

December 8, 2023

Member of Congress
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

The American Farm Bureau Federation, the nation's largest general farm organization with nearly 6-million-member families in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, encourages Congress to pass H.R. 1147, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act which modifies current National School Lunch Program provisions to allow schools to offer students whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free flavored and unflavored milk.

Schools account for about 7.5% of total U.S. milk sales, making them an essential outlet for dairy farmers. Milk, including whole, reduced-fat, and flavored options, is also critical for children and adolescents who may not obtain necessary levels of vitamin D, potassium, high-quality protein, calcium, vitamin A, vitamin B12 and other key nutrients in their diet. According to the Department of Agriculture approximately 90% of the U.S. population, including school-aged children, are not consuming enough dairy to support recommended nutrient intake. Seventy-three percent of the calcium available in the food supply is provided by milk and milk products and milk is the number one source of protein in the diets of children ages 2-11. Unfortunately, current Dietary Guidelines effectively prohibit whole and 2% milk in schools. These guidelines contradict modern nutritional science and promotes unhealthy eating habits for children.

It is widely recognized by pediatric dietitians that adequate fat intake is essential to proper brain development and to support the energy requirements of young children and adolescents. Furthermore, numerous recent studies have debunked the previously asserted correlation between obesity and milk fat content. In a 2020 American Journal of Clinical Nutrition article, researchers stated that: "Relative to reduced-fat cow-milk, whole-fat cow-milk consumption was associated with lower odds of childhood overweight or obesity." The researchers went further, concluding that international guidelines that recommend reduced-fat milk for children may not lower the risk of childhood obesity. A second American Journal of Clinical Nutrition article from 2016 also found a positive correlation between milk fat content and vitamin D uptake, noting that, "whole milk consumption among healthy young children was associated with higher vitamin D stores and lower body mass index."

Children and adolescents often find whole and 2% milk options more palatable than low-fat or nonfat options. Numerous studies have shown modest-to-significant drops in milk consumption after flavored, whole and reduced-fat options are removed, limiting intake of essential nutrients. For example, a 2019 study published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that significantly fewer students selected milk in schools when flavor options were removed (a drop from 94% to 57%). Between 2008 and 2018, weekly milk consumption per student dropped from 4.03 8-ounce bottles or cartons to 3.39 (-15%). Student milk consumption

dropped more rapidly after whole and 2% milk options were removed from schools when the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act was implemented. Between 2008 and 2012 weekly milk consumption by students dropped by 0.03 bottles year-over-year. After 2012, weekly consumption dropped by 0.13 bottles annually, an over three-fold magnitude decrease.

Whole and 2% milk options, including flavored options, are wholesome choices for children and should be available to students to promote childhood nutrition. AFBF strongly supports the return of whole and 2% milk, flavored and unflavored, in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program as implementation of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act would accomplish.

Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Zippy Duvall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Zippy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Duvall".

Zippy Duvall
President