Tesi di Laurea

Food Industries, Obesity Epidemic, and Food Politics in the United States.
An Analysis of factors contributing to the development of obesity in the United States.

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Introduzione

L’obesità è un fenomeno in forte crescita in tutto il mondo, che desta preoccupazione sia per gli effetti negativi che ha sulla salute delle persone sia per l’attuale e futura sostenibilità dei sistemi sanitari.

Sono colpiti da questo fenomeno tanto i paesi occidentali quanto i paesi emergenti.

Secondo i dati dell’Organizzazione Mondiale della Sanità gli Stati Uniti risultano essere la nazione i più colpita.

Il presente lavoro si propone di fornire un contributo alla comprensione di questo complesso fenomeno indagando le varie patologie che derivano dallo sviluppo di questa condizione e analizzando i fattori storici, sociali ed economici che hanno concorso a generarne l’attuale criticità.

Nello specifico, viene discussa la diffusione della cultura del fast food negli Stati Uniti, le qualità nutrizionali degli alimenti venduti dalle principali catene del settore, ed i metodi di produzione utilizzati.

Inoltre, in questa ricerca si dimostra come le strategie di marketing hanno reso possibile la diffusione e la conseguente distribuzione nelle scuole dei fast food e di altri cibi ad alto contenuto calorico nelle scuole.

In conclusione, il presente lavoro di tesi approfondisce in modo critico le politiche delle lobby americane e le strategie di marketing attuate dalle aziende alimentari per influenzare le scelte di consumo non soltanto della popolazione adulta ma anche dei più giovani e dei bambini.
Contents

Abstract 4

Chapter 1: The Obese Society 5
  1.1 Overview 5
  1.2 Obesity 6
  1.3 Obesity-Related Factors 8
  1.4 Obesity and Related Diseases 13
  1.5 Medical Treatments 20
  1.6 American Obesity Epidemic 25
  1.7 Childhood Obesity

Chapter 2: The American Fast Food Syndrome 29
  2.1 History of Fast Food 29
  2.2 The Growth of McDonald’s 32
  2.3 Conquering the World 35
  2.4 Healthy Food? 37
  2.5 Portion Size and Obesity 50

Chapter 3: Food Industries Politics in the United States 57
  3.1 Food Companies and Lobby 57
  3.2 Lobbying Methods 59
  3.3 Co-opting Nutrition Professionals 68
  3.4 Checkoff Programs and the Power of Public Relations 72
  3.5 Food Companies, Criticism and Lawsuits 79

Chapter 4: Food Companies And Children 82
  4.1 Marketing to New Consumer: The Era of Kid Costumers 82
  4.2 Food Industries and School 89
  4.3 Soft drinks 93
  4.4 History of Soft Drinks Regulations 99
  4.5 The 2010 Dietary Guidelines and the Let’s Move Campaign 103

Conclusions 108

References 110
Abstract

According to the World Health Organization obesity has become in the last few decades a global problem that affects millions of people around the world.

Recent studies show that among the countries with an advanced economy the United States has the highest rate of obesity. In fact, the US industrial food system provides such plentiful, relatively inexpensive food that almost every one in the country could be overfeed.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the health problems associated with obesity, and the historical, social and economic factors correlated to the development of this condition in the United States. It discusses the rise of fast food culture, the quality of the food sold by fast food restaurants, and the way in which food is produced and processed. Moreover, this thesis assumes a critical analysis of the mechanisms which corporations use to influence government nutrition policies and the food advertising and marketing channels used to target children and teenagers.
Chapter 1: The Obese Society

1.1 Overview

In the last few decades obesity has become a global problem that affects millions of people around the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) obesity has nearly doubled since 1980\(^1\), and in 2008 more than 1.4 billion adults were overweight; 35% of adults aged 20 and over were overweight, and 11% were obese.

Today 65% of the world's population lives in countries where obesity kills more people than malnutrition does in underdeveloped regions: in 2011 more than 40 million children under the age of five were overweight.\(^2\) Experts believe that this trend will continue and by 2015 approximately 2.3 billion adults will be overweight and more than 700 million will be obese.

Moreover, in recent years childhood obesity has increased remarkably; 15% of adolescents and 15.3% of children in the United States appear to be obese, a figure that has more than doubled in the last 20 years.\(^3\)

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1.2 Obesity

Overweight and obesity are defined as an abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health. While overweight refers to an increase of the body weight, with an accumulation of adipose tissue of 10% of the ideal weight, obesity is instead an accumulation of body fat of more than 20% of the ideal weight. Today a standard measurement of obesity is the Body Mass Index (BMI). The BMI is an index of weight-for-height that is commonly used in medicine to classify overweight and obesity in adult population; a person's weight in kilograms is divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m²). The BMI provides the most useful instrument to measure the level of overweight and obesity among population and it is used for both females and males. According to the standard index, who scores 18.50 or below of BMI is considered underweight, overweight is defined as a BMI between 25.0 and 29.9, and obesity occurs with a BMI of 30 or higher. A healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9. Other methods of calculating body fat and body fat distribution include measurements of skinfold thickness and waist circumference, calculation of waist-to-hip circumference ratios, and techniques such as ultrasound, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). However, the Body Mass Index remains the basic measurement for most of the official health institutions and it is internationally used by the World Health Organization and by many other government

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health agencies, such as the Centers of Health (NIH)\textsuperscript{7} and the center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)\textsuperscript{8}.

Obesity is an increasingly common condition that affects every region of the world. It used to be a problem of the wealthy nations, but in the last few decades obesity has impacted countries at all economic levels.\textsuperscript{9} Among developed countries, the United States has the highest rates of overweight and obesity, with fully a third of population who is obese. It is estimated that obesity in the United States will rise to 50% by the 2030.\textsuperscript{10} As for many other health issues, the burden of obesity is not distributed equally across society; poor people are more likely to become obese, and those with less education have higher risks than those with more education. Certain minorities, especially the African-American and Hispanic women, are more at risk of becoming obese than other groups.\textsuperscript{11}

Today the number of people in the world who are overweight or obese equals the number of people who are underweight. While obesity affects equally men and women, 42% of obese are males and 27% females.

\textsuperscript{7} The National Institutes of Health (NIH), a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is a nation’s medical research agency making important discoveries that improve health and save lives; the National Institute of Health is the largest source of funding for medical research in the world.

\textsuperscript{8}Center for Disease Control and Prevention is components of the Department of Health and Human Services, based in Atlanta, United States.


1.3 Obesity-Related Factors

In the first half of the twentieth century, the prevalence of obesity in industrialized countries has increased steadily. Initially the spread concerned particularly developed countries, such as Europe and the United States. More recently, data show a significant increase of prevalence in developing countries, such as Mexico, China and Thailand. The World Health Organization (WHO) has coined the term “Globesity” (global obesity) to indicate the spread of obesity on a global scale. According to the latest available data, 52% of the population of the European Union is obese. The lowest obesity rates can be found in Romania (8%) and Switzerland (25%).

In Europe, the rate of obesity has doubled over the past 20 years; the most affected nations are Hungary, Luxemburg, and the United Kingdom. In Hungary, between 1988 and 2009, the levels of obesity among population shift from 13.2% to 28.5%, where in Luxemburg the rates shift from 16.3% to 22.5% between 1987 to 2007 and from 14.0% to 21.0% in the United Kingdom.

As stated earlier, the rise of obesity has affected all groups, but it varies from country to country. Evidence indicates that obesity in countries like Austria, England, France, Italy and Spain tends to be more common in disadvantage socio-economic groups. Recent data reported by the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) and the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination, show that between 2007 and 2009 the prevalence of obesity was over 8 percentage points lower in Canada than in the United States (24.3% compared

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with 32.6%). Today obesity is also affecting the poorest countries in the world. Over the past 20 years, many developing countries have been dealing with malnutrition, especially among children. However, the trend in these countries has changed, and they are now facing the problem of over nutrition.

Among developing countries the highest rate of obesity is concentrated in several of the Pacific Islands with record rates in Nauru where in 2012 79% of adults were obese; the lowest rate are registered in India where obesity affects only 0.5% of the population. In the Philippines obesity records 3%, in Singapore 6%, and in North Africa and in the middle east there is compelling evidence that obesity rates are on the rise. Also, obesity levels are increasing in the Six Arabian Gulf States (Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, South Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait). In the two last decades these countries have seen a tremendous increase in weight and wealth. Recent surveys have found that in South Arabia 40% of the adult population is obese, followed by Kuwait 36%. Today, obesity and chronic diseases have become a growing problem also across Sub-Saharan Africa. According to a 2009 report, the prevalence of urban overweight and obesity in Sub-Saharan Africa increased by almost 35% between 1992 and 2005. The International Organization for the Study of Obesity claims that 39% of women in South Africa and Egypt suffer from obesity.

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16 A not-for-profit organization, based in London, United Kingdom; this organization is linking over 50 regional and national associations with over 30,000 professional members in scientific, medical and research organizations.
Finally, the World Health Organization predicts that by 2030 nearly one-fifth of African adults will be obese.\(^\text{17}\)

The rapid increase of obesity in both rich and developing countries, has led many researchers to believe that there are strong connections between the risk of obesity and social-environmental factors. As the economy and life-style of developing countries continue to improve and become similar to the one of developed countries, the risk of obesity is becoming a reality. Obesity could rise as a result of unhealthy diets decreased physical activity, and increasing consumption of “westernized” diets. Diets in western countries mainly consist of large meals which are high in refined grains, red meat, fats, and sugary.\(^\text{18}\) Other factors may generate an environment that could predispose people to become overweight or obese. It has been proven that even if urbanization and related dietary changes may improve health, they may also increase the risk of certain health problems, including obesity.\(^\text{19}\)

There are multiple and interconnected factors that may lead people to obesity.\(^\text{20}\) Such factors include:


1) Physiological problems; weight gain is due to difficulties in life, anxiety and depression, overeating may represents a psychological trigger, and a way to cope with stressful events. Many obese affirm to have started gaining weight when an important event occurred in their lives such as the death of a family member, a divorce, a sudden change or a marriage. In such events obesity seems to be a reaction to the event, the act of eating in excess may be seen as a relief.

2) Ethnicity: According to the National Center for Health Statistics, which is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ethnic minorities appear to be most affected. In the United states African-Americans and Hispanics are most affected and score higher rates of obesity than the others ethnicity.

3) Socio-economic: obesity is more common among individuals belonging to lower socio-economic and cultural classes.

4) Level of education: the incidence of obesity is significantly higher in people with primary or no education than in people with a college degree.

5) Genetic factors: obesity is the result of the action of numerous independent individual genes.\(^{21}\) The correlation of obesity is particularly common between a mother and her children; the fact that the weight of adopted children is correlated with the one of the natural parents rather than with the one of the adoptive ones, may demonstrate the role of genetic transmission of obesity. However, many studies have proven that although a family might have a genetic predisposition to obesity, it does not necessarily prove the

inheritance of the disease. In fact, obesity may be mainly a result of poor eating habits and can be affected by environmental factors.\textsuperscript{22}

6) Social influences: studies confirm the influence of society in the development of obesity. The trend of body weight is much different between those who migrate to rich western societies, and those who, with the same genetic heritage, remain in their native countries.\textsuperscript{23}

7) Environmental factors: they represent a very important component in the genesis of attitudes that encourage excess weight, and are among those summoned to explain the global obesity epidemic.\textsuperscript{24} For instance, the importance of the environment in weight gain has been studied among the Pima Indians. The Pima where an Artic population who migrated to two different areas: Arizona and Mexico. Those who settled in Arizona, were sedentary, over-fed, and suffered from obesity, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. Instead, those who settled in Mexico were devoted to agriculture, and had better eating habits and did not suffer from obesity.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{25} Parini Umberto (2010), \textit{Chirurgia dell’obesità; approcci multidisciplinare}, (Amérique, Quar:Musumeci:64-66).
However, these conventional factors can only provide a partial explanation for the recent dramatic rise of obesity rates as most of them have not changed substantially over time. No comprehensive theories have been able to adequately identify the key risk factors that contribute to the rise of obesity, but research show that the modification of individual behavior influence diet and physical activity. Features that promote over-eating encourage the consumption of unhealthy foods, and discourage physical activity have been considered a potential risk factor for obesity. In addition, consuming food away from home (such as fast-food) is an important cause of increased obesity risk.

