

Partnering with MyPyramid: Industry Challenge to Step Up and End Childhood Obesity

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There is an increasing concern with the weight and the eating habits of America's children. This is undoubtedly a complicated problem, but what is often overlooked is the one place where a deliberate, positive trend toward change could take place tonight – in the family home. If we can collectively connect with a family's "nutritional gatekeeper" in ways that help them shop, cook, or dine out a little more nutritiously and be a little more physically active, we could make an immediate change, with lasting impact.

To do this, we need to connect with these nutritional gatekeepers wherever they make their food decisions. We need to connect with them where they work and play, and where they purchase and prepare food. This is why the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) has launched "Project M.O.M.—Mothers & Others & MyPyramid." [www.MyPyramid.gov/ProjectMOM/index.html] This is a 3-pronged government/multi-industry/education movement aimed at transforming to the way America eats. This will be realized by empowering all nutritional gatekeepers – giving them the skills and information they need to model a healthy lifestyle and make "family-healthy" food choices.

On February 6, 2008 – a day I believe is historic – 25 food industry-related associations met at the Department of Agriculture to discuss how a government-facilitated movement might enable their members to "Partner with MyPyramid" to improve family nutrition and end childhood obesity. While some of these association CEOs will be involved in developing a strategic plan and a sustainability infrastructure in the next months, there is something more immediate that they are asking their members to do: Join with CNPP by signing a Memorandum of Understanding and do something to help nutritional gatekeepers make more deliberate decisions – decisions that are consistent with the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and MyPyramid.

This is a chance to "Think Differently." Ideas could involve using MyPyramid information on packaging, giving away a free MyPyramid Menu Planner CD to consumers who mail in Proof-of-Purchases, coming out with a new product, or developing a website that shows easy and fun ways to be more physically active. More examples of ways you can "Partner with MyPyramid" can be found at www.MyPyramid.gov/Challenge/index.html. This website will also tell companies how to sign on to be part of the Industry Challenge, as well as more information about the initiative. If you have additional questions please contact John Webster at john.webster@cnpp.usda.gov or Jackie Haven at jackie.haven@cnpp.usda.gov.

On the CNPP website (www.cnpp.usda.gov), we'll acknowledge all companies that sign the MOU and send in a MyPyramid-consistent idea. We'll also acknowledge these companies at the formal media unveiling of Partnering with MyPyramid that will be held in Washington, DC, in April 2008. Later this year, we will ask all participating companies how they are progressing on their project, and a number of the participants will be recognized in the 1st Annual Partnering with MyPyramid Symposia toward the end of year.

Along with the food industry, education associations, and the media, this first year's Challenge will also involve the electronic arts industry (video games, computers, internet, cell phones, and so on). For example, we're interested in ways that the new MyPyramid Menu Planner program can be downloaded to video game systems, ways that the Menu Planner can be bundled with start-up software, and ways that MyPyramid messages can be automatically sent to cell phones. We will meet with electronic arts trade associations later this month.

We applaud your trade association for its vision in helping create a win-win opportunity that is bigger than us all. We applaud you for thinking about how your company can take a part in a historic movement.