

Healthy Foods, Healthy Bodies and Healthy Budgets

Question and Answer with Ben Thomases, Shana Patterson and Jackie Epping

Ben Thomases - New York's Food Policy Initiative

Q: Is there a website with information about the NYC initiatives discussed today?

A: Some of these initiatives are described at these links:

Green Carts

http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/doh/html/cdp/cdp_pan_green_carts.shtml

Healthy Bodegas

http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cdp/cdp_pan_hbi.shtml

School Food

<http://www.opt-osfns.org/osfns/>

Study on Supermarket Shortage “Going to Market”

<http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dcp/html/supermarket/index.shtml>

Q: Are you seeing any drop off in participation of Breakfast in the classroom in higher grades compared to elementary school?

A: Our breakfast in the classroom initiative is too young to have meaningful data in response to this question.

Q: What companies are you ordering the healthier food from? Our schools order from Sysco and Aramark and our food service directors often claim that they don't have healthier options available when they order it?

A: We order food from a wide variety of companies. In general, we do not order whole meals, but pre-prepared items (such as frozen potato wedges) that are combined with other items and reheated in our school kitchens to make a whole meals. We are very proud of the healthy products that have been specially formulated for us. If a district is interested in learning more about specific products that we order (pizza with low-fat cheese and whole wheat crust, reduced breaded fish sticks, skim-chocolate milk with 130 calories per serving) or about who our major suppliers are in general, I encourage them to reach out to me via e-mail. I will put that district in touch with the purchasing managers at our Office of School Food.

Q: Do NYC farmer's markets have road blocks to participation from animal agriculture...meat, dairy, eggs being very nutrient dense and relatively low in calories?

A: No. However, our Health Bucks program only permits the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Q: Is there a plan to move food stamp applications online similar to the school meals application? Wouldn't moving to an online application system improve office visit efficiency and satisfaction?

A: Yes we will be providing an online Food Stamp application in the near future. Unfortunately, I don't expect this to dramatically change the application process, because the USDA still requires extensive documentation, and an application interview (which can in many cases be conducted by phone.)

Q: How are you evaluating the implementation of the NYC nutrition standards?

A: We are requiring agencies to regularly report on their compliance with the standards.

Q: How have you been able to sustain the Healthy Bodega Initiative? Many corner store programs across the country report that as soon as engagement with the store owner ends, when an initiative ends, sustainable effort wanes.

A: Some of the Bodegas we have worked with have returned to their pre-intervention state after a period of time, but many of them have not. In order to be sustainable, changes in the bodega have to help the owner make money. Many of the Bodegas we recruited to increase their orders of 1% milk have continued this practice because the product sells.

Shana Patterson - Smart Meal Initiative

Q: How do you see the Smart Meal program coordinating with menu labeling policy initiatives?

A: The Smart Meal (SM) program can fit as a great 'next or first step' for restaurants as a policy action. Because many restaurants do not have fully analyzed recipes for all items, the SM program gives them a more financially reasonable step. Additionally, the SM program provides consumer education along with brand recognition (i.e. the criterion tell the consumer 'why' the item qualifies and for 'what.'). Full labeling disclosure policies simply display a label of numbers.

Q: What are the two companies that you recommend for menu analysis?

A: On the Menu, LLC, and Strategic Nutrition, LLC – both are companies in Colorado, but do work nationally.

Q: In regards to the side dishes and the Smart Meals Programs, would the side dishes have different nutritional requirements than an entree?

A: The side dishes do indeed have different requirements. This information can be found on the slides or you may go to www.livewellcolorado.com and search Smart Meal. In August 09, be looking for our newly launched website specifically dedicated to the SM program www.smartmealcolorado.com

Q: Anyway to track from restaurants how many smart meal choices are being purchased?

A: This was part of the evaluation that I discussed during the webinar. Each restaurant tracks these data differently.

Q: Has the Smart Meals program encouraged reformulation of menu items in participating restaurants?

A: Almost in all cases, each restaurant has had to modify the item/meal they were serving.

Q: Are the other McDonalds in other states going to adopt the Smart Meal program?

A: Arizona and Utah.

Q: What kind of marketing did you do to privately owned restaurants to get them on board. What was their level of participation?

A: We have done very little marketing due to our budget constraints. However, at the very beginning, we sent out a one-page mailing to restaurants inviting them to participate. From that point on, we have relied on our major partners to get the word out (McDonald's and the press that came from their participation; Kaiser paying for the air-time and development of the Comcast On Demand commercial advertising the SM program to potential restaurants in Colorado, etc.)

Jackie Epping - Physical Activity Recommendations & Policy Options

Q: Could a certified physical activity practitioner fill a role in the schools? Would only PE teachers be able to conduct physical activities with kids in schools? School budget a big barrier.

A: Physical Education Specialists with degrees in education are absolutely necessary for teaching Physical Education. Classroom teachers have been trained to effectively lead physical activities but neither they nor PA practitioners have the training or expertise to replace Physical Education Specialists.

Q: For schools to simply stay open takes personnel to assure safe access and clean up following event so school is ready for kids the next day, this takes money which not too many schools have a lot of--where is the funding for this?

A: This funding should not have to come from the schools per se, it should come from the same tax revenues or other sources that fund the building of schools and/or park and recreation facilities; i.e., this should be a responsibility of the community. Taxpayers pay for schools; they should have access to those facilities.

Q: Are there grants available to sponsor community-wide events that fit recommended guidelines- 2 week time frame.

A: Many local foundations are now interested in funding activities to promote physical activity. Other sources might include local businesses that have a vested interest in people

being active – sports equipment or apparel manufacturers or other local businesses. State health agencies are also potential sources of funding.

Q: How does this information go with the new Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans that was recently promoted from HHS?

A: Think of the new PA Guidelines as the “what individuals should do” in terms of PA, and think of the Community Guide recommendations as the “how this can be supported/facilitated in communities”.

Q: With competing priorities for schools, there is a huge need for parents to push for healthier schools. What tips can you offer to engage parents in healthy initiatives?

A: This is a tough one, as engaging parents can be challenging, and has often been cited as a barrier to the full implementation of school-based programs. Here are a couple of thoughts:

1. Identify a visible parent “champion” who can help educate, inform, and engage other parents.
2. The best advocates are often people who understand or have experienced the benefits of what they advocate for. Consider offering something specifically for parents that will allow them to benefit (e.g. free or reduced fee fitness classes, cooking classes and demonstrations) and model the healthy behavior for their children.
3. I’ve worked in intervention studies which have utilized “reverse learning”; i.e., the student goes home and educates the parent. One example is a study in which students learned how to read food labels and how to modify recipes to reduce the fat content. The student’s mother called the school to say that, because her son insisted she drain fat off of the ground beef, her meatloaf wouldn’t “stick together” any more.
4. As part of the School Nutrition Recovery Act, schools are required to have the equivalent of a School Health Council that should include parents. This could be a way to engage parents in a meaningful way.