Perhaps, one of the most important things to consider in the studying of obesity is the amount of calories present in fast-food. Excess in caloric intakes is a determinant factor in weight gain. Recently, public attention has shifted, it focus on the negative effects that fast-food consumption has on health. Movies such as Fast-Food Nation, Supersize Me, and Fast-Food Inc., have been widely receipted. Indeed, the rise in obesity rates has paralleled by substantial increased in fast-food industry.

1.4 Obesity and Related Diseases

Globally, obesity is considered the fifth leading cause of global deaths, and around 2.8 million adults die each year in the world as a result of this condition. In addition, obesity can cause many other health conditions such as Type 2 diabetes or

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ischemic heart disease, and many increases the chances to develop particular type of cancer.\textsuperscript{28} Recent studies have linked obesity to several serious medical conditions\textsuperscript{29}, such as high blood pressure. Obese have a higher chances of high blood pressure than a normal person; some studies have shown that obesity, especially in those with a BMI greater than 40, is a risk factor for hypertension.

Also, cardiovascular diseases are common among obese people. These conditions are related to a class of diseases that involve the heart, blood vessels, arteries, capillaries, and veins. In addition, cardiovascular diseases are connected to coronary heart disease, stroke and peripheral vascular disease.\textsuperscript{30} These type of diseases constitute a large percentage (up to one-third) of the deaths in men and women in most industrialized countries, with an high incidence in developing countries. Moreover, a strong correlation between hypertension and obesity has been studied. Obese patients have higher rates of hypertension than individuals with a normal weight. Hypertension triggers an array of cardiovascular damages, such as the left ventricular hypertrophy, atrial and ventricular


\textsuperscript{30} Eckel R. H., MD, \textit{Obesity and Heart Disease, A Statement for Healthcare Professionals From the Nutrition Committee, American Heart Association}, Nutrition Committee (updated 1997) <http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/96/9/3248.full>. 
arrhythmias, diastolic hearth failure and ischemic hearth disease with or without congestive hearth failure.\textsuperscript{31}

The prevalence of hypertension in obese subjects is almost three times higher than adults with a normal weight.

Also obesity is thought to be the primary cause of type 2 diabetes; according to the World Health Organization, more than 90 percent of obese patients worldwide have Type 2 diabetes.\textsuperscript{32} Type 2 diabetes is the most common form and occurs when there is a deficit of insulin secretion and the amount produced is not sufficient to meet the body's needs, or when the insulin produced is not working satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{33} In both cases, the result is an abnormal increase in the levels of blood glucose; this condition is called hyperglycemia. This form of diabetes is called non-insulin-dependent because the injection of outside insulin, unlike the type 1 diabetes, is not of vital importance.

Besides diabetes, numerous studies have suggested a strong correlation between obesity and certain type of cancer. Although the link between obesity and cancer is not well defined, many studies have found an association between overweight and the incidence of


some forms of cancer, particularly breast, endometrial, ovarian and cervical cancer in obese women, and prostate and rectal cancer in men. Also, obesity increases nearly three times the risk of colon cancer in both men and women. Obesity is also associated with osteoarthritis disease; in fact this condition can cause mechanical damage to the joints, resulting from excess weight and pain in the lower back.

The increase of weight can raise the risk of this pathology. In fact, while walking, the body weight exerts a force on the knee up to 6 times the body weight itself. According to recent data, obese have a higher risk to develop gastric ulcers. This disease occurs when there is an imbalance between the amount of hydrochloric acid that is secreted and the enzyme called pepsin. Overweight men are at a greater risk of developing gastric ulcers than women. Moreover, the appearance of peripheral veins is common among obese; medical studies show that obesity promotes the occurrence of venous disease. Retrospective studies have been able to show that in obese subjects the relative risk of deep venous thrombosis is estimated 1.5 times greater than individuals with a normal weight.

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Another condition that could appear with obesity is infertility. Obese women may have changes in hormonal levels and this shift can cause ovarian failure and cancer. Also, the body needs to have appropriate weight to produce the right amount of hormones, to regulate ovulation and menstruation, and if this condition is not regulated, infertility occurs.

1.5 Medical Treatments

The World Health Organization has argued the necessity of international guidelines for the prevention and treatment of obesity. In order to reach all socio-economic and ethnic groups, specific objectives should be developed. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, physical activities and diets can help prevent and control obesity, while diets should match the lifestyle, eating habits, and real needs of the individual. Physical activity is important in the phase of weight maintenance and prevention of weight regain. For obese individuals should be sufficient walking three or four times a week for thirty or sixty minutes. However, in order to be effective daily exercise should include activities such as the use of physical strength to perform household chores like going up and down the stairs, walking, riding a bicycle, parking a vehicle at a certain distance from the place of final destination.

In addition to weight loss, physical activity offers numerous benefits. It improves respiratory function, cardiovascular system, and the vascularization of the heart. It rebalances the concentration of fat in the blood, reduces possible arterial hypertension, improves glucose tolerance, and helps to reduce circulating insulin, and finally contributes to the prevention of osteoporosis.

Besides improving their health, obese should try to change their maladaptive behavior with the help of cognitive behavioral therapy. This kind of behavioral therapy offers some tools to overcome the resistance to diet and physical activity by using techniques such as, self-monitoring of eating habits, management of stressful situations and stimulus control.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover, in recent years it has become increasingly evident that caloric restriction is not able to guarantee the maintenance of the results obtained in the long run. Therefore, pharmacotherapy has been commonly accepted in treating obesity along with other various therapies. Consequently, some medications have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

A more invasive technique used to cure obesity that is having an increasing success, is bariatric surgery. Surgical treatment of obesity is the only therapy that can boast safe demonstrations of long-term efficacy in the control of body weight in patients with severe obesity.\textsuperscript{41} Although surgical therapy offers undoubted benefits to the patient is also associated with the possible occurrence of specific complications sometimes even in the


short term. Therefore, the choice to undergo surgery should be carefully considered and possible side effects and complications should be taken into consideration by both doctors and patients. In this regard, in 1991, the Consensus Conference of the American National Institute of Health (NIH) indicated the guidelines for patient selection criteria for bariatric surgery. The conference concluded that only certain type of patients, such as those with a BMI 35-40, between the age of 18 and 60, and with an existing obesity condition longer than 5 years, should be considered for this type of treatment.

Nowadays, medicine and science constantly encourage new research to fight obesity. In fact, new studies conducted in Washington D.C. identify certain kind of bacteria of the intestinal flora that promotes thinness and healthy metabolism. This type of bacteria was discovered through an experiment in which bacteria taken from humans were implemented on mice. The results were published in the Academic journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science by a group of scientist, who works at the American University of Washington. In this experiment, researchers took samples from the gut bacterial flora of monozygotic twins, of which one was thin and the other obese, and transplanted them into the intestine of mice lacking bacteria.

The first characteristic identified in the mice was that the recipients of the bacteria of the obese twin gained more weight compared to the recipients of the bacterial flora of the thin twin. Subsequently, the mice were all placed in the same cage and after 10 days the obese mice became leaner, adopting the leaner rodent metabolism. The lean mice instead maintained their metabolism. It was discovered that the change was caused by a transfer of

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bacteria. In fact, when mice were fed with a diet high in fat and low in fiber, no exchange of bacteria were reported between lean and fat mice.

According to the scientists, the results of such the experiment could represent an important step towards the development of new personalized therapies for the treatment and prevention of obesity based on probiotics and food. This new research confirms that the variety of bacteria in the gut tends to amplify the bacterial diversity that promotes thinness.\(^{43}\)

### 1.6 American Obesity Epidemic

Recently, obesity has become in the United States a serious health problem that affects the life of million citizens, families, communities, and has profoundly changed the health care cost of the country. According to the data of the World Health Organization, among rich countries with advanced economy the United States has the highest rate of obesity; in the last 30 years obesity rate among the U.S. population has more than doubled and in 2013 more than two-thirds of adults are obese and the number of obese children and adolescent are steadily increasing.\(^{44}\) Obesity in the U.S. has become the second preventable cause of death after tobacco use, and has caused a dramatic rise of the health care costs.\(^{45}\)


Recent research shows that the medical costs for obesity have reached the amount of $147 billion, almost 10% of the national health care budget.\textsuperscript{46}

However, the percentage of obesity varies from state to state. According to the data or the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention obesity affects a 20.5% of the population in Colorado, and 20-25% in Louisiana. Data shows that thirteen states (Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia) had a prevalence of obesity greater than 30%.\textsuperscript{47}

The highest prevalence of obesity is in the Midwest with a percentage that amount to 29.5% and 29.4% in the South; lower prevalence was observed in the Northeast (25.3%) and in the West (25.1%).

The following table lists the percentage of obese population in the United States\textsuperscript{48};

**2010 State Obesity Rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Colombia</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>29.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>30.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
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<td>Oregon</td>
<td>26.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>31.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Analyzing certain socioeconomic groups, researches have shown that obesity affects certain groups more than others. Unlike other developing countries where wealthy people with high standard of living are more likely to be obese, in the United States there is a strong connection between poverty and obesity. This connection has to do with access to different varieties of food. However, the relationship between low socioeconomic status and obesity is complex. First of all, in the U.S. healthy food such as fresh vegetables and unprocessed food, is generally more expensive than the so called Junk-Food. Consequently, people with a low income are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Obesity Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>27.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>23.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>30.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>22.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>23.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>23.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
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<td>Maryland</td>
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<td>Massachusetts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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more likely to consume Junk Food that contains sugar, fat, processed ingredients and high-fructose corn syrup.\textsuperscript{51}

Areas with a high percentage of poor are often called “food deserts”, term used to explain the lack of availability of fresh food. Often low-income neighborhoods lack of full-service grocery stores and farmer’s markets where residents can buy low-fat products and a variety of fruits and vegetables. Most of the times residents of these areas have no private means of transportation available and they are limited to shop at small neighborhood convenience and corner stores where fresh products and low-fat items are limited.

Recent research made by the Food Research and Action center have shown that residents of neighborhoods that have better access to supermarkets and limited access convenience to stores usually have a healthier diet and a reduced risk of obesity. In addition, lower income neighborhoods often have limited physical activity and recreational facilities and fewer parks, making it difficult to lead a physically active lifestyle. Limited access to such resources is another risk factor for obesity. Also, children who lives in such communities often don’t participate in sports; the high cost of organized sports and transportation problems are barriers to the participation of children in physical activities. In addition many low-income communities have lack access to basic health care, and when health care is available, the quality is lower and often results in incorrect diagnosis.

In conclusion the prevalence of obesity is increasing among all age and racial groups. However there is a disproportionate rise of obesity among African-Americans and Hispanic/Mexican

According to the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism obesity increases were markedly greater in non-Hispanic blacks (13.4% to 23.6%) and Mexican Americans (13.8% to 23.4%). Data on the development of obesity show that the rise of obesity in women has been greater in African American female with a percentage of 49.7%, versus a 28% of the Mexicans and 30.1% of the Hispanic, white people have the lowest percentage: 30.1% for woman and 27.8% for men.

