CHICAGO, Nov. 9 /PRNewswire/ -- In attempts to improve the nutritional quality of school meals, there have been several strides forward - including the removal of soft drinks and other less nutritious menu options. However, some schools and activist groups are calling for a new change that many health professionals agree could cause more harm than good when it comes to children's health: removing chocolate milk from the lunch line.

"Groups calling for chocolate milk to be taken out of the cafeteria due to concerns over added sugars are not looking at the big picture," said New Jersey-based registered dietitian, exercise physiologist and mom Felicia Stoler, DCN, MS, RD. "Nearly 70 percent of the milk children choose to drink in school is flavored, which offers the same nine essential nutrients as white milk, including a number of nutrients that kids are not getting enough of such as calcium, vitamin D and potassium."

The nation's leading health and nutrition organizations - including the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Heart Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Medical Association, and School Nutrition Association - recognize the valuable role that milk, including flavored milk, can play in meeting daily nutrient needs. All recognize that the small amount of added sugar in flavored milk is an acceptable trade-off for the nutrients provided. In addition, studies show that children who drink chocolate milk have better quality diets, do not have higher overall intakes of sugar, fat or calories, and are not heavier than non-flavored milk drinkers.

"If we're looking for a culprit for childhood obesity, milk is not it," said Stoler. "Chocolate milk is just as nutrient-rich as unflavored milk, and if it helps children drink more milk, then that's a positive strategy.

**Calling On Moms To Raise Their Hands For Chocolate Milk**
The nation's dairy farmers and milk processors are joining the national conversation on healthy school lunches to provide moms with the facts about the nutritional benefits of drinking lowfat or fat free chocolate milk and to help keep chocolate milk in schools with a new campaign called Raise Your Hand for Chocolate Milk. Launching today, the campaign includes a new Web site (RaiseYourHand4Milk.com) where moms can learn the facts, read the science and show their support for chocolate milk by signing the Raise Your Hand petition.

"As a mom and nutrition expert with a particular focus on kids' health and wellness, I've joined this campaign to make sure moms know the facts and raise their hands," said Stoler. "Moms can't be with their kids at every meal. I think it's essential to make sure schools are offering nutrient-rich options that kids will actually choose without mom standing over them."

**New Study Shows Impact of Removing Flavored Milk From Schools**
A new study presented at the American Dietetic Association's Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo on Oct. 20, 2009, found that when flavored milk was removed from a school district in Connecticut, milk consumption dropped by as much as 67 percent.

"It's important for parents and school districts to recognize the potential implications of removing chocolate milk from school meal offerings," said study co-author Margie Saidel, MPH, RD, Vice President for Nutrition, Sustainability and Community for the Chartwells School Dining Services, one of the country's leading providers of school meals. "As we demonstrated, there could be well-meaning but negative consequences from this type of decision. National food consumption surveys show that milk ranks among the top sources of several nutrients including calcium, protein, potassium, magnesium, riboflavin and zinc. With that in mind, it seems clear that there are far better ways to trim calories and added sugar from the menu than removing chocolate milk, which makes so many positive contributions to children's diets."

Saidel said the idea of removing chocolate milk has been raised in many of the 600 school districts served by Chartwells, representing 2.5 million students. Yet, she's hopeful the study will help educate schools and parents on the possible ramifications of that decision.

**What Experts Say About Chocolate Milk**
Leading health professionals recognize the valuable role milk and flavored milk can play in a child's diet to help them get the three servings of dairy they need each day.

The **American Academy of Pediatrics**, in a policy statement discouraging soft drinks in schools,(1) and in its report on optimizing children's and adolescents' bone health and calcium intakes,(2) encourages consumption of nutritious beverages including lowfat or fat free white or flavored milk, water or real fruit or vegetable juice as healthful alternatives to soft drinks.

"The small amount of extra sugar in chocolate milk should not negate its nutritional benefits," said Bob Murray, MD, FAAP, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on School Health and author of the soft drinks policy statement. "It's so important for children to not miss out on the milk they need during these critical periods of growth."

The **American Dietetic Association** states that "by increasing the palatability of nutrient-dense foods/beverages, sweeteners can promote diet healthfulness." (3) This concept is also supported by the **2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans** which states that enhancing the palatability of nutrient-dense foods, such as milk, may improve nutrient intake.(4)

In addition, the **American Heart Association** (AHA) supports a positive role for added sugars to help increase intakes of nutrient-rich foods including dairy foods. Specifically, in their scientific statement on *Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health*, the AHA states, "when sugars are added to otherwise nutrient-rich foods, such as sugar-sweetened dairy products like flavored milk and yogurt ... the quality of children's and adolescents' diet improves, and in the case of flavored milks, no adverse effects on weight status were found."(5)

**How Moms Can Raise Their Hands**
The nation's dairy farmers and milk processors are asking moms to raise their hands in support of chocolate milk by visiting RaiseYourHand4Milk.com or the Raise Your Hand For Chocolate Milk page on Facebook.

The sites feature facts and science on chocolate milk's role in children's diets and ask moms to sign the Raise Your Hand petition to show their support and help reinforce the importance of giving kids nutrient-rich options like chocolate milk at home and in school.

Moms visiting RaiseYourHand4Milk.com can also view video messages from other moms - including pediatricians, dietitians and celebrities - sharing why they are raising *their* hands in support of chocolate milk.

**About the National Dairy Council**
National Dairy CouncilÂ® (NDC) is the nutrition research, education and communications arm of Dairy Management Inc(TM). On behalf of U.S. dairy farmers, NDC provides science-based nutrition information to, and in collaboration with, a variety of stakeholders committed to fostering a healthier society, including health professionals, educators, school nutrition directors, academia, industry, consumers and media. Established in 1915, NDC comprises a staff of nutrition science researchers, registered dietitians and communications experts dedicated to educating the public on the health benefits of consuming milk and milk products throughout a person's lifespan.

In addition, NDC funds independent research to aid in the ongoing discovery of information about dairy foods' important role in a healthy lifestyle. This research provides insights to industry for new dairy product innovation. In partnership with its network of state and regional dairy councils, NDC disseminates nutrition programs, materials and research to support government recommendations
for improved nutrition for Americans, including consumption of at least three servings of nutrient-rich low-fat or fat-free milk and milk products a day.

**About the National Milk Mustache "got milk?"**Â® **Campaign**
The Milk Processor Education Program (MilkPEP), Washington, D.C., is funded by the nation's milk processors, who are committed to increasing fluid milk consumption. The National Fluid Milk Processor Promotion Board, through MilkPEP, runs the national Milk Mustache "got milk?"Â® Campaign, a multi-faceted campaign designed to educate consumers about the health benefits of milk. For more information, go to [www.whymilk.com](http://www.whymilk.com/). Lowe New York is the creative agency for The National Milk Mustache "got milk"Â® Campaign.

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on School Health. Policy Statement, Soft Drinks in Schools. *Pediatrics.* 2004;113: 152-154.
2. Greer FR, Krebs NF, Committee on Nutrition. Optimizing Bone Health and Calcium Intakes of Infants, Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics.* 2006;117: 578-585.
3. American Dietetic Association. Use of Nutritive and Nonnutritive Sweeteners. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association.2004;* 104: 255-275.
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2005.
5. Johnson RK, Lawrence JA Brands AM, et al. Dietary Sugars Intake and Cardiovascular Health: A Scientific Statement from the American Heart Association. *Circulation.* 2009; 120:1011-1020.

SOURCE The Milk Processor Education Program; National Dairy Council