

Remarks by
Hunt Shipman
Executive Vice President, Government Affairs and Communications
National Food Processors Association
Washington, DC
Before the
Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
On
“Conquering Obesity: The U.S. Approach to Combating this
National Health Crisis”
Wednesday, September 15, 2004

Good afternoon. I am Hunt Shipman, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs and Communications for the National Food Processors Association, based in Washington, D.C.

NFPA is the voice of the \$500 billion food processing industry, and our three scientific centers, our scientists, and professional staff represent food industry interests on government and regulatory affairs and provide research, technical services, education, communications, and crisis management support for the association's U.S. and international members.

Obesity is a multi-faceted issue, requiring a multi-disciplined approach. In the time that I have today, I would like to briefly address efforts now underway that we believe can be successful in helping to combat obesity.

The food industry has a long history of providing consumers with safe, affordable, and nutritious foods that meet their expectations for taste, value, and convenience. Innovation and reformulation are key tenets for our industry.

Food companies have responded to consumer demand by creating a variety of reduced-, low-, and non-fat food products, reduced- and low-calorie foods, and foods modified for specific dietary and medical needs. Such foods help ensure that all consumers can find the products they need to create healthful diets.

An important fact to remember is that the greatest source of nutrition information for most consumers is the Nutrition Facts panel found on the foods they purchase, every day.

The Nutrition Facts panel was developed and designed to help make consumers aware of the various nutritional components in foods. It also can be an excellent weight management tool.

NFPA is now preparing a consumer-friendly brochure on “following food labels for healthy weight management,” featuring easy-to-understand information on food labels, and how labels can help them to attain or maintain a healthy weight by making wise food choices.

This consumer information will be available on NFPA’s website, where it can be downloaded by consumers, health experts and anyone who communicates to consumers about how to better understand food labels.

Because of the importance of physical activity in combating obesity, the food industry sponsors a number of programs designed to encourage children’s physical activity and nutrition education, such as the University of North Carolina’s “Get Kids in Action” program, and “Triple Play,” the Boys and Girls Club of America’s new health and wellness initiative, to promote healthy lifestyles.

The food industry also has endorsed legislation designed to provide more government support for school physical activity programs, such as the “Impact” bill introduced in the Senate last year. We believe that federal support for in-school physical activity programs is important to the success of such efforts.

And the food industry has actively participated in numerous conferences and other public events to discuss various approaches to combating obesity.

As I noted at the beginning of my remarks, obesity is a multi-faceted issue – and no one approach or activity will solve this situation.

Clearly, labeling alone cannot bring about the behavioral changes needed to reduce obesity in this country.

We need to ensure that the information we provide to consumers is linked to both motivational and actionable education messages, so that consumers will use nutrition information to create healthful diets. Such messages need to be thoroughly researched and consumer-tested.

In 2004, both USDA and HHS have been active participants in the process of reviewing the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, as well as the Food Guide Pyramid. Revised versions of both the Dietary Guidelines and the Pyramid are scheduled to be released in early 2005.

Throughout the review process for the Dietary Guidelines and the Pyramid, NFPA has strongly advocated that these nutrition education tools must be easily understood and must trigger behavioral change by the public.

Attention to positive dietary guidance messages, coupled with consumer research to evaluate their effectiveness in motivating behavioral change, is essential. Federally funded biomedical and behavioral research related to health promotion and disease prevention also is needed.

Food companies succeed by meeting consumer demand – and clearly the consumer demand for both a wide variety of food products to meet varying dietary needs and the demand for more information on how to attain or maintain a healthy weight is strong.

Labeling flexibility will help to create incentives for products designed to meet consumers' needs and demands. Government's role should be to ensure that labeling and claims that can help consumers to better understand the role that various foods can play in healthful diets is both truthful and non-misleading.

In closing: Stakeholders – including the food industry, government, and the medical and public health communities – will have to work together. Without such cooperative efforts, we will make no progress on this issue. Dedicated collaboration, energy, and resources will make a difference in the classroom, on the playground, in the home, and throughout our nation as a whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on this important issue.

###