1.7 Childhood Obesity

Over the past twenty years childhood obesity has increased among American youngsters. It is estimated that about 15% of children between the age of 6 and 11 and 15.5% of adolescents between 12 to 19 are obese. A research made by the American Obesity Association analyzed the prevalence of obese children using the 95th percentage of BMI as a point of references; the results show that obesity rates have doubled in children between the age of 6 and 11 and tripled in the age group 12-19.

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The American Obesity Association uses the 85th percentile of BMI as a reference point for overweight and the 95th percentile as a reference for obesity.
Moreover, childhood obesity varies among social and racial groups. In fact, a research conducted by the Center of Disease Control and Prevention shows that obesity rates are rising rapidly especially among African-American or Hispanic. Statistics reveal that in 1999 only the 23% of white children aged 6-10 were obese in contrast to a 29% of Mexican-American children. The risk for an obese child of becoming an obese adult increases with age and it is directly proportioned to the gravity of overweight. Among obese children in preschool, 26-41% will be obese as adult, and among the school-age children this percentage rises to 69%.

Overall, the risk for children of becoming obese as adults varies between 2 and 6.5%. The percentage of risk goes up to the 83% for obese adolescents. There are many factors that can be linked with childhood obesity. Having one or both parents obese is the most important risk factor since parents may transmit some unhealthy eating habits to their children.

Another aspect that has recently linked childhood to obesity is the adiposity rebound. On average, in a year children BMI values continue to increase and stabilize after the age of 5-6 years. The age at which BMI values are lowest is called adiposity rebound, and this corresponds to the age of 5-6. If the BMI values continue to rise before the age of 5 (early adiposity rebound) this can be an early indicator of risk of development of obesity.

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Moreover, obesity in children is linked to a series of dramatic diseases: it is associated with a 52% and 60% increased risk of new diagnosis of asthma, high risk for psychosocial problems, fatty liver, sleep apnea, orthopedic-related problems, and high risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. Obese children and teenagers have been found to have risk factors for high cholesterol levels, cardiovascular disease, abnormal glucose intolerance and high-blood pressure.

In addition to suffering from poor physical health, obese and overweight children are often subjected to discrimination by other children, and the stress that results from such situations may cause low self-esteem and transform social and academic functioning.

Among obesity, it is necessary to make a distinction between Essential Obesity and Secondary Obesity. A small portion of children are affected by Secondary Obesity, whose causes are linked to hereditary diseases. The majority of children is instead affected by Essential Obesity, a condition that is linked to metabolic and environmental factors. Moreover, childhood obesity results from the interactions of many factors that interact with each other causing the pathology. Psychological factors play a fundamental role in the formation of obesity and are connected to familiar habits; a wrong feeding behavior of the parents such as the attitude to overeat can be transmitted to the children. It is important to consider that mothers play a dominant role in the family, exercising control over a child, hampering the development of autonomy and often inspiring eating behaviors.

Also, lack of affection from parents may have consequences on the child; for example, a child with unmet emotional needs would react with a growing demand for food that represents a reward and sometimes can be seen as a compensator and regulator of anxiety.

In addition to lack of affection, other factors such as socio-environmental factors, emotional trauma, and social maladjustment contribute to the development and the persistence of obesity.
Among these, extra-curricular activities primarily sedentary can be considered important in the pathogenesis of obesity. Recent epidemiological studies have shown that three quarters of children spend more than two hours per day watching TV, and that only 50% of adolescents practice a sport regularly. Moreover, the analysis of feeding behavior is important since eating habits are formed early in life in response to physiological and psycho-social pressures and could have a considerable impact on the state of health in the long term.

Another factor that has contributed to the growth of obesity is the transformation of lifestyle. Thirty years ago, children had a different lifestyle; they walked to and from school every day, ran and played for hours after school. Meals were home-cooked with appropriate portions and vegetables. Eating fast food was rare and snacking between meals was occasional. Today, their walks to and from school have been replaced by car and busses, physical activities are often cut, and children who practice sports after school are rare; most of them spend afternoons watching television, surfing the net or playing video games. Also, parents are busier than ever and families eat fewer home-cooked meals. Snacking between meals is now the norm.

Chapter 2: The American Fast Food Syndrome

2.1 History of Fast Food

Fast food restaurants are considered an essential part of the American culture and society. Over the last 30 years the fast food industry has developed all over the country and today fast food restaurants can be found everywhere; in airports, universities, schools, cruise ships, gas stations and also in hospital cafeterias.\(^{58}\)

The Fast food industry early began after the second World War in California, the most important and powerful state in the west. From 1940 to 1945 the American government spent in California nearly twenty billion dollars to built airports, factories, military bases, and port facilities. As the quality of life improved among the population many new things were introduced. One of the most popular and innovative thing was represented by the drive-in restaurants were hamburgers and hot dogs were sold.\(^{59}\)

The first hamburger chain was established by company called Whitecastle which was founded in Kansas in 1921. The Whitecastle introduced for the first time a low-cost and high-speed menu and sold hamburgers for just five cents a piece.\(^{60}\)

However, fast food industries had a major growth years later with the McDonald’s brothers, who in 1937 opened in Arcadia, California, a hot dogs stand. They expanded their business when they decided to open in 1973 a drive-in restaurant in Pasadena. At the beginning McDonald’s


were selling mainly hot-dogs, but years later they moved to San Bernardino, California and opened the McDonald’s Brothers Burger Bar Drive In.\(^6^1\)

Moreover, in the late 40s, the McDonald’s brothers decided to try something new; they fire their waitress, closed the restaurant and opened few months later with a completely new method of preparing food that was designed to increase the speed, have lower prices and raise the volume of sales. They created a new restricted menu, and decided to serve only hamburgers and cheeseburgers.

The innovation of this system was represented by the fact that the food preparation was divided into separate tasks performed by different workers; one would grilled the hamburger, another one would wrapped it, one would prepared a milk shake and another would made the fries.

For the first time the principles of a factory assembly line were applied to a kitchen. Consequently, skilled and expensive cooks were no more necessary and all the hamburgers would be made with the same ingredients: ketchup, onions, mustards and pickles.\(^6^2\) This new fast cooking system revolutionized the restaurant business and in only few weeks the McDonald’s restaurant became famous and began having a much broader clientele. In the meantime, entrepreneurs from all over the country arrived to San Bernardino to visit the McDonald’s restaurants and began to built restaurants with the same concept in their hometowns.

Since the start-up costs of a fast food restaurant were low and the margins of profit promised to be high a large number of people were ready to open fast food restaurants.


One of them, was William Rosenberg a door-to-door salesman who decided to open a small doughnut shop in 1948, later called Dunkin’Donuts.\textsuperscript{63}

Today Donkin’Donuts is a global doughnut company and coffeehouse chain; since 1950s it has grown to become one of the largest coffee and baked goods chain worldwide, with 15,000 restaurants in 37 different countries.

Moreover, Glen W. Bell Jr., a world war veteran resident of San Bernardino, and McDonald’s client, decided to copy McDonald’s using the assembly-line system to make Mexican food. Later he founded a restaurant chain known as Taco Bell. Today, Taco Bell serves a variety of Mexican foods such as tacos, burritos and quesadillas, in more than 5,800 restaurants in the country.

In 1953, Keith G. Cramer owner of Keith’s drive-in restaurants in Daona beach, Florida, after having visited the McDonald’s brothers restaurant in California opened his first Insta-Burger-King.

Today, Burger King is one of the most famous burger restaurants in the United States with over 13,000 outlets in 79 countries; of which, 66 percent based in the United States.\textsuperscript{64}

Another entrepreneur that observed the success of McDonald’s was Dave Thomas who started to work in a restaurant at the age of twelve. He opened his own place in Ohio, and named it Wendy’s old fashioned Hamburgers Restaurants.

Today Wendy's Hamburgers is an international fast food chain, that has 5,876 different locations; all Wendy's restaurants are franchised and, the majority of them are located in the United States.


For every fast food idea that swept the nation, there were countless others that flourished. There were chains with homey names, like Sandy’s, Carrol’s, Henry’s, Winky’s, and Mr. Fifteen’s and others with futuristic names such as the Satellite Hamburger System and Kelly’s Jet System; others carried the names of their main dish such as Burger Chefs, Burger Queens, Burgerville USAs, Yumy Burgers, Whataburgers, Dundee Burgers, O.K. Big Burgers, to name a few.

The leading fast food chains spread nationwide; between 1960 and 1973, the number of restaurants grew from roughly 250 to 3,000.

### 2.2 The Growth of McDonald’s

McDonald’s is the leading Global foodservice retailer with more than 34,000 restaurants serving every day over 69 million people in 118 countries. Historically, the turning point in the McDonald’s company came in 1955, when Ray Kroc, a provider of blenders, founded the "McDonald's Systems, Inc." which was later renamed "McDonald's Corporation".

Ray Kroc was selling paper cups for smoothies and blenders, when the Mc Donald’s brothers ordered 8 multimixer he decided to go to the restaurant in San Bernardino curious to see how it was possible to use them at the same time.

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Once he arrived at the restaurant, he was impressed with the work and the speed with which the brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald were serving their simple meal consisting of a burger and a drink. He was fascinated by the huge volume of sales and the effectiveness of the system. Each step in the preparation of the menu was reduced to the essential and achieved with minimum efforts; the local offering served the best burgers in the region and cost 15 cents with no tip and wait.

Kroc, founder of the McDonald's Corporation, was the first who sought in this organizational model a big business opportunity.\(^68\) Therefore he convinced the McDonald’s brothers to give him the exclusive use of the name McDonald's and later he refined and improved the operating system, on 15 April 1955 he opened the first McDonald's in Des Plaines, Illinois.

In 1960, there were 228 McDonald's and in 1967 the first restaurant outside the United States was opened in Canada. The 1971 was the year of the first restaurant in Europe, that was opened in the Netherlands, near Amsterdam.\(^69\) By 1995 there were over 18,000 restaurants worldwide. Now more than half of the McDonald’s restaurants are located outside the United States. The country with the higher number of McDonald’s restaurants is Japan, with approximately 2,500 restaurants, followed by Canada and Australia. McDonald’s corporation today is became a

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powerful symbol of America’s service economy which is now responsible for 90 percent of the country’s new jobs.\textsuperscript{70}

Annually McDonald’s Co. hires about one million people and one out of every eight workers in the United States has been employed by the company at some point in their life. In the United States McDonald’s is the largest buyer of pork, potatoes and beef and the second largest purchaser of chicken. Additionally, the company spends more money on advertising and marketing than any other brand.

In 1996 after signing a global marketing agreement with Walt Disney McDonald’s is one of the biggest distributors of toys in the United States.\textsuperscript{71} Research shows that 96 percent of American schoolchildren could identify Ronald McDonald; the only fictional character with a higher degree of recognition is Santa Claus.

In 1970s the brand became so famous that was coined the term “McDonaldization of America” by the farm activist Jim Hightower, who viewed the emerging fast food industry has a challenge to independent business, a new influence on American Life.\textsuperscript{72}


2.3 Conquering the World

With the saturation of the U.S. market, the Mc Donald’s goal has been to conquer the global marketing, in fact the company has tried to infiltrate everywhere in the world with its products and its philosophy.

McDonald’s slogan, “One world, one Taste”, emerges from an ambitious corporate vision that dominates the global fast food industry in which the company do not export only burgers and fries but also itself, and his mentality as a way of life that represents the mass culture of the third millennium. McDonald’s strategy operates both globally and locally; in its approach to foreign markets, especially those in Europe, where traditions are stronger and more resistance to an “Americanization” of tastes, McDonald’s plays ambiguously a role called “national”.

Here, the chains tends to represent the “French” in France, the Italian in Italy through the use of local products and suppliers, advertising hamburgers and sandwiches that remind of fresh and typical local products. With this kind of nationalization that is only apparent, McDonald’s is trying to hide the globalist and multinational vision of the company.

