and put into practice through healthier choices. Approximately 30 young men from Phoenix house now make healthy veggie, fruit and yogurt smoothies together. Since the nutrition series began, there has been an overall shift in attitude towards what eating healthy really means and how to eat healthy when eating out.

The Eat Smart New York (ESNY) Long Island region launched a new nutrition education initiative working with laundromats in the community to encourage customers to re-think their intake of sugary beverages and provide opportunities for physical activity. Eat Smart New York Nutritionist, Donna Ingram, started working with the Mega Wash & Dry Laundromat, building rapport with its owner Arty Barbuto. Prior to working with Cornell, Barbuto had ideas about bringing nutrition education to his laundromat, but didn't know where to start. He loves the healthy messages that Ingram brings to his customers, and he especially likes that she taught the children all about the five food groups using MyPlate. As a result of Eat Smart New York messaging, Barbuto had to remove an entire row of soda in his vending machine in order to provide more water for the growing demand.

Food and beverage companies inundate the public with billboard and bus advertisements for unhealthy foods, targeting minority and low-income communities and spending more than \$1.8 billion marketing to children.^{3,4} Yet, we expect programs receiving a fraction of this funding to compete with these messages. Nutrition education programs will make a difference, but they need financial support.

Once again, we urge you to **maintain the current level of SNAP-Ed funding in the farm bill, as well as keep SNAP funding intact**, which will in turn ensure that federal dollars allocated to nutrition programs are used effectively and efficiently. Thank you for your time at the Cobleskill hearing.

Sincerely,

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³ Institute of Medicine. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity*. 2006.

⁴ Healthy Eating Research. Food and Beverage Marketing. 2017; <http://healthyeatingresearch.org/focus-areas/food-beverage-marketing/>. Accessed September 11, 2017.



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About the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy

The Tisch Food Center, housed in the Program in Nutrition, cultivates research about connections between a just, sustainable food system and healthy eating and translates it into recommendations and resources for educators, policy makers, and community advocates. Teachers Colleges Program in Nutrition, founded in 1909 by Mary Swartz Rose, PhD, is the oldest university based nutrition program in the country, and established the field of nutrition education.

