

September 21, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of UnidosUS (formerly National Council of La Raza) and the Hispanic Federation, we write to support your efforts to improve the food package for the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), is the nation's largest Latino\* civil rights and advocacy organization. Through our unique combination of research, advocacy, programs, and a national network of nearly 300 community-based Affiliate organizations across the country—including almost 100 Hispanic community groups that focus on food and nutrition—we simultaneously challenge the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos in the United States.

Hispanic Federation (HF) has worked since 1990 to uplift millions of Hispanic children, youth, and families through policy advocacy, innovative community programs, and strengthening Latino nonprofits. HF fulfills its mission to empower and advance Hispanic communities through extensive grant-making and programmatic initiatives and by working with its network of nonprofit leaders and institutions to educate policymakers, funders, the public, and media about the needs and aspirations of Latinos in the areas of education, health, immigration, civil rights, economic empowerment, civic engagement, Puerto Rico, and the environment.

Thank you for your leadership in supporting Hispanic and Latino communities through efforts to reduce hunger and fill nutrition gaps in challenging times. Your stewardship of federal food and nutrition programs is providing a lifeline to millions of struggling Latino families. Along with colleagues across the Administration, USDA has worked tirelessly to redress inequities that have long harmed Hispanic communities.

Improving the food package for WIC by including the recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (National Academies) in forthcoming rules will improve the health of low-income Latino families. We are particularly supportive of steps to ensure that breakfast cereals purchased by WIC dollars meet the same whole grain-rich standards that now apply to school nutrition programs and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

Fully implementing the National Academies' recommendation for whole grain breakfast cereals would reduce high levels of chronic disease that Latinos experience due to disparities in access to healthy food. **Diabetes and obesity, for example, are some of the Hispanic community's most serious—and preventable—health problems:**

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\* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this letter to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

- Compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Latinos are [more than twice as likely](#) to suffer from type 2 diabetes; the disease afflicts 17% of Latinos, compared to just 8% of non-Hispanic Whites.
- More than 40% of Latino children are [overweight or obese](#), compared to 27% of non-Hispanic White children. Since 2011, [obesity rates have been higher for Hispanic children](#) than for children in any other racial or ethnic group.

**Evidence shows that increasing consumption of whole grain cereals can significantly lower diabetes and obesity rates. For example:**

- A study by Harvard researchers found that “higher consumption of whole grains ... including whole grain breakfast cereal” was “significantly associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes.” Consuming one or more servings of whole grain breakfast cereal a day was associated with a [19% drop in type 2 diabetes](#).
- A study of children in four states found that, after controlling for age, sex, race, ethnicity, state of residence, and level of physical activity, children who consumed 1.5 daily servings of whole grains had a [40% lower risk of obesity](#), compared to children who received less than one serving. The single category of whole grain foods most often consumed by children in the study was whole grain-rich breakfast cereal.

Nevertheless, Latino children and adults maintain the country’s lowest average daily consumption of whole grains. For example, in [2017–2018](#), the most recent year for which data are available, average daily intake of whole grains among Latinos was more than 25% below levels for non-Hispanic Whites.

Latino parents care about their children getting the best nutrition possible to give them a healthy start in life. Once healthier options become available and parents learn about their value, Hispanic parents choose what is best for their children. This happened the last time WIC nutrition standards were upgraded in 2009, requiring half of WIC cereal products to meet whole grain-rich standards. This gave Hispanic parents additional options, with WIC supplementing the foods that families could buy using other resources. When the WIC national standard improved, Latino parents purchased the new healthier options, and Hispanic children rapidly experienced notable gains, including [a 17% increase in fiber intake](#) and a [10% decrease in the prevalence of childhood obesity](#) among Hispanic toddlers enrolled in WIC.

Experience in Oklahoma is particularly relevant, as it is the only state that is already implementing the whole grain-rich standards recommended by the National Academies. Latino parents in Oklahoma have shown their commitment to improving their families’ health by using WIC to purchase whole grain-rich cereals. According to the [National WIC Association](#), Oklahoma’s Latino families use WIC to purchase whole grain-rich cereals at a level 21% higher than WIC cereal redemptions for all other families in the state.

Additional research confirms that these standards have dramatically improved nutrition for families. Almost [half of all Oklahoma toddlers consume whole grains](#) at nationally recommended levels (46.7%), compared to [just 7% of toddlers nationally](#). We urge you to maximize the gains realized from improved nutrition standards by investing in community education efforts when the new WIC package rolls out, informing parents how consumption of whole grain-rich cereals and other nutritious foods can help their children grow up healthy and strong.

WIC improvements also yield broad community-wide gains. The promulgation of new WIC standards in 2009 significantly increased availability of healthy foods at corner stores and other markets in low-income neighborhoods, [illustrated](#) by [studies](#) in [multiple](#) communities. As in the past, if the WIC package is improved to incorporate the National Academies' recommendations, all WIC-participating grocery stores will be required to offer shoppers the choice to buy whole grain-rich cereals. This will bring healthier food options to low-income, Latino neighborhoods throughout America, benefiting WIC participants and other families alike.

We support swift adoption of these recommendations, which we believe strongly advance the Biden Administration's commitment to health equity. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Stan Dorn ([sdorn@unidosus.org](mailto:sdorn@unidosus.org)), Umailla Fatima ([ufatima@unidosus.org](mailto:ufatima@unidosus.org)), or Laura MacCleery ([lmacleery@unidosus.org](mailto:lmacleery@unidosus.org)) at UnidosUS, or Laura Esquivel ([lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org](mailto:lesquivel@hispanicfederation.org)) at the Hispanic Federation.

Sincerely,



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