



# Whitewashed

How Industry and Government  
Promote Dairy Junk Foods

Michele  
Simon

EATDRINK  
POLITICS  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is in the midst of a public health epidemic due to poor diet. While much of the focus has been on obvious culprits such as sugary soft drinks and fast food, dairy foods often get a pass. The dairy industry, propped up by government, has convinced us of the health benefits of milk and other dairy products. But the context of how people consume dairy matters. This report shines a light on the shifting patterns of consumption away from plain milk toward dairy products laden with sugar, fat, and salt.

### Report Findings

#### *Dairy Consumption Patterns*

- Consumption of milk a beverage has decreased nearly 50 percent since 1909
- About half of all milk is consumed either as flavored milk, with cereal, or in a drink
- Nearly half of the milk supply goes to make about 9 billion pounds of cheese and 1.5 billion gallons of frozen desserts--two-thirds of which is ice cream
- Cheese is the single largest source of saturated fat in the diet
- 11 percent of all sugar goes into the production of dairy products

#### *Government Support for Dairy*

- The federal government mandates the collection of industry fees for “checkoff programs” to promote milk and dairy

- USDA employees attend checkoff meetings, monitor activities, and are responsible for evaluation of the programs
- Checkoff money is not supposed to be used for lobbying but USDA gave \$2.1 million to the U.S. Dairy Export Council, which lobbies for dairy products overseas
- The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the legality of the checkoff programs as “government speech”, finding: “the message ... is controlled by the Federal Government”

#### *Fast Food Promotion Despite Checkoff Being for “Generic” Marketing*

- McDonald’s has six dedicated dairy checkoff program employees at its corporate headquarters who work to ensure that dairy plays an important role in McDonald’s product development
- The dairy checkoff program helped Taco Bell introduce its double steak quesadillas and cheese shreds, which resulted in a four percent increase in the chain’s dairy sales
- The dairy checkoff program helped Pizza Hut develop a 3-Cheese Stuffed Crust Pizza and the “Summer of Cheese” ad campaign
- Between 2009 and 2011, Dominos benefitted from a \$35 million partnership with the dairy checkoff program, resulting in the company adding more cheese, with other pizza makers following their lead
- Domino’s “Smart Slice” program brought the pizza to more than 2,000 schools in 2011, with help from the checkoff program

***Dairy Junk Foods in Schools***

- 70 percent of milk consumed in schools is flavored
- USDA’s milk checkoff program promotes “Chocolate Milk Has Muscle” and “Raise Your Hand for Chocolate Milk” campaigns to defend chocolate milk
- Industry leader Dean Foods’ TruMoo is a popular brand sold in schools; one serving of TruMoo strawberry milk = 21g of sugar
- Milk checkoff materials were used to change the mind of one school official who was planning to remove flavored milk
- The checkoff-supported “Fuel Up to Play” program contains health messaging that is contradictory to federal dietary advice
- Fuel Up to Play promotes chocolate milk in schools as a way for children to “Fuel Up” with protein and vitamins

***Misleading Health Claims by USDA Checkoff Program Recipients***

- “Cheese can fit into almost any eating plan”
- “Process cheese is made from natural cheese”
- “Cheese contributes essential nutrients for good health”
- “Studies show that when chocolate milk is not an option in the school meal line, many kids don’t drink any milk at all. That means they completely miss out on essential nutrients they need to think, learn and grow”
- “Chocolate milk is the perfect balance of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and protein—a combination that can’t be found in any other beverage”
- “What’s more important: a small amount of added sugar, or missing out completely on a powerful package of nutrients?”

**Recommendations**

The federal government should stop mandatory assessments of the dairy industry and put an end to the dairy checkoff program. At a minimum:

- 1) Checkoff funding should not promote dairy junk foods that conflict with dietary guidelines or health programs**
- 2) Checkoff funding should not promote name brands such as Domino’s “Smart Slice” pizza in schools**
- 3) Checkoff funding should not promote sugary milk in schools**
- 4) Checkoff funding should not be used for the “Fuel Up To Play 60” program in schools due to questionable benefits**
- 5) The federal government should closely review checkoff recipients’ materials to avoid deceptive or questionable nutrition and health claims**
- 6) The federal government should conduct better oversight to ensure checkoff money is not used for lobbying**

**In Addition:**

- 7) The federal government should not allow dairy junk foods to be approved as “Smart Snacks” in schools**
- 8) The federal government should not allow sugary milk in school**
- 9) The Women’s Infants and Children’s Program should not be exploited by the dairy industry to allow sugary yogurts**
- 10) State governments such as New York State should stop subsidizing yogurt companies such as Chobani**