



# Federal Trade Commission

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**THE UNITED STATES FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION  
PROMOTING SOLUTIONS TO CHILDHOOD OBESITY:  
Perspectives on Food Marketing and Self-Regulation**

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**European Union Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health  
Joint EU-US Meeting**

**May 11, 2006**

Good afternoon. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to take part in this transatlantic meeting to discuss the good practices underway on both continents to promote diet, physical activity, and health. I would like to thank Commissioner Kyprianou and Director General Madelin for their vision in developing this event, and the European Commission staff for gathering an impressive group of stakeholders to participate.

I begin with the history of the lowly tomato.<sup>2</sup> As some of you may know, tomatoes originated in Central America as a weed in maize and bean fields. Despite this humble origin, they were the foundation of the Mexican diet when Cortez arrived in Mexico in 1519. Shortly thereafter, two Jesuit missionaries brought red tomatoes back to Italy. In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Italians began using tomato sauce as an accompaniment to pastas like ravioli and tortellini that

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Federal Trade Commission or of any other individual Commissioner.

<sup>2</sup> See R. Tannahill, *Food in History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1988).



South America will be overweight.<sup>4</sup> But our problem

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modify their products, their marketing techniques, and their messages. I believe, however, that those actions should be industry-initiated, not government-imposed.

Although some here may doubt the commitment of industry to self-regulate in any meaningful way, I have seen examples of successful self-regulation and the advantages it can offer. Under the right circumstances, industry-generated solutions can address problems more quickly, creatively, and flexibly than government regulation

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Putting the challenge to industry was, in fact, the primary goal of the joint workshop that the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Health and Human Services hosted last July.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. federal government has undertaken many initiatives to reverse rising obesity rates, particularly among children, many of which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and its agencies described earlier today.

The purpose of our workshop, however, was to encourage the private sector to take the initiative. We asked the food and beverage manufacturers, restaurants, and the media and entertainment industry to tell us what they are doing to address obesity. Clearly, one effective way to reach children and persuade them to eat better and exercise more is to harness the tremendous knowledge, creativity, and marketing power of these industries. The industry has the ability to effect real change in the public's food choices. Our workshop provided a jump start for that change.

Our two-day public workshop brought together a diverse mix of participants – food companies, advertising agencies, media, consumer and public health groups, academics, government, and others. A representative from the European Commission also participated. The workshop panels reviewed current m

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from traditional hard-to-open wax cartons to brightly decorated and easily opened small plastic jugs. Since last July, the momentum has continued, as more product innovations and marketing shifts have been introduced.



children.



agencies hope to accomplish. I am optimistic that we have generated real momentum for change. But I am also committed to making sure that this momentum translates into real progress. The two agencies will be monitoring industry's response to these recommendations closely. After allowing time for the private sector to respond, we will issue a follow-up report assessing the extent to which positive, concrete steps have been taken and what additional actions are warranted.

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