Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children Statement by Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D. Executive Director Center for Science in the Public Interest

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Good morning and welcome to this press conference. I am Michael Jacobson, the executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest. For those of you who aren't familiar with us, CSPI is a nonprofit health-advocacy organization that focuses on nutrition, food-safety, and other issues. We're funded largely by the 900,000 subscribers to our *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, as well as by foundation grants.

One of the issues that CSPI has worked on for many years is children's diets and health. Obviously, one of today's major public-health concern's is the soaring rates of childhood obesity. Over the last 20 years, the rates of obesity have doubled in children and tripled in teens.

Aside from obesity, nutrition is a problem. Fewer than 5 percent of children eat a nutritious diet, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Children's diets are too high in calories, saturated and trans fat, refined sugars, and salt, and don't include enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and calcium. Kids' poor diets and growing waistlines increase their risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other serious diseases.

Poor dietary habits and obesity not only cause problems when children are older, but many children experience health problems while they're still young. A quarter of children between 5 and 10 years old have elevated blood pressure or cholesterol or other early warning sign for heart disease. Type 2 diabetes can no longer be called "adult onset" diabetes, because a growing number of teenagers are developing the disease.

Although children's food choices are affected by many factors, food marketing plays a key role. No one disputes that the goal of food marketing aimed at kids is to influence kids' food choices. Studies show that food marketing attracts children's attention, influences their food choices, and prompts them to ask their parents to buy the advertised products.

Over the past decade, the volume of marketing aimed at children doubled, from about \$7 billion to \$15 billion a year – about half of that is for food. Soft-drink vending machines are everywhere, including in schools; fast-food outlets have metastasized from city streets to shopping malls, hospitals, and museums; and food manufacturers have unleashed an awesome number of unhealthful foods designed specifically to entice children.

Twenty-five years ago, CSPI and Action for Children's Television petitioned the Federal Trade Commission to restrict children's television advertising, in part because of the junk-food commercials. The FTC, after much study and public hearings, was considering whether not just

junk-food advertising, but *all* advertising aimed at young children, is simply unfair--and in violation of the law--because those kids simply don't understand the concept of advertising. At that point, the food, toy, broadcasting, and advertising industries used their political might to get Congress to stop the FTC's inquiry. That was the last serious attempt to protect children from junk-food advertising.

Given the rising obesity rates and the poor state of children's diets, CSPI is once again making the reduction of junk-food marketing aimed at children a high priority. Today, we are calling on manufacturers, restaurants, broadcasters, movie studios, magazines, ad agencies, schools, videogame manufacturers, organizers of sporting events, and others who manufacture, advertise, or otherwise promote food to children to exercise greater responsibility.

CSPI's new *Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children* provide criteria to guide marketing practices so as to avoid undermining children's diets and harming their health. We hope the *Guidelines* also will be helpful to parents, school officials, legislators, health organizations, and others who are seeking to improve children's diets.

The guidelines are part of a broader strategy that CSPI is undertaking to reduce junk food marketing aimed at children and address childhood nutrition and obesity. CSPI worked with Senator Harkin to get funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to commission the Institute of Medicine to study the extent and impact of food marketing aimed at kids. That study is underway. CSPI also is working with other members of the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity (NANA) to maintain funding for CDC's "VERB" campaign, which promotes physical activity to youth. We are urging the Administration to stop trying to terminate that program and instead to expand it by including a nutrition component.

I would like to express my special thanks to the Carmel Hill and Park foundations that funded much of this work. I also want to thank the many experts from universities, health organizations, foundations, and industry who helped shape the marketing guidelines.

I am now delighted to introduce Dr. Margo Wootan, CSPI's director of nutrition policy, who developed the *Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children*.

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