The meals do not really involve the use of real local ingredients. In fact the company asks the suppliers to use just national products in line with international standards; for instance, potatoes produced in Italy are used as long as they are the same type used in the United States and approved by the Corporation. This method, combined with efficiency, calculability,

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74 Chain Steve (1996), Big mac: The unauthorized Story of McDonald’s, (New York: Harcourt Brace; 29-31).
predictability and control, aims to provide a product that is identical all around the world and that taste exactly the same everywhere.\textsuperscript{75}

All these characteristics instead of being the sum of different cultures, create a single culture, obtained from the maintenance of the same basic ingredients combined with the typical McDonald’s style of fast production and low prices. At McDonald’s, efficiency is important and means reducing to a minimum the time of preparation, service and dining. Everything is structured to reduce time, the food chosen is rapid in preparation, the crews receive very detailed instructions for speeding up the preparation time and, complete meals are synthesized in a single product (for example: Egg McMuffin, that replaces breakfast).

McDonald’s publicized the idea of snacking during a break or having a dinner with family or friends, even if the system of choice invites you to eat quickly and sit on uncomfortable chairs with lack of privacy in the room. “Fastization” is functional to a society all geared on speed, which can not indulge on breaks, and where eating becomes the fulfillment of a merge organic function.

With regard to costumer service, McDonald’s requires its employees to follow at a rigorous protocol, made of smiles, ritual questions, and cordiality.

The Company ensure cleanness in the surrounding area and make the kitchen visible to the public, even if only the heads of the employees are visible, while the Food Counters are not.


2.4 Healthy Food?

After Coca-Cola, hamburgers are the best-know American food invention that has spread around the world. However, although its overall popularity, today fast food have come under attack for many reasons. McDonald’s and fast food has revolutionized the food industry and affected the life of both the people who produce food and the people who consume it.

Typically Fast Food meals refer to a meet-sweet diet offered from a limited menu. Modern commercial fast food is highly processed and prepared on a large scale using standardize of cooking and production methods and equipment costs.\textsuperscript{76} Also, fast food products are made with ingredients formulated to achieve identifiable flavor aroma, texture and “mouth fell” and preserve freshness.\textsuperscript{77} Fast food is often called junk food; this category contains little nutritional values, high amounts of salt, saturated fats, fatty and hydrogenated acids.\textsuperscript{78} This food, is high in calories and does not provide the right amount of healthy nutritional elements such as vitamins, antioxidants and fiber.\textsuperscript{79} The abuse of junk food deranges metabolism, and it is linked to obesity, coronary hearth disease, diabetes, hypertension and, depression.

The reasons why this type of food spreads and settles easily are different. First of all, governments, corporations and institutions control rather than protect consumers.

\textsuperscript{76} Melaniphy John C. (1992), Restaurant and Fast Food Site Election, (New York: John Wiley & Sons;44-45).


People prefer food that are familiar, taste and high in calories, fat and sugar and with a large amount of salt.

Today the food industry has provided a food supply variety, plentiful, inexpensive and that does not depend on seasons; in addition it has created a food full of flavors which intensify the taste, and it is easy to find and finally extremely cheap. Hydrogenated fats, sweeteners, potatoes, minced fat meat and raw materials cost very little.  

Fast food restaurants rarely mention where their food comes from or what the ingredients are. Most fast food is delivered to the restaurant frozen canned dehydrated or freeze-dried. Americans spend more than 110 billion dollars a year on fast food. They snack on food that is high in calories and with a low nutritional value such as candies, cookies and chips. Over the past twenty years sales of high salt, high-calories are increased dramatically, while the consumption of fruit and vegetable has remained stable. Since the end of 1970, the consumption of soft drinks has more then doubled, and in children it has increased more than 20%.

In the last decades, one big factor that altered the food consumption in the United States has been the industrialization and consolidation of American agriculture.

Today food industry and agriculture are the result of twentieth century trends that led from small farms to giant corporations, from a diet based on food grown locally to one based largely on foods that have been processed and transported for long distances.

These change created a farm system efficient and more specialized. In 1900 around 40% of the population lived on farms but today no more than 2% does. Since 1960 the number of farms has

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declined from 3.3 million to 1.8 million, but their size has increased by 40% and their productivity by 82%. Most farms today raise just a single commodity such as cattle, pigs, chicken, corn or soybeans. Many of the farms are part of a system of “vertical” integration, one corporation own all stages of production and marketing.

The big efficiency, specialization, size of agriculture created a system where the overabundance is central, proving a daily average of 3,900 calories per capita.

One result of overabundance is to add value to food through processing. The producers receive only a fraction of the price that consumers pay at the supermarket. For instance in 2000 only the 20% of retail cost was returned to producers. This percentage declined for years; today producers of eggs, beef, chicken receive 50% to 60% of retail cost. The remaining 80% of the food dollar goes for labor, packaging, advertising and other activities.

This kind of market began to make more profits “adding value” through food flavors. This explain why today saturated oils and high fructose corn syrup are so common. Another way food companies can add value is by packaging the food; it is easier to consume food that require no preparation; for example Frito Lay and Sevel Eleven started serving candies chips in plastic cups, these so-called “go-snacks”.

At the same time, the rise of drive-ins and fast food restaurants in southern California helped turn the hamburger into American’s national dish. Ray Krok’s decision to promote McDonald’s as a

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84 A division of PepsiCo that began in 1960, that produce and sell corn-chips, potato chips and snacks food.

85 International chains for convenience store that primarily operates with franchising.
restaurant chain for families had a profound impact on the nation’s eating habits. Hamburgers were convenient, inexpensive, hand-held and easy to chew.\textsuperscript{86}

Before World War II, pork was the most popular meat in the United States, later rising incomes, falling cattle prices, the growth of the fast food industry and the mass appeal of the hamburger pushed American consumption of beef higher than pork. By the early 1990s beef production was responsible for almost half of the employment in American agriculture and the annual revenues generated by beef were higher than those of any other agricultural commodity in the United States. The average American ate three hamburgers a week, and more than two-thirds of those hamburgers were bought at fast food restaurants. Moreover children between the ages of seven and thirteen ate more hamburgers than anyone else.

In 1950s American ranches were dominating the food supply but over the last twenty years they have sold their cattle’s and quit their business.\textsuperscript{87} Today, many of the remaining ranches in the United States are fairly poor and facing a host economic problems such as rising land prices, over supplies of cattle, increased shipments of live cattle from Canada and Mexico, development pressure, and inheritance taxes. In addition to the growth of fast food chains, the higher demand for food have encouraged consolidation in the meatpacking industry which has been transformed over the last twenty years.

Today the top four meatpacking firms, ConAgra, Tyson, National Beef, Cargill slaughter about 84 percent of the nation’s cattle. This four major companies control about 20 percent of the live


cattle in the United States with the so called “captive supplies”; cattles are maintained in company owner feedlots or purchased in advanced through forward contracts.\textsuperscript{88}

ConAgra was the first one that has completely altered the way beef is produced. The ConAgra Beef Company runs the nation’s biggest meatpacking complex: beef and sheep slaughterhouse, and processing facilities.

To supply the beef slaughterhouse, ConAgra operates enormous feedlots; each of them can hold hundred thousand head of cattle.\textsuperscript{89}

In 1987 ConAgra food acquired Montfort of Colorado, and became the biggest meatpacker in the world. Today, it is the larger foodservice supplier in North America.\textsuperscript{90} In addition of being the number-one producer of French fries, ConAgra is also the nation’s largest sheep and turkey processor, the largest distributor of agricultural chemicals, the second-largest manufacturer of frozen food, and the third-largest chicken and pork processor. The company sells food for about one hundred consumer brand names, including Hunt’s, Armour, La Choy, Country Pride, Swiss Miss, Orville, Redenbacher’s, Reddi-Wip, Taste O’sea, Knott’s Betty Farm, Hebrew National, and Healthy Choice. Even though only few Americans have heard of ConAgra, they are likely to eat at least one of its products every day.

ConAgra produces a wide range of food, including cooking oil, frozen dinners, hot cocoa, hot dogs, peanut butter and many others.

In recent years, ConAgra had many problems; in 2012 contributed with $1.176.700 to a million political campaigns known as the Coalition Against the Costly Food Labeling Proposition,

sponsored by food producers. This organization was created to oppose the California citizen’s initiative, demanding mandatory labeling for food that contains genetically modified ingredients. Moreover the biggest issues that the company had to face was in 2002, when it had to recall 19 million pounds of ground beef contaminated by E coli bacteria; this meat was linked to the illnesses of 19 people in six western and Midwestern states.  

Every day in the United States, roughly 200,000 people are sickened by a foodborne disease, 900 are hospitalized and fourteen die. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention more than a quarter of the American population is poisoned every year. Most of these cases are never reported to authority. The rise in foodborne illnesses has been caused by many complex factors and much of the increase can be attributed to recent changes in how American food is produced. The nation’s industrialized and centralized system of food processing has created an environment in which millions of people can be infected.

In January of 1993 doctors at a hospital in Seattle noticed an unusual number of children with bloody diarrhea. Some of them were suffering from hemolytic uremic syndrome, a previously rare disorder that causes kidney damage. Health officials soon traced the outbreak of food poisoning to hamburgers served at local Jack in the Box restaurants. Tests made on the hamburgers patties disclosed the presence of E coli 0157:H7. Jack in the Box made an immediate recall of the contaminated ground beef supplied by Vons companies in Arcadia California.

than seven hundred people in four states were sickened by Jack in the Box hamburgers, more than two hundred were hospitalized and five died.  

The jack in the Box case received a great attention from the media, alerting the public to dangers of E coli 0157:H7 linked to fast food hamburgers. In 1982 thousand of children were sickened by contaminated hamburgers sold at McDonald’s restaurant in Oregon. It was proved by the McDonald’s investigators that there was presence of the bacteria in the meat; however the company denied that its hamburgers contained that kind of bacteria and mentioned that there were only the possibility to a statistical association between a small number of diarrhea cases in two small towns and other restaurants.

E coli 0157:H7 is a mutated version of a bacterium found abundantly in the human digestive system, most of these bacteria helps to digest food and synthesize vitamins. This bacteria can release a dangerous toxin that attacks the intestine. Some people that contract the bacteria do not become ill, other may suffer mild diarrhea but in the most cases the symptoms are severe abdominal cramps followed by watery diarrhea, then bloody. Sometimes the diarrhea is accompanied by vomiting and fever.

In some cases the bacteria can cause hemolytic uremic syndrome, bloodstream, kidney failure anemia, and internal bleeding. Children under the age of five and elderly people are most likely to suffer from illness caused by E coli 0157:H7.

Around 10 percent of the people sickened by Jack in the Box did not eat contaminated burger but were infected by someone who did; on average an infected person remain contagious for two

weeks. Some American cattle have been infected with E coli decades ago, but the recent changes in how cattle are raised, slaughtered and processed have created an ideal means for the pathogen to spread.  

To supply such a big amount of beef, animals are crowded closed together and during the three months before slaughter they eat grain damped into long concrete troughs; the grain fattens the cattle quickly, aided by anabolic steroids implanted, and substances with high protein content that accelerate growth. Far from their natural habitat, the cattle in feedlots become more prone to all sorts of illnesses. The odds of widespread contamination are raised exponentially when the meat is processed into ground beef. A generation ago local butcher and whosalers made hamburger meat out of leftover scraps. Ground beef was distributed locally, and was often made from cattle slaughtered locally. Today large slaughterhouse dominate the nationwide production of ground beef. A processing plant can produce 800,000 pounds of hamburgers a day, meat that will be delivered around the United States.

In addition, one quarter of the nations’ ground beef may come from diseased animals that are riddled with antibiotic residues. Therefore, this type of meat besides being high in fat and low in vitamins may also contain dangerous types of bacteria.

