THE HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS ACT OF 2010  
(Rep. Jared Polis, CO)

America’s children are increasingly afflicted with adult diseases, including obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, as a direct result of their diet and lifestyle. Schools face economic challenges in providing healthful and nutritious foods. The easiest way to bring down children’s intake of fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol and increase fiber and other nutrients is by providing them with healthy plant-based (vegetarian) choices. Just one low-fat plant-based meal a week can begin to correct a child’s poor nutrient intake.

The Healthy School Meals Act will improve children’s eating patterns by encouraging the inclusion of healthful plant-based options in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. This important legislation will introduce plant-based foods to schools, increase the availability and affordability of these foods, and provide incentives for schools to provide daily plant-based options. The Act will also remove restrictions on providing nondairy milk alternatives with school lunches, improving the nutrition of millions children who currently lose out on vital nutrients because they are lactose intolerant, have allergies, or choose not to drink milk for other reasons.

Key Provisions

- **Pilot Program:** The Healthy School Meals Act directs USDA to conduct a pilot program in which the Secretary provides to selected school food authorities at no cost plant-based alternate protein products and nondairy milk substitutes. The USDA shall conduct an evaluation of the pilot program and shall be allocated an amount of $4,000,000 for program implementation.

- **More Plant-Based Commodities:** Following the pilot program, USDA will purchase plant-based alternate protein products and nondairy milk substitutes to make available to schools through the commodities purchase program and provide training materials regarding nutritional benefits and preparation of these products.

- **Incentives for Schools to Offer Healthy Plant-Based Meals:** School districts where at least two-thirds of the students are offered plant-based entrées on their daily lunch menus will receive supplemental commodity assistance of at least 25% of their total commodity assistance, which can be used to purchase additional plant-based commodity foods through the USDA commodities program. States will be permitted to set aside up to 5% of the commodity bonus for administration of the program.

- **Increased Availability of Cow’s Milk Alternatives:** Schools participating in the School Lunch Program will offer students a substitute for fluid milk that meets nutritional standards established by USDA for calcium, vitamin D, and other key nutrients. Students will no longer need to provide a doctor’s note to choose a cow’s milk alternative, and schools will be reimbursed for meals that include a healthy milk alternative.

For more information about the Healthy School Meals Act, contact the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine or visit our web site at [www.healthyschoollunches.org](http://www.healthyschoollunches.org).

To become a cosponsor, please contact Spiros Protopsaltis in Congressman Polis’ office at 202-225-2161 or [Spiros.Protopsaltis@mail.house.gov](mailto:Spiros.Protopsaltis@mail.house.gov).
WHO SUPPORTS HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS?

Dozens of physicians, health care institutions, celebrities, and organizations have expressed support for offering children nutritious, plant-based options and milk alternatives through the National School Lunch Program.

Key Stakeholders
The Healthy School Meals Act of 2010 was developed in consultation with numerous health professionals and physicians as well as the US Department of Agriculture, and school food service directors and state administrators across the country.

States Supporting Plant-Based Options for School Lunches
California, Florida, Hawaii, and New York have passed resolutions supporting healthful plant-based options for school lunches. Similar resolutions are pending in a number of other states, including: Georgia, Iowa, and Ohio.

Doctors and Health Care Providers
The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine is a national nonprofit organization representing 8,000 physician members and more than 100,000 lay members. More than 100 hospitals and health care providers also support this effort, and more than 200 doctors have signed letters in support of healthy school meals.

The Public
More than 120,000 individuals from all 50 states have signed a petition calling on Congress to help schools provide vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, vegetarian foods, and healthful nondairy beverages in school meal programs.

WHY HEALTHIER SCHOOL LUNCHES?

Adult Diseases in Children
Children are increasingly affected by obesity and related conditions that were previously considered adult diseases. Current trends are disastrous:

- In the past 30 years, the prevalence of overweight in children ages 6 to 19 has tripled. In 2008, 32% of children and adolescents were classified as overweight and 17% were considered obese.
- Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, undesirable cholesterol levels, and heart disease now being found at alarming rates in children and adolescents.
- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- Children get too much fat, saturated fat, trans fats, and cholesterol, and total calories. Children don’t get enough fiber, whole grains, fruits or vegetables.

Why Vegetarian Options in the Lunch Line?
Plant-based (vegetarian) options will help schools meet federal nutrition requirements.

- Most schools are struggling to meet the USDA guidelines, which are required for meal reimbursement.
- In the 2004-2005 school year, only 30% of schools met the guidelines for maximum saturated fat allowed in school lunches.
- Students who do not participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) consume less saturated fat and total fat, compared with NSLP participants.

Plant-based entrees will improve the nutritional quality of school food.

- Plant-based foods are:
  - Cholesterol free
  - Generally lower in calories
  - Generally low in fat and saturated fat
  - High in fiber
  - Shown to prevent, reduce & reverse diet related diseases
HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORT PLANT-BASED OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN

Numerous scientific studies have shown the benefits low-fat, high-fiber, plant-based options for adults and children. The American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association, and the American Institute for Cancer Research promote plant-based foods for chronic disease prevention. The American Medical Association and the American Public Health Association have called on federal food assistance programs to emphasize vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, and nondairy vegetarian foods.

The following are recent statements from key health organizations and experts in support of increasing the amount of plant-based foods in children’s diets.

**Institute of Medicine**: In its 2009 report School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children, the committee recommends that the USDA adopt standards for menu planning, including:
- Increasing the amount and variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Setting a minimum and maximum level of calories
- Focusing more on reducing saturated fat and sodium

Accessed Jan 25, 2010

**Position Statement of American Dietetic Association**

“It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes.”


**American Public Health Association Policy Statement**

Addressing Obesity and Health Disparities Through Federal Nutrition and Agricultural Policy

The APHA aims to advocate for national policies that address the prevention of obesity and racial and ethnic disparities in health status by:
1. Increasing access to healthy, culturally acceptable vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, vegetarian foods, and healthful nondairy beverages in school lunches and food assistance programs.
2. Urging Congress to shift federal subsidies support to products low in fat, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar.
3. Urging the federal government to change laws, specifically those governing the US Department of Agriculture, that promote agricultural interests over the interests of nutrition.


**American Medical Association** — H-150.944 Combating Obesity and Health Disparities

Our AMA supports efforts to:
1. reduce health disparities by basing food assistance programs on the health needs of their constituents;
2. provide vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, vegetarian foods, and healthful nondairy beverages in school lunches and food assistance programs; and
3. ensure that federal subsidies encourage the consumption of products low in fat and cholesterol. (Res. 413, A-07)


“Requirements for nondairy beverages should be based only on essential nutrients (calcium, vitamin A, vitamin D, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, riboflavin and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>). Soymilk can even be a healthier option for children because dairy is the main source of saturated fat in children’s diets. Non-flavored soymilk is usually lower in sugar, sodium, calories, and total fat, and contains virtually no saturated fat. Soymilk also contains no cholesterol.”

Neal Barnard, M.D.—Nutrition Author & Researcher