



Potato Monthly: June 2021



Food and Nutrition Policy

House Agriculture Committee Hearing on SNAP

The House Agriculture subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations recently met to discuss the future of SNAP. The hearing included testimonies from individuals who have been receiving SNAP benefits during the pandemic and professionals working closely with research related to food assistance. The testimony and discussion highlighted the importance of SNAP dollars during the pandemic and beyond, the need to improve and modernize the program through continued investment in online pilots and food box programs, and a desire to better evaluate the work requirements.

Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021

Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI) announced the introduction of the *Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021*. The Act would permanently provide free breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack to all school children regardless of income, eliminate school meal debt, provide free summer meals to all children as well as summer EBT to all low-income children, and also incentivize local food procurement.

Stop Child Hunger Act of 2021

Representative Mike Levin (D-CA), Representative Jahana Hayes (D-CT), and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) are introducing the *Stop Child Hunger Act of 2021* to establish a permanent, nationwide electronic benefits transfer (EBT) program for children during school breaks and closures of more than five days. The legislation builds upon the summer EBT proposal in the *Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2019* and the American Families Plan and would convert the summer EBT pilot into a permanent program allowing eligible households to use EBT cards for the purchase of food from SNAP retailers. The proposal has been endorsed by multiple hunger groups including FRAC, Feeding America, and Share our Strength.

President Biden's Budget Proposal

In late May, President Biden released his FY 2022 budget proposal. The budget includes projected fiscal spending of \$6 trillion, including \$27.9 billion for USDA, a nearly 17% increase from FY 2021. The funds for USDA would be targeted toward investments related to racial injustice, climate change, and hunger. Additionally, the proposal sets aside \$6.7 billion in funds for WIC, includes plans to expand SNAP eligibility, and would make permanent the summer EBT program. The budget requests \$6.5 billion for FDA and would "provide additional funds to address numerous emerging food-related chemical and toxicological issues."

FDA Notice on Research for "Healthy" Symbol

In May, FDA issued a procedural notice on the preliminary quantitative consumer research the Agency plans to conduct on symbols that could be used in the future to convey the voluntary nutrient content claim "healthy." As part of this effort, the Agency released a number of draft "healthy" symbols under consideration. FDA is proposing to conduct three quantitative research studies to explore consumer responses to the draft front-of-pack (FOP) symbols for the "healthy" claim. The first study would include a 15-minute web-based questionnaire to collect information from 5,000 US adult members of an online consumer panel, and the second and third studies would include a 10-minute questionnaire to test sets of draft FOP symbols. Comments on this FDA information collection are due by July 6, 2021.

WHO Sodium Benchmarks

The World Health Organization (WHO) has established global benchmarks for sodium levels in foods across different food categories as part of WHO's efforts in reducing sodium intake. WHO intends for the global benchmarks to be complementary to ongoing national and regional efforts to set sodium targets. The report presents the sodium benchmarks established for various food categories and also outlines the process and method through which the WHO benchmarks were established. Subcategories with sodium benchmarks related to potato products include potato and vegetable chips, extruded snacks, prepared salads (E.g., potato salad), canned vegetables and legumes, and frozen potatoes and other potato products (ready-to-eat).



Food Safety + Ag

Hemp Access and Consumer Safety Act of 2021

Recently, Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR), Rand Paul (R-KY), and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) introduced a new bill titled, the *Hemp Access and Consumer Safety Act of 2021*, to specifically allow the use of Cannabidiol (CBD) and other hemp derivatives in foods and dietary supplements. The bill would ensure hemp-derived CBD is regulated by FDA like other legal products used in foods, dietary supplements, and beverages. The legislation also authorizes FDA to establish labeling and packaging requirements for CBD-containing products.

USDA Food System Investments

Citing lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and recent supply chain disruptions, the USDA has announced plans to invest more than \$4 billion to strengthen critical supply chains through the Build Back Better initiative. The new effort will strengthen the food system, create new market opportunities, tackle the climate crisis, help communities that have been left behind, and support good-paying jobs throughout the supply chain. Funding announcements under the Build Back Better initiative will include a mix of grants, loans, and innovative financing mechanisms for the following priorities, each of which includes mechanisms to tackle the climate crisis and help communities that have been left behind, including: Food production, food processing, food distribution, and marketing & consumers.

National Organic Standards Board Fall Meeting

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) announced a meeting of the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) to be held October 19-21, 2021. The NOSB makes recommendations to USDA about whether substances should be allowed or prohibited in organic production and/or handling, assists in the development of standards for organic production, and advises the Secretary of Agriculture on other aspects of the implementation of the Organic Foods Production Act. The meeting is being held to discuss and vote on proposed recommendations to USDA, to obtain updates from the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) on issues pertaining to organic agriculture, and to receive comments from the organic community. Written public comments will be accepted on or before September 30, 2021.

Nutrition Science

Effect of Potassium from Potatoes on Blood Pressure and CVD Risk Factors

A new study, published in *Nutrients*, investigated the effect of increased dietary potassium from a whole food source (baked/boiled and fried potatoes) or a potassium supplement on blood pressure and cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factors (i.e., potassium/sodium retention) compared to a 'typical American' control diet (low potassium intake). Results showed that baked/boiled potato consumption had the greatest benefit on reducing sodium retention – even more than the supplement – and thus was associated with a greater blood pressure reduction compared to the control diet. Further, despite commonly held misbeliefs about French fries and their role in heart-healthy lifestyles, the authors observed that French fries in amounts typical of a large serving in a fast-food restaurant had no adverse effect on blood pressure or blood vessel function. For added context, potatoes make up ~7% of potassium intakes in America, and French fries account for ~3% of potassium intake. This is the first controlled feeding study to examine the effect of potassium from food (in this case, potatoes) on blood pressure and cardiovascular outcomes in a pre-hypertensive/hypertensive population.

Positive Potato Coverage in Livestrong

Livestrong published an article on "20 Foods High in Carbohydrates That Are Really Good for You," highlighting potatoes as a result of Potatoes USA's ongoing outreach with leading lifestyle, nutrition and wellness media. The article says, "You need carbohydrates for energy to fuel your everyday physical activity, but the quality of carbohydrates you choose is most important. Foods high in healthy carbs are unprocessed or minimally processed whole foods that also have fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health." *Livestrong* also published a second article covering the healthfulness of potatoes as a source of antioxidants and vitamin C.