In 1980s, besides the production of beef, also the poultry industry was transformed by some mergers. Eight poultry processors now control about two-thirds of the American market. These processors have shifted almost all of their production in the south Alabama, Arkansan, Georgia.

and Mississippi now process more than half of the chicken raised in the United States. There were many factors that revolutionized the poultry industry and increase the power of the large processors, but one innovation that played important role was the creation of the chicken nuggets.\footnote{National Academy Press (1998), \textit{Ensuring safe Food; From Production to Consumption}. (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press: 224-226).} Fred Turner, the chairman of McDonald’s was the first that had the idea of a chicken finger-food without bones small in size. After six months of intensive research, the Keystone lab developed new technology for manufacturing of Mc Nuggets and created small pieces of reconstituted chicken, composed by white meat held together by stabilizers, fried and frozen ingredients. The initial marketing test made by McDonald’s for its Mc Nuggets was so successful that the company enlisted Tyson Foods to guarantee an adequate supply.

Tyson food is an American multinational corporation based in Arkansas that operates in the field of food industry. It is one of the largest leading chicken processor which developed a new breed of chicken to facilitate the production of Mc Nuggets.\footnote{Hui Y.H. (1992), \textit{Encyclopedia of Food Science and Technology}, (New York: Crown Publishers: 498-499).}

In 1983 chicken Mc Nuggets were introduced in the United States and within one month since the launch, McDonald’s had become one of the largest purchaser of chicken in the United States, second only to Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Mc Nuggets were very successful among consumers; they were easy to chew, tasted good and were apparently healthier than other items on the menu. However, the health benefits were illusory; they were cooked in beef tallow.

Today chicken Mc Nuggets are widely popular among children and contain twice the facts that an hamburger contains.
The Mc Nuggets changed not only the American diet but also its system for reasing and processing poultry.\textsuperscript{101} Twenty years ago the chickens were sold whole, today 90 percent has been cut in pieces, cutlets or nuggets. In 1992 for the first time American consumption of chicken surpassed the consumption of beef. Thanks to the Mc Nuggets contract now Tyson food is the World’s largest chicken processor that manufacture about half of the nation’s Mc Nuggets and sells chicken to the largest restaurant chains. It is a vertically integrated company that breeds, slaughters and, processed chickens. It does not however raise the birds. It leaves the capital expenditures and risks to independent contractors.

A Tyson chicken grower does not owns the birds; between the day they are born and the day they are killed the birds spend their entire life on the feed, veterinary services and technical support that Tyson provides. The company supplies feeding schedules, demands equipment upgrade and employs supervisors to make sure that the directives of the company are followed.\textsuperscript{102}

The grower’s income is determined by a formula based upon weight and the amount of feed used. The chicken grower provides the land and the labor, the poultry houses and the fuel and the processor can terminate a contract with a grower whenever it likes.

These cattle have been widely criticized of being responsible of the killing and torture of thousand of chicken, for using barbaric methods and to raise chickens with antibiotics. In 2007 an USDA inspectors discovered that the Tyson food was using antibiotics to raise the animals in the cattle and reclaim that the company writes “raised with antibiotics” in the label.


packaging of food. The reason why these company are using these types of drugs is because the animals have a system strongly immune depressed because of their terrible living conditions such very limited spaces, continuous light 24 hours a day, force-feeding, and various mistreatment resulting from mechanization. Clearly, this stress make them prone to diseases, so the companies allow the use of antibiotics for non-therapeutic purposes and in almost preventive function.

Some studies have come to establish that for every kilo of meat produced on farms are used on average 100mg of antibiotics. The continuous consumption of meat and the subsequent intake of these medicines may be in the long run the cause of chronic intestinal disorders. McDonald’s and the others fast food chains never mentions where their production of food come from; otherwise they sponsor their food as healthy and nutrient.

McDonald's promote his food as “nutritious”, but the truth is that is high in fat, and low in fiber and vitamins. Diet of this type are linked to a higher risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other diseases. Their food also contains many chemical additives, some of which can cause ill-health, and hyperactivity in children. Moreover their meat is linked to major cause of food poisoning incidents. In 1991, McDonald's was responsible for a series of food poisoning in Britain, where people suffered serious kidney failure.

Another type of food among the most famous that is extremely unhealthy and contributes to the rise of obesity and that it extremely unhealthy are french fries. The famous McDonald’s French fries have long been praised by costumers, competitors and even food critics. Their distinctive taste is largely determined by their cooking oil. For many years McDonald’s have

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cooked its French fries in a mixture of about 7 percent cottonseed oil and 93 percent beef tallow. This mix gave to the fries their unique flavor but also a high amount of calories.¹⁰⁵ In 1990, McDonald’s after many criticism over the amount of cholesterol in their fries, and the accuse for the contribution of obesity switched to pure vegetable oil. But the company had to make fries that taste like beef without cook it in tallow, so suddenly add the mysterious phrase “natural flavor”.¹⁰⁶ Million of food that people buy today is full of this kind of additives, but the flavor industry is highly secretive about it. Its leading companies will not divulge the precise formulas of flavor compounds or the identities of clients. The secretly is essential for protecting the reputation brands. The fast food chains would like the public to believe that the flavors of their food somehow originate in their restaurants not in a distant factory run by other firms. International Flavors & Fragrances is the world’s largest flavor company and manufactures the smell of McDonald’s food. Today the rise and falls of flavors of corporate empires of soft drinks companies, snack food companies, and fast food chains is frequently determined by how their products taste. The flavor industry emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, as processed food began to be manufactured on a large scale. Recognizing the need for flavor additives the early food processor turned to perfume companies that had years of experience working with essential oil and aromas.¹⁰⁷

Much of the perfume industry was located in Europe, but after World War II much of the industries shifted to the United States. As soon as they become useful, flavor additives were used mainly in baked foods, candies and sodas. Later the invention of gas chromatographs and mass spectrometer (machines capable of detecting volatile gases at low level, vastly increased the number of flavors that could be synthesized. By the mid-1960s the American flavor industry was churning out compounds to supply the taste of Pop Tarts, Bac-Os, Tab, Tang, Filet O-Fish sandwiches and thousand of other new foods. The American flavor industry now has annual revenues of about $1.4 billion. Approximately ten thousand new processed food products are introduced every year in the United States, and fast food and almost all of them require flavor additives. 108 The distinction between natural and artificial flavor can be arbitrary and absurd, sometimes they contain exactly the same chemicals and are just produced in different methods. An natural flavor is not necessary healthy even if the word “natural” is implied, is not purer that an artificial one, when almond flavor (benzaldehyde) is derived from natural sources such as peach apricot pims it contains traces of hydrogen cyanide, a deadly poison. Benzaldehyde derived through a different process, by mixing oil of clove and the banana flavor and does not contain any cyanide. Nevertheless, it is legally considered an artificial flavor and sells at a much lower price. Natural and artificial flavor are now manufactured at the same chemical plants. The small and elite group of scientist who create most of the flavor in most of the food now consumed in the United States are called “flavorist”. 109 In order to give the processed food the proper taste a flavorist must always consider the food’s “mouthfeel”, the unique combination of textures and chemical interactions that affects how the flavor is perceived. Some popular fast

foods derive their flavor from unexpected sources. Wendy’s Grilled Chicken sandwich, for example contains beef extracts.

Burger King’s BK Braler Chicken Breast Patty contains “Natural smoke flavor”. A firm called Red Arrow products company specialized in “smock flavor”, which is added to barbecue sauces and to processed meat.

All of these flavors which are extremely unhealthy are added in almost all of the food sold in the United States and in the one sold in fast food restaurants.

Today is well-known that fast food is not good for health, it contributes to the development of obesity and contains dangerous ingredients, causing unhealthy addiction and physical damages.

But, fast food is an integral part of the American society, it is radicalized in the style of life of the population and it represents a serious problem not only for current generations, but also for the future one.

2.5 Portion Size and Obesity

Besides of being unhealthy, fast food chains have made a policy throughout that focus on the realization of high portion size.

Since the early 1980s, increases in the portion sizes of foods commonly eaten away from home have occurred in parallel with the increase of obesity among the population, and constitute an important contributing factor to rising rates of obesity. Portion sizes sold in fast food chains are often two or five time larger than when they were first introduced. They influence eating habits of the costumer who in time have come to expect larger portions. Big size contributes to overweight in three ways: they provide more calories than smaller portions, encourage people to

consume more calories and to underestimate those calories. The United States food supply currently provides 3,900 kcal/day, a per capita increase of 700 kcal/day since the early 1980s, whereas dietary intake surveys report only an additional 200-300 kcal/day. Americans spend nearly half of their food budget on foods prepared outside home and consume about one-third of daily calories from outside sources, much of it from fast food.

In 2001, the US surgeon General’s Call to Action to prevent obesity challenged health professionals, communities, and the food industry to confront portion size as a factor in weight control, provide food in more appropriate amounts, and raise consumer awareness of appropriate portion sizes. In 1998 and 2002, a research conducted by the Journal of Public Health Policy, reported the increasing sizes of fast-food portions from leading chains. In this study were examined subsequent changes through 2006, a 4-year period in which calls for methods to address and prevent childhood obesity have become much more pronounced.\textsuperscript{111}

Table 2.1: Portion size of sodas, French fries, and hamburgers available at three of the largest fast-food establishments in the United States in 1998, 2002 and 2006.\textsuperscript{112}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fontain Soda</th>
<th>Size 1998 (oz or fl oz)</th>
<th>Size 2002 (oz or fl oz)</th>
<th>Size 2006 (oz or fl oz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>12 Child</td>
<td>12 Child</td>
<td>12 Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td>16 Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21 Medium</td>
<td>21 Medium</td>
<td>21 Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Burger King</th>
<th>Burger King</th>
<th>Burger King</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 Large</td>
<td>32 Large</td>
<td>32 Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>42 Supersize</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burger King</td>
<td>12 Child</td>
<td>12 Child</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21 Medium</td>
<td>21 Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 Large</td>
<td>32 Large</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>42 King</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy’s</td>
<td>12 Kid</td>
<td>12 Kid</td>
<td>12 Kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td>16 Small</td>
<td><strong>20 Small</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 Medium</td>
<td>20 Medium</td>
<td>32 Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 Biggie</td>
<td>32 Biggie</td>
<td><strong>6.0 Large</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Fries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mc Donald’s</td>
<td>2.4 Small</td>
<td>2.4 Small</td>
<td>2.4 Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Large</td>
<td>5.3 Medium</td>
<td><strong>4.0 Medium</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Supersize</td>
<td>6.3 Large</td>
<td><strong>6.0 Large</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burger King</td>
<td>2.6 Small</td>
<td>2.6 Small</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.1 Medium</td>
<td>4.1 Mediumf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.1 large</td>
<td><strong>5.7 Large</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6.9 King</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy’s</td>
<td>3.2 Small</td>
<td>3.2 Kid’s Size</td>
<td>3.2 Kid’s Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 Medium</td>
<td><strong>5.0 Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.0 Small</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.6 Biggie</td>
<td>5.6 Biggie</td>
<td><strong>5.6 Medium</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7 Great B.</td>
<td>6.7 Great B.</td>
<td><strong>6.7 Large</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 compares the portion size of fountain soda, French fries and hamburgers served at Mc Donald’s, Burger King and Wendy’s in 1998, 2002 and, 2006.\textsuperscript{113}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hamburger, beef only (Precooked)</th>
<th>Size 1998 (oz or fl oz)</th>
<th>Size 2002 (oz or fl oz)</th>
<th>Size 2006 (oz or fl oz)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mc Donald’s</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burger King</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
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<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy’s</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.0</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As promised, McDonald’s supersized soda; its largest size is now a 32-oz large. In 1998, the largest size soda at Burger King was 32 oz. In 2002, however, the chain increased the largest size to 42 oz. At Wendy’s, a medium soda was 22 oz in 1998 and the largest soda was 32 oz. In 2002 Wendy’s reduced the Medium to 20 oz, but increased the size to 32 oz in 2006. Also in 2006, this company introduced a new 42-oz size. Wendy’s accompanied these additions with some name changes. The former 32-oz Biggie is called now Medium, and the new 42-oz soda is called Large.\textsuperscript{114} McDonald’s offered French fries in three sizes in 1998: Small (2.4 oz), large (5.3 oz), and Supersize (3.6 oz). In 2002, it increased the Supersize to 7.1 oz. And renamed the other sizes Small, Medium and Large. Following the release of \textit{Super Size Me!}, McDonald’s eliminated the Supersize and reduced the sizes of the Large and Medium. In 2006 the large was just slightly smaller than the Supersize in 1998. Burger King introduced a new larger French fries, called King, a size that the company still sells.

