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Getting rid of the junk in school vending machines

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Though processed and packaged, Lewis points out that fruit strips are made only from fruit with no added sugar or other additives.

Most health-conscious people have had the experience of standing in front of a vending machine, struggling to select the least unhealthy snack out of 30 or so items. Heavily salted peanuts, fig cookies or a scant bag of salted pretzels. But times are changing.

Smart Snack standards

For vending, the USDA's Smart Snacks standards include some of the following:

Have no more than 200 calories.

No more than 35 percent of sugar by weight. Some exclusions apply for fruit items.

Have no more than 230 milligrams of sodium per serving. Standard goes to 200 milligrams after July 1, 2016.

Total fat must be at or below 35 percent of calories per serving.

Saturated fat must be at or below 10 percent of calories per serving.

No trans fat is allowed.

All schools may sell water, carbonated water, unflavored low-fat milk, flavored or unflavored fat-free milk and soy alternatives or 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice.

U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Smart snacks

In addition to consumer demand, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's new "Smart Snacks in Schools" standards go into effect on July 1, 2014. Those standards require that snacks have no more than 200 calories, must be at or below 35 percent of calories in total fat, be at or below 35 percent by weight in sugar, be at or below 230 milligrams of sodium and have no trans fat.

In June, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the new nutrition standards balance recommendations from the Institute of Medicine with 250,000 comments on the proposal first made earlier in the year.

"Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of our children," he said. "Parents



Lewis



New U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for schools, taking effect July 1, 2014, allow for 100 percent fruit and vegetable juice but no more full-sugar soft drinks.



Army reservist and business student Dan Lewis put 11 HUMAN Healthy Vending machines in various schools, the Summerville Family YMCA and Joint Base Charleston this fall.

and schools work hard to give our youngsters the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong, and providing healthy options throughout school cafeterias, vending machines, and snack bars will support their great efforts.”

The standards will put the final nails in the coffin of full-sugar soft drinks, candy bars and “honey buns” in schools and, on a broader scale, provide incentives for healthier vending options for all.

In the works

The Smart Snacks guidelines came out of the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010, which addresses school lunches and “competitive foods,” such as vending, in public schools.

Coleen Martin of the MUSC Boeing Center for Children’s Wellness says that policy changes will have a “greater public health impact.”

“If you think about it, there are well over 100,000 tri-county residents, including students, staff, families and friends, impacted by implementing healthy snack policies in schools and athletic events,” says Martin, especially noting having only water or nonsugary drinks in schools and on school grounds.

“The greatest barrier to getting schools, parent associations, booster clubs and other groups on board to make changes in the sale of competitive junk foods is the fear or reality of financial impact (such as losing money on vending).”

The mandates, she adds, work well with other efforts to educate those groups of real health risks of junk food. Ultimately, the combination will lead to sustaining change toward healthier food.

Health(ier) vending?

While some conventional vending machine operators are making adjustments, other companies are springing up that specialize in healthier options, such as

East Coast Organic Vending and HUMAN Healthy Vending.

This fall, Army reservist and business student Dan Lewis started as a HUMAN (which stands for Helping Unite Mankind And Nutrition) franchisee and has put nearly a dozen machines in various locations, including schools and the Charleston County School District office on Calhoun Street, as well as the downtown Summerville YMCA and Joint Base Charleston.

Lewis is fine-tuning the selections in each vending machine, but one at the Charleston Charter School for Math and Science featured fruit-based snacks by That's It, Stretch Island Fruit Co. and Welch's as well as fruit beverages by Switch, Apple & Eve, Switch, Izze and Alo, an aloe vera beverage.

Lewis, who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn in Iraq, pursued the vending business after his own personal health scare.

Recovering from reconstructive ankle surgery a few years ago, Lewis started having unexplained dizziness, later diagnosed as vestibular migraines.

Through his research, Lewis discovered that eating processed foods may contribute to the migraines and he changed his diet. The migraines went away.

During the research, he stumbled upon HUMAN and wanted to be a franchisee.

The HUMAN vending machine has been a surprising hit with students at the 520-student Charleston Charter School of Math and Science on upper King

Street.

Athletic Director Brett Phillips says he and the school wellness committee welcomes the machine because students are taught to eat right and that vending machines should not offer junk food options.

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