



October 5, 2012

The Honorable Kevin W. Concannon  
Under Secretary  
Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, USDA  
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Suite 216E Whitten Building  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0106

Dear Under Secretary Kevin Concannon, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, USDA,

The Illinois Hunger Coalition supports the new meal nutrition standards as an effective tool for addressing the problems of hunger and obesity among school age children.

While much of the criticism of the new standards focuses on the calorie ranges, FRAC noted that the new healthier meal calorie ranges follow the Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommendations. The calorie ranges—establishing both minimum and maximum amounts of calories—address concerns about both childhood hunger and obesity. They allow schools to provide age-appropriate meals while avoiding excessive caloric intake. The calorie ranges were carefully calculated based on the Dietary Reference Intakes: Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein, and Amino Acids and the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. The calorie needs of each age group were allocated proportionately throughout the meals in a day.

Representative Steve King (R-Iowa) has written in an op-ed that children are hungry by the end of the school day. Any parent knows that lots of children are hungry after school – a function of how children develop and not of new calorie limits. But hungry children can ask for more fruits and vegetables, and the new nutrition standards are only one of several new improvements to the federal child nutrition programs aimed at ensuring children have access to healthy meals before, during, and after school. Congress has broadened the reach of the Afterschool Meal Program so every state can offer children who are engaged in afterschool activities a snack or (depending on the length of the program) a meal. And these offerings have to be nutritious too.

Low-income children are vulnerable to obesity and poor nutrition because of risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, fewer opportunities for physical activity, high levels of stress, greater exposure to obesity-related marketing, and limited access to health care. Given all of these challenges, school meal programs play an important role in improving the health of low-income children.

In conclusion, the Illinois Hunger Coalition fully supports the efforts of USDA as they seek to improve the nutrition and health of students through the new nutrition standards.

Sincerely,

Diane Doherty  
Executive Director  
Illinois Hunger Coalition