



National Medical Association

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December 15, 2003

Office of Health Policy, Research
& Professional Medical Affairs

Ms. Patricia Daniels
Director, Supplemental Food Programs Division
Food and Nutrition Service
USDA
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520
Alexandria, VA 22202

RE: Revision to the WIC Food Packages
68 Federal Register 53903, Vol. 68, No. 178, September 15, 2003

Dear Ms. Daniels:

The National Medical Association (NMA) is the oldest and largest national organization representing African American physicians and health professionals in the United States. Established in 1895, the NMA represents more than 25,000 physicians and the millions of patients they serve. The NMA recognizes the significant role the WIC Program has played in the nutritional health and education of millions of at-risk, low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women, infants and children.

Through its membership, professional development, community health education, advocacy, and research efforts, the NMA is committed to improving the health status and outcomes of African American, minority and disadvantaged people. While throughout its history the National Medical Association has focused primarily on health issues related to African Americans and medically underserved populations, its principles, goals, initiatives and philosophy encompass all sectors of the population.

The WIC program is well established and viewed as a credible source for nutrition. To this end, any changes to the WIC Food Package should be based on scientific and consumer evidence that will not result in harmful effects in the target population's nutritional needs. The NMA also recommends caution in implementing major changes on a program wide basis without clear documentation of nutrient needs and participant preference, as well as an understanding of the effects of changes on participant nutrient intake and costs.

The current WIC package provides foods, which contain target nutrients likely to be lacking in the diets of low-income women, infants and children, including protein, vitamins A and C, iron and calcium.

The NMA recently conducted a Consensus Conference entitled, "The Case for Dairy and Dairy Nutrients in the African American Diet", which addressed the role of diet and dairy in reducing certain diseases, including obesity, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis among African Americans. Recent research on the need for dietary calcium and other nutrients found primarily in dairy foods, combined with evidence that African Americans consume less dietary dairy than other sectors of the general population, has sparked concern for the resulting health consequences of this trend. The panel of experts identified the important impact that inadequate consumption of dairy products, fruits and vegetables plays in preventing the aforementioned diseases.

Furthermore, the NMA recommends that the current inclusion of dairy products be maintained. Dairy foods are the major source of calcium in the American diet and especially in the diet of African Americans. The NMA recommends that the American public in general and African Americans in particular, should consume more dairy foods, i.e. two to three servings per day. The NMA also recommends the addition of fruits and vegetables to the WIC food package.

For your review and information attached is a copy of the NMA's abbreviated Executive Summary and Recommendations that are pending publication in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*. The supporting information details the NMA's position on dairy and other nutrients for the American diet.

Should you have any questions or need additional information do not hesitate to contact me directly at (202) 207-1549.

Sincerely,



Ivonne Fuller NRPP MPA

Enclosure