Wendy’s discontinued the terms Biggie and Great Biggie to describe French fries in 2006, replacing them with the Medium and Large, but its portion sizes remain the same as they were 4 years earlier. McDonald’s and Wendy’s still offer the same size hamburger patties as they did in 1998, but Burger King has introduced a larger, 12 oz precooked hamburger.\textsuperscript{115} The size of hamburgers at all three chains now exceed the amount recommended by the USDA for an entire day. The 12-oz portions at Burger King and Wendy’s constitute 2 days’ recommended portions of meat.

\textsuperscript{114} Cohen M.D. Deborah (2013), \textit{A Big Fat Crisis: The Hidden Forces Behind the Obesity Epidemic and How We Can End It}, (New York: Nation Books158-159).

Table 2 highlights recent events in the history of portion size at these chains. In the last several years, Mc Donald’s discontinued its Supersize French fries and sodas, but both Burger King and Wendy’s introduced new portions in larger sizes. Burger King has also introduced several large specialty hamburgers.

This observation indicate that fast-food chains have responded little or not at all to calls to reduce the portion sizes of soda, French fries, and hamburgers.

McDonald’s has made the most progress in reducing its portion sizes, but its sizes greatly exceed those offered in 1955. Burger King and Wendy’s have added larger sized sodas, and Burger King has introduced several larger hamburgers. Other US chains have followed this choices. In 2003, for example, Hardee’s introduced the “Monster Thickburger” with 12 oz beef and 1,420 calories, two thirds of the calories recommended for an entire day for certain segments of the population.

Rather than reducing portion sizes, the top of fast food chains are engaged in sleight the name. Mc Donald’s and Wendy’s have dropped descriptors such as supersize, Biggie, and Great Biggie and replaced them with Medium or Large. Name changes but they are unlikely to help with weight maintenance as they may induce people to believe they are eating smaller amounts of food.

This observation also indicates that the portion sizes of these items offered in the United States exceed those available in Europe. For example the largest orders of French fries and soda at Mc

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Donald’s in the United States contain about 100 calories more than the largest sizes offered in Sweden. ¹¹⁷

The fast food chains have not responded to any extent to the 2001 Surgeon General’s Call to Action or to more recent calls on restaurants to reduce portion sizes nor are they likely to do so voluntarily. ¹¹⁸ The New York Health Department recently approved regulations to require fast-food chains to post the calories counts of foods directly on menu boards. This and other policies to make it easier to reduce energy intake deserve serious consideration by any government agency concerned with the effects of obesity on public health.


Chapter 3: Food Industries Politics in the United States

3.1 Food Companies and Lobby

Today food companies exercise a disproportionate influence on the government nutrition policies of the United States through different methods, among them one of the most effective is lobby. Lobbying is a legal attempt made by individual or groups to influence government policy or action. It promotes the views of special-interest groups, influence government laws and finally communicates with government official about laws, policies and rules.

In particular food lobbyist are people like professional advocates, often lawyers who ask to the government to make laws or rules that will benefit their client’s companies. They are hired and not elected and they represent an integral part of the American political system. They argue for specific legislation in decision making bodies such as the United States Congress.

In the last decade the number of lobbyists increased dramatically, between 1997 and 1999 it raised from 15,000 to more than 20,000; it is estimated that in 1997 lobbyist spent more than $1.43 billion on behalf of clients. To realize how food lobbying works, it is necessary to understand the relationship between the Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); the federal agency most responsible for food and agriculture in the United States. At the end of the second World War, there was a

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period in which government and food producers worked together in the national interest, so farmers and food producers saw USDA as their department and its secretary as their spokesman. The so-called “agricultural establishment” is constituted by food producers, USDA officials and members of the House and Senate Agricultural Committees; all together they represent an entity so strongly united in purpose that it could ensure any federal policy related to land use, commodity, distribution or prices that would promote the interests of food producers.

The control owned by producer groups over USDA and congressional actions was so strong that this “establishment” virtually excluded not only the Secretary of Agriculture, but also the President of the United States. 121

Over the course of the 20th century farms have consolidated into larger, more capital intensive operations. In this period, the United States had generally moved to overproduction; so in the early 1970 the system began to demand more influence over agricultural policies. Agriculture gain more importance, large processing and marketing companies were formed in the U.S. economy and their interests were different from those of smaller food producers. 122

In response to new demands in 1974 the agricultural commitment was expanded and began to include representatives from urban and rural areas. Later in 1977 the Congress gave to the agricultural committee jurisdiction over policies and programs related to marketing, agricultural production, research, development and also to a new wide range of area such as: forestry, rural development, food assistance, international trade, market regulation, taxes and nutrition advice to

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the public. All these changes generated a huge proliferation of lobbying activities related to the wide function of federal agricultural committees. Analyzing the history of lobbying in the United States in 1959 there were just 25 group of producers dominating agricultural lobbying, but in 1980s the number grew up to 84, and by the late 1990s there were thousand of business, associations and individuals that were trying to influence federal decision related to every single aspects of food and beverage productions, sales, service and trade. Besides the number of lobbyist a study made in 1977 identified 612 individuals and 460 groups in this category.

To understand how the system works is necessary to analyze how lobbyists gain access to federal officials and staff. They had it through different meanings; such as the transfer of founds from lobbyists to federal official, through donations called “hard” money, legal and unsanctioned donations of “soft” money, gifts and the frequent job exchanges between lobbyists and federal officials known as the “revolving” door.124

3.2 Lobbying Methods

The term “revolving door” refers to the movement of high level employees from public sectors jobs to private sectors jobs and vice versa. In the United States, government hires industry experts for their private sector experience, for their influence with corporations that the government is trying to regulate and to obtain political support from private companies. On the other hand, industries hire people out of government position to obtain personal access to


government officials, search convenient regulation and government contracts in exchange of high-paying employment offers.\textsuperscript{125} The lobbying industry is particularly affected by the revolving door phenomenon for the reason that the main resources for a lobbyist are contacts with government officials. This revolving door phenomenon is not new but traced back to 1968. In that time, about 23 former senators and 92 former representatives had registered as lobbyists for private organizations.\textsuperscript{126} Recently 40\% of the representatives defeated in the 1992 election became lobbyists, moreover from 1989 to 1993 42\% of Senate committee staff directors and 35\% of those in the House side became lobbyist. In the food industry job exchanges between lobbyist and the Us Department of Agriculture are especially common because as many as 500 agency heads and staff are political appointers chosen on the basis of party affiliation and support. In 1974 a report listed some assistant secretaries, administrators, and advisors that have joined USDA from position with meat, grain, and marketing firms or had left the agency to take position with food producers.\textsuperscript{127}

When officials of regulatory agencies starts to work for industry they are certain to be paid better than they were in their government jobs, in addition they contribute to industry the valuable expertise that they acquired at the expense of taxpayers.\textsuperscript{128} The practice of recruiting industry executives to government work creates doubt of conflict of interest, even when they


accept lower salaries. That reason is that is difficult to imagine that they can make decision without keeping their former employer’s interest in mind.\textsuperscript{129}

Revolving-door are not easy to categorize, one example is the career of Michael Taylor. Michael Taylor is a lawyer that began the revolving door as counsel to Food And Drug Administration (FDA). Than he moved to King & Spalding, a law firm representing Monsanto, an agricultural biotechnology company. In 1991 he came back to the FDA as Deputy Commissioner for Policy; here he was part of a team issue the agency’s decidedly industry-friendly policy on food biotechnology and that approved the use of some genetically engineered growth hormone in dairy cow created by Monsanto. His role in this decisions was unclear and led to an investigation by the federal General Accounting Office, that eventually exonerated him of all conflict of interest charges.\textsuperscript{130} In 1994 Mr. Taylor become administrator of Food Safety and Inspection Service in USDA, becoming the hero of food-safety activists for the development of the agency’s policies for controlling dangerous microbial contaminants in meat and poultry. After another period in private legal practice with King and Spalding, Mr. Taylor in 1998 again joined Monsanto as Vice President for Public Policy. In 1999 he finally decided to resign his position during the public controversy over Monsanto’s aggressive promotion of its genetically engineered foods. Then he returned to the private sector to the Resources for the Future, a nonprofit think tank on environmental and natural resources issues in Washington D.C.

This case is an example that illustrates the dilemma posed by the revolving-door issues. Even if former government officials provide expertise useful to food companies, it is also true that former food company employees provide expertise that can help government agencies do a better

\textsuperscript{129} Parke Wilde (2013), \textit{Food Policy in the United States: An Introduction}, (Goodreads Author:151-152).

job of regulation. The carrier of Mr. Taylor demonstrates that the revolving door does bit always favor industry.

The role of money interactions between lobbyists and government officials is less ambiguous, and one of the most alarming ways in which lobbyists exercise their influence over federal decisions is by spending money. Even if there are reporting requirements, it is difficult to find out how much money lobbyist spend on federal officials. Some deals of lobbying takes place in some areas of social transaction, such as dinner parties, birthday parties, receptions, meetings, weddings. It has been estimated by the Center for Responsive Politics that food and agriculture lobbyist spent $53 million in 1998 on issues other than tobacco.\(^{131}\)

One way through lobbyist disburse funds to individual member of Congress is through Political Action Committees (PACs). PACs are called hard money and consist in political donations regulated by law through the Federal Election Commission.

PACs began in 1940 when the Congress prohibited labor unions from contributing to political campaigns, so in order to get around this restriction the unions started to collect voluntary contribution from members to support the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.\(^{132}\) In 1974, right after the Watergate scandal, amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act authorized the formation of PACs by corporations, unions and other groups with the final purpose of collecting voluntary campaign contributions. Although the amount of money of these contributions is limited, any one individual could contribute to federal candidates for $1000 for each elections. The most considerable fact is that individuals could contribute with quite large


amounts of money because the act did not restrict the number of candidates to whom contributions could be made, or the number of PACs to which every one donor could contribute. It was estimated that in one year, 608 PACs formed and contributed $12.5 million to the 1974-1975 election campaigns. Some of the PACs represent businesses, and others represent food and agriculture interests.

Data from the Center for Responsive Politics shows that 212 agribusiness PACs contributed with $4.3 million to federal candidates in 1999-2000 elections. Some examples are given by the America Meat Institute PAC that contributed with $56,500, PepsiCo with $66,810, ConAgra with $86,750 and the Food Marketing Institute with $133,308.\(^{133}\)

One significant thing is that agribusiness PACs money contributes with the unequal distribution of money among Democrats and Republicans. Some research made on the effect of PACs does not prove that they are made to buy influence, but they suggest a strong correlation between contributions and desired outcome.\(^{134}\)

Recently a research made on the connection between PACs contributions and votes of the congress on sugar subsidies had shown that the largest contributions from sugar PACs had gone to members who voted for subsidies.

