

New USDA school food regulations granola bars instead of Hershey bars

By ACSH Staff — June 28, 2013

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In 2012, congress put rules into place regulating the nutritional content of the foods that could be served as part of the free and low-cost school breakfasts and lunches. Now, the USDA is going a [step further](#) [2], and regulating the nutritional content of foods that children can buy outside of the cafeteria from vending machines, snack bars and school stores.

The main target of this new legislation, intended to go into effect during the 2014-2015 school year, will be high-calorie sports drinks. Under the new rules, sports drinks will only be sold in high schools, and will be limited to those containing 60 calories or less in a twelve-ounce serving. Elementary and middle schools will now only be allowed to sell water, carbonated water, 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice and low fat and fat-free milk. Snack foods served can contain no more than 200 calories and schools are encouraged to provide snack foods with more whole grains, low-fat dairy, fruits, vegetables and lean proteins. These rules will not apply to lunches brought from home, bake sales, or fundraisers.

There is some skepticism surrounding the new school food standards. The Government Accountability Office visited a variety of school districts around the country and found that many students were not responsive to the new foods being incorporated and this resulted in a decrease in participation in the school lunch program, as well as more food waste. And Sandra Ford, president of the School Nutrition Association adds, School meal programs are already in the midst of a sea of change as cafeterias work to meet new school breakfast and lunch standards and encourage students to try the healthier choices offered. Complex regulations can present unique challenges and unintended consequences when put into place.

The ACSH staff is also having trouble trying to wrap our heads around this new legislation, as was apparent by the lively discussion this morning. ACSH s Dr. Josh Bloom doubts that these new nutritious foods in vending machines at schools will make any difference in the fight against obesity. He says, A typical pack of two granola bars contains about 200 calories virtually identical to that of a Hershey Bar. People have obviously bought into the green packaging and the feel-good term natural, leading me to believe that this decision seems to be more about marketing and perception rather than obesity. Also, I don t think that the USDA should be in the business of banning anything from schools in the first place. It is not their place to do so.

ACSH s Ariel Savransky adds, As was said before by the School Nutrition Association, you can t just put these new foods into the school and expect that the kids are going to be receptive to them. A key component is missing there. There has to be some sort of educational program at the same

time to gradually expose the kids to these new foods, or at least to further encourage the kids to consider trying the new foods.

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Links

[1] <http://hsdispatch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/88018728.jpg>

[2] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/28/business/us-takes-aim-on-snacks-offered-for-sale-in-schools.html?_r=0