Another analysis made on the history of legislation on sugar and peanut demonstrate an increase in contributions to both parties just prior to votes. To conclude can be said that PACs give more

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money to legislators who are more likely to vote for their interest; so, finally contributions do have a significant effect on voting decisions.\textsuperscript{135}

Another kind of contribution that is given to political parties is call: “soft money”. They differ from hard money because they are money donated to political parties in a way that leave the contributions unregulated. Soft money are different from hard money, they are called "nonfederal" contributions and are given to political parties for other purposes than supporting candidates for federal office. Unlike hard money contributions, there are no limits on the amount of soft money that can be given by individuals to political parties. Moreover, even if labor unions and corporations can not give money to candidates for federal office, they can give soft money to parties.\textsuperscript{136}

The contributions of soft money can be used to support issues that political parties and candidates might favor. This money are unrestricted, they can support elections indirectly, and can come from any source. They differ from PACs because they can be substantial: in 1991 several food and agriculture corporation made $150,000 contributions to the Republican Party and in 1997-1998 agribusiness corporation made donations with soft money of $1.3 million to Democrats and $1.4 million to Republicans. Another example is the Flo-Sun Sugar Company and its subsidiaries which made 20 donations of amounts ranging from $2,500 to $25,000 to congressional campaign in 1997-1999.

Most food corporations favor Republicans for the reason that members of this party are more likely than Democrats to promote business interest.


Beside soft money, election laws have permitted lobbyist to give members of Congress small gifts like books, lunches, liquor, awards, samples, but a reform law limited in 1996 the value of that gifts; it prohibited the House members to accept individuals gifts no more than $50 each and in total no more than $100 during any one year. ¹³⁷

Another thing that became really common is that lobbyists might pay for legislators’ vacation; under the terms of 1996-1997, members of Congress could take trips and accept speaking fees paid for lobbyists.

An analysis made on the travel practices of members of the House of Representatives in 1989-1990 found that collectively had taken nearly 4,000 sponsored trips and more than $500,000 were accepted. Other analysis had shown that agriculture interest group sponsored 390 trips, 240 of them taken by members of agriculture or appropriate committees.

In conclusion campaign contributions, trips and presents buy corporate influence over government decisions, in proportion to the amount spent and will favor the politics of food producers avoiding costumer’s interests.

An important example that show how money and donations can influence political decision that involve food companies is given by the so called “banana wars”.

Bananas are one of the most popular fruit among American population; the consumption pre capita is about 75 annually, most of them are imported from Central America by Chiquita Brands International. This company at the beginning was known as United Fruit, which dominated global trade in bananas for century. The head of the brand, Carl H. Lindner, gives generous contributions to both political parties; in 1998 he gave $177,000 in soft money to Democrats and

$360,000 to Republicans. In 1999-2000 with his contributions of $500,000 placed himself second among his leading donor of soft money to Republicans. Later, Chiquita became the most famous, advertised brand in the United States.

In the late of 1990 the brand encountered a problem with the European Union when the European Union imposed limits on imports of bananas from outside; soon after this decision the US trade representative field a formal complaint with the World Trade Organization, saying that the restriction on bananas violated international trade agreements. As a consequence the United States, in which Chiquita had a large influence because of the lobbyist activities imposed high tariffs on certain European luxury goods, the WHO agree with this action and ordered to the European Union to comply with trade accords.138

The method used by Chiquita to obtain this victory and to follow their interest has been described by investigative reporters as “followed the money” and this method proved how million dollars campaign contributions bought access and favors in Washington.139

Chiquita was already controlling the 20% of European banana market, and the White House was making a strong effort to help the company compensate for having lost $350 million in 1999 and 2000 and more than $1.3 billion since the EU imposed the quotas.140 Late in 2000 the European Union offered to establish import quotas, but Chiquita rejected the proposal and accused the Clinton administration for the company financial difficulties and issued the European Union for


At the end the administration together with the brand won, it saved the company from bankruptcy and finally ended a nine year conflict creating the latest episode in the company’s history of success in influencing the U.S. government to solve its problem.\footnote{Steve Striffler, Mark Moberg, Gilbert M. Joseph, Emily S. Rosenberg (2003), \textit{Banana Wars: Power, Production and History in the Americas}, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press: 242-243).}  

This example proves how money given by lobby are extremely effective on the decisions and actions of the government and how they can favor a certain kind of food rather than another, without thinking about the interest of individuals. Another recent episode that proves how lobby influence food politics in the United States is given by the actions of some Soda companies. This companies have lobbied actively against the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity made in 2010 by Michelle Obama’s who started the so called “Let’s Move Campaign” aimed to end childhood obesity within a generation.  

This campaign include several interventions such as more informative food labels in schools, restrictions on misleading health claims, limits on sodas and snacks sold in school’s vending machines and cafeterias, and finally a request of a minimal amount of vegetables for children, and food safety standards. In this case to oppose the campaign and to protect their own interests soda industries focused on the power of lobby and invested heavily in advertisements on new website and created a new campaign that focused on the “freedom of choice”.\footnote{Marion Nestle, \textit{Food Politics}, “ Why regulate? Because it works”, \textit{Author’s blog}, (updated 10 April 2013) \url{http://www.foodpolitics.com/tag/food-industry-regulation/}.}
The obesity task force proposed to tax sodas and the American Beverage Association lobbied to “oppose proposals to tax sugary beverages” at the federal level. Reports had shown that soda industry is still spending more than $2 million to defeat the soda tax ballot initiative.

3.3 Co-opting Nutrition Professionals

Another way in which companies influence dietary advice of people is through co-opting experts. As an implicit corporate strategy they go right to the hearth of nutrition as profession; food companies engage nutritionists as allies in various ways, some evident, some not.\textsuperscript{144} The core of this strategy is to provide information and founds to academic departments research institute and professional societies. Important food companies support conferences, meetings, journals and others activities. Some of nutrition professionals depend on that support and some actively search it. An example of this strategy is given by journals and journals supplements. Nutrition societies publish journals and supplements to journals; these are often expensive to produce and usually corporate sponsorships helps to reduce the cost.

The journal of nutrition and education has 8 corporate patron friends who make some annual financial contribution to support the journal. Some sponsors of the journal include companies such as Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Monsanto, Roche Vitamins, Sugar Association and others like baby food, vitamin supplements and genetically modified corps.\textsuperscript{145} All multinational companies, even if they produce and sell unhealthy food, are extremely powerful and able to overcome with their influence.


The authority that this sponsor exercise over this journal is remarkable and researches and drug company sponsorship have shown an high correlation with publication of articles favorable to sponsor’s products. Moreover it is proved that nutrition journal supplements tend to highlight the benefits of particular foods or diets in which the sponsor have interests. In this case, is evident that the interests of the consumer is absent and hide behind the journal profit and the interest of the sponsor who exercise his power though money.

Nutrition societies to generate their income always seek corporate sponsorship in every occasion. It is common that food, beverage and supplement companies buy space at exhibits, underwrite coffee breaks, place advertisements in program books. This phenomenon which has no limits in the United States can be easily explained with the example of the debate of food biotechnology that took place at one of the American Dietetic Association’s annual convention. The association offered meals, hotel expenses, and airfare to the participants all paid by Monsanto, the most important U.S. food producer of genetically modified corps. In this case Monsanto was obviously “buying influence” and the associations intrinsically allow the food producers to do that. In this field, sponsorship is considered so helpful and strong that can have remarkable consequences. For example a study made on pharmaceutical industry practices has reported that physicians who accepted travel founds, gifts or meal from some drugs companies, or who attend conferences sponsored by them are more oriented to write prescriptions for the sponsor’s medications. To avoid this kind of influence, nutritionist should refuse sponsorship and invitations to attend at sponsored meeting.

Another example in which the interest of consumer and the real “identity” of food is hidden behind others interest is given by the actions undertaken by the American Hearth Association.\textsuperscript{147} The Association who had promoted for a long time low-fat and other dietary approaches to prevention of coronary hearth disease decided to raise funds by labeling some foods “hearth-healthy”. The association started to identify foods that met certain standards for content of fat, saturated fat, sodium and cholesterol with a logo that was showing a red heart with a white check mark and the words ”America Heart Association Tested & Approved”.

The plan of the association was to collect fees from food companies that made approved products, and at the same time benefit from company advertising and promoting of the partnership.\textsuperscript{148} After this proposal there was an immediate opposition from USDA officials who claimed that identifying single foods as heart-healthy distorted basic principles of good nutrition, which depend on overall dietary patterns. Officials of the U.S. Food and Drug administration were also worried that the “Hearth Check” could interfere with the agency’s efforts to develop new labeling rules.\textsuperscript{149} However the American Hearth Association invited 2000 producers of margarines, crackers to apply for endorsement. Each one had to pay a fee for testing of the amount of $40,000, plus an educational fee of $5,000. The association affirmed that the association thanks to this program had the chance to reach millions of Americans with a health message. On the other hand the food companies protested and retained the program “an extortion


racket”. At the same time, federal agencies affirmed that the Heart Check label would be misleading and official of the US Food Drug Administration express that they had serious reservations about the means that the association had chosen to meet those ends and that they believed that the program did not represent the kinds of foods that ought be promoted to achieve healthy hearts and that the program will increase consumer confusion and obstruct any comprehensive solution to the food labeling program.

In 1990 the first foods “approved” by the association appeared on shelves: Promise margarine, Colavita olive oil and C&W frozen vegetables. Also some nutrition scientists were against the program, they retained that the program gave the wrong impression that margarine is an hearth-healthy food which clearly is not. The message that was given was that every food that was labeled and approved from the association was good and what was not is bad, considering that fresh food is never labeled can be a further proof of the misleading intentions of the association.150

At the same time the legal staff of seven states and two nutrition societies wrote to the Food and Drug Administration opposing the program. Consequently two-thirds of the companies that had joined the program withdrew from participation. In April of 1990 the association finally decided to end the program and returned the fee that it had collected.151 The association did not give up the idea and tried again successfully in 1993. The association started again to collect initial fee and renewal fee from different food companies and the result was that the brand Kellogg’s had

more than 50 products carrying the America Hearth Association seal of approval and the company affirmed that was pleased to provide consumers with guidance on selecting hearth-healthy foods. Among this food there were unlikely items such as Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes and Fruity Marshmallow Krispies.

In 1997, 55 companies were participating with 650 products and the current product required a $7,500 each product and $4,500 for renewals, with a discount if 25 products would be submitted in one year. The rules preclude endorsement of dietary supplements, medical foods and products owned by tobacco companies with the result that Kellogg’s Cocoa Frosted Flakes a product extremely high in sugar content that was considered “hearth smart” even if the post equivalent was not (the company is owned by Philip Morris). The program led also to nutritionally absurd advertisements and even if the association claimed to use good purposes, the program raised questions about credibility.

3.4 Checkoff Programs and the Power of Public Relations

Besides food interest groups which gain access and exert influence upon elected officials through donations of hard and soft money there are some methods less visible that involve lobbying activities and officials of federal agencies\(^\text{152}\). This kind of lobbying involves forming friendships, doing favors and the so called “soft-ball” methods, used by food companies to promote product sales and discourage unfavorable regulations.

An example of the friendlier forms of influence exercised by food companies occurs through “checkoff”\(^\text{153}\).

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The purpose of a commodity checkoff program is to promote generic commodities produced by the U.S. agricultural industry. These government-sponsored programs impose mandatory assessments on commodity producers and processors which are in turn, used to fund programs that are meant to increase demand for sales of the covered commodities.\textsuperscript{154}

A checkoff program collect funds from producers of a particular agricultural commodity and uses the funds to do research and promote a specific commodity. Checkoff programs are used to improve the market position of a product, to expand markets and to increase the demand.

To promote their sales, food companies induced Congress to pass a collection of law that require the producers of certain commodities among dairy products, beef, eggs, milk and peanuts to deduct or “checkoff” a fee from sales and use it for generic advertising and promotions.

These programs allow commodity groups to pool resources for advertising campaign, market research new product development and consumer education.

Through this program in 1996 U.S. food producers were contributing with more than $530 million annually to promote farm commodities. The three largest check-off founds were made for beef and soybeans; these generated in 1994 $228 million, $48 million respectively for national and state promotional activities. These programs have an interesting history. For example the beef check off when began in 1922 generated $31.000. In 1970s when beef consumption began to decline, the National Cattlemen’s Association started lobbying through a campaign that involved political actions committees, letters, writings and personal visits made by

beef producers to members of Congress. Cattlemen were extremely generous with campaign contributions and consequently this lobbying became especially effective. In addition cattlemen were distributed among many states along the nation, each of course with two senators and several representative. Even if the check-off legislation prohibits use of the funds for lobbying the difference between promoting a product to consumers and promoting it to lawmakers can be subtle. Some of the boards are closely affiliated with lobbyist groups and they share together office space, For example, the Cattlemen’s Beef Promotion and Research Board for many years shared an address with the National Cattlemen’s Association that is a trade association lobbying group, later in 1996 these group merged and formed the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association.

Check-off funds should be used for research and advertising but the majority of the funds are spent to convince consumers to choose one type of food product over another. For example meat and beef boards design campaign to increase the demand of red meats and other meat products. They try to encourage consumers to view beef as versatile, healthy and lower in cholesterol, moreover they educate doctors, nurses, dietitians, teachers and media about all the benefits of beef. At the same time the dairy boards promote the consumption of milk, butter and ice cream claiming that they are the best sources of calcium and other nutrients. Studies have shown that for a wide range of commodities there is a positive relationship between such campaigns and sales. The economists of the United States Department of Agriculture estimated that from 1984 to 1997 the campaigns raised the sales of milk and cheese.


The main goal of every checkoff programs is to increase commodity demand and raise the potential long-term economic growth.\textsuperscript{157}

The supporters of check-off claim that these programs benefit farmers and provide useful information to consumers. On the other hand, critics view the programs as increasing food prices giving the promotional costs on to consumers and causing competitions among commodity groups. From a nutritional standard point of view check-off programs promote products saturated and high in fat and cholesterol. Moreover the funds are used to influence nutrition and food policies that are only favorable to industry and misleading for consumers.

Another form of softer influence used by food industry is the one that promote the idea of “eat more” through public relations. Even if all kinds of businesses have strategies as a means of increasing sales, the worries concern the way multinational and American food companies use public relations to deviate criticism and to convince people that their products promote health.\textsuperscript{158}

To influence the public advertising is the most evident methods but there are other methods used that are largely invisible to the public. One example is given by Nestlé company who tried to calm down worldwide criticism of its promotion of infant formula as a substitute for breast-feeding. The company started a campaign to convince the government officials and health to accept certain marketing strategies, even in developing nations where this kind of formula can do more harm than good. The company started this campaign stating that this kind of milk was superior to any other food for infants. Before that this formula was invented an infant who could


not be breast-fed had little change of survival because milk from cows and other animals contains nutrients in a concentration to high to be digested and absorbed by human infants.

When the company in alliance with physicians invented this successful formula they began marketing the products not only to mothers who needed it but also to those who did not.

By the late 1920s medical researches demonstrated that the infants who were fed with condensed evaporated milk had levels of physical growth similar to those who were fed with breast milk. Later in 1950s, U.S. formula companies began to market their product more aggressively and consequently, they quickly spread all over the country.\textsuperscript{159}

The sales of this formula elicited criticism, particularly in developing countries where bottle-feeding began to be associated with an increase in infant mortality. In 1930 for the first time the relationship between formula feeding and infant death first came to public attention, but this condition did not stop the company and in 1970 Nestlé was distributing 50 brands and 200 varieties of infant formulas in 100 countries.\textsuperscript{160} Soon after, doctors and pediatricians began to develop films, books and documentaries that were showing the tragic effects of formula among infants. They accused the industry of using public relations and advertising to make formulas appear superior to breast milk. They affirmed that the company had secret agreements with births centers to distribute free samples and dressing milk nurses in white uniforms and paying them to promote formula or sell it on commission. They were worried by the ways in which company advertisements specify that formula could be superior to breast milk. Some common advertisements included pictures of woman feeding their babies with statements like “Breast-


feed your baby needs a supplement, use our brand of powdered milk.\textsuperscript{161} Over the years the infant-formula had the attention of numerous authors who documented inappropriate marketing actions of government and industry. In 1977 some Americans activists started to protest against Nestlé, retaining the company responsible for a worldwide boycott. When the protests against the company increased and when the public recognition of the boycott raised, the company asked to the Senator Kennedy to take the matter to two relevant agencies of the United Nations: The World Health Organization (WHO) and to the United Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and ask them to make a meeting to establish guidelines that the company could live with.

During the time in which this meeting were developed, Nestlé worked secretly to convince delegates that the restrictions in infant-formula marketing practices would not be in the countries in which the company has the best interests, such as the third world countries.

In the meantime, UNICEF stated that the replacement of breast-feeding with milk powder was not particularly healthy, and that in Third World countries would lead to the death of about one and a half million children every year, due to problems related to the difficulty of sterilization of water bottle. For these reasons, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted on May 22, 1981, the International Code of Marketing of Breast, milk Substitutes, which consisted in international regulations on the promotion of breast milk substitutes, a list of no binding guidelines.

Delegates passed a Code in 1981 that was stating that governments should provide information about the superiority of the breast-feeding formulas and, draft measures that would control the

use of inappropriate marketing practices. The delegations adopted the code and only one country was dissent: the United States. The U.S. State Department’s official explained that the Code might violate the U.S. Constitution. Otherwise seemed more likely that the State Department instructed U.S. delegates to vote against the Code on response to a wide lobbying by U.S formula companies.

Later, to restore the company’s credibility Nestlé organized a unit in Washington D.C. and started to improve its public image and end the boycott. The public relations efforts that the company was using shifted to a less aggressive approach; it began to publishing newsletter and information about groups that refused to join the boycott. In addition formed alliance with other formula manufactures, with international health organizations both in industrialized and in developing countries. Moreover, it stated to collect reports on advocacy group, eliminated public discussion on the issue, and worked to exclude critics from decision-making processes.

However advocated remained skeptical and interpreted the data collected later by the commission as a demonstration of the violations of the Code. At the end the public relations efforts made by the company succeed and convinced most people that Nestlé had complied with the code and most of the boycott ended. In 1988 Nestlé introduced Carnation formulas into the U.S. market; for the first time started to advertise the product directly to the public and not with the pediatricians. The American Academy of Pediatrics objected against this action especially on the statement that direct advertising would encourage new mothers to choose this kind of

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formulas rather than breast-feed.\textsuperscript{164} In that year there was also the publication of a book named “\textit{Infant Feeding: Anatomy of a Controversy}” which contained chapters written by important international experts that agree to Nestlé’s version of the history.\textsuperscript{165} The contributions explained the company as genuine in his attempts to adhere to the Code and as wrongly targeted by advocates. Some retained that the book’s editor and the author were consultants to the company even if in the book there were no evident connections.

When in 1993 was clear that the Carnation formulas were not successful in U.S. markets, Nestlé accused the America Academy of Pediatrics of conspiring against them. With a change in administration, the United States finally joined the rest of the World and signed the international Code in 1994.

Considering this example it is clear that Nestlé which is the largest food company in the world has huge resources to influence the actions and opinions of people who work for national and international agencies. Its use of public relations and lobbies activities can be an extreme example of economic motives that hide the health problems and the interests of people and consumers, behind the interests of the multinational companies.

\textbf{3.5 Food Companies, Criticism and Lawsuits}

When public relations, advertising, arrangements with experts and the others efforts are insufficient to protect the sales environment, and food companies interests, food companies use more heavy-handed methods. To show that their products are not dangerous for health, safety


or environmental consequences and to protect their image, food companies sue critics for libel or other reasons.

Sometimes food companies turn to the courts to complain against private citizens who made critical comments about companies’ products. One example was the case of McDonald’s versus Greenpeace. In 1980, London Greenpeace, a small activist group, began to diffuse brochures titled: “What’s Wrong with McDonald’s? Everything They Don’t Want You to Know”. These brochures were explaining that the more that you discover about McDonald’s processed food, the less attractive it becomes. In addition, Greenpeace considered McDonald’s responsible for exploitation of food producers in developing countries, children and employees and for destroying rain forest, unhealthy food and torturing and murdering animals. Greenpeace explained that McDonald’s meat was responsible for 70% of all food-poisoning incidents and hormones, antibiotics and pesticides in animal feed. The point of this protest was not to turn McDonald’s in a vegetarian organization but to change everything about the system. McDonald’s, even if is a company so famous, popular, large and successful did not see the brochures just as a protest or as a presentation of an animal-rights agenda, but saw it as damage for the company and decided to interpret it as libelous. So McDonald’s sued five members of London Greenpeace in a case that now is known as “McLibel”.

Under the Britain’s law the defendants were required to prove that their statements were true. These case was so difficult and some of them were afraid to deal with such a big and powerful company, that three members

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apologized and McDonald’s dropped the charges against them. The trail against the others members that did not apologize began in 1994, and after hearing from 180 witnesses, among them many nutrition researches, and reviewing 60,000 pages of transcripts the judge concluded that they had not proved that the company destroys rain forests, exploit employees and poison the costumers. But the judge said also that the company sells meat products that expose people to a serious risk of food poisoning by the residues of antibiotic drugs, growth-promoting hormone drugs and pesticides.

The judge ruled also that they “exploit children” with advertising, they produce “misleading” advertising, and that they are responsible for cruelty to animals.

In 1999 the Court of Appeal made others rulings that it was fair to say that McDonald’s has low pay for employee, and stated that it is true that if people eat enough McDonald’s food, the diet may well become high in fat, with the very real risk of heart disease and the development of obesity. In spite of those statements the trial ended with a judgment in favor of McDonald's. The compensation to McDonald's amounted to £60,000, but it is estimated that the damage to the image and reputation of the company in the public eye was worth about £10 million.169

At the end of the court case, the Anti-McDonald's campaign began, and then the public attention turn to ethical issues related to McDonald’s marketing to children, to the products of the company high in calories, sodium and sutured fat. In this case, even if there were substantial proof and effective disposition against Mc Donald the company finally won. The multinational firm could not accept any criticism that would affect its own image and that could maybe cause a future a costumer’s loss.

Chapter 4: Food Companies And Children

4.1 Marketing to New Consumer: The Era of Kid Costumers

In response to competition, food companies are always looking for new strategies and politics to sell their products and, they always search for new marketing targets. They have began new campaigns aimed at ethnic minorities, at international audiences and also at young children. Marketers have always seen children as attractive costumers, but the attention to this group is particularly increased in recent years.

The reason are many, for example today children control a an increasing amount of money and they have more responsibility in making certain decisions. It is difficult to know exactly how much money they control but, in 1990s recent studies reported that children spend around $4.42 per week, for a total of more than $6 billion a year, and that they finally influence annual family spending decisions involving another $132 billion.\(^{170}\) The amounts controlled by children increase with age; it is reported that between the age of 7-12 they control $8.9 billion in spending money, and teenagers $120 billion. Overall children aged 6-19 years were thought to have influenced a staggering $485 billion in purchase decisions in 1999.\(^{171}\) The rise of the purchasing power in children can be the result of a variety of societal trends; first of all, the decreasing size of families permits parents to give more attention to their children, working and single parents are more focused on them, and the result is that children are more “spoiled “by food companies. Moreover, one consequence is that a lot of advertising messages reach even the youngest children. Even at an earlier age, children are able to recognize advertised brands and to


established firm preferences. Every young child can understand sales messages, distinguish one product from another and the purpose of money.

At the age of 7 or 8, most children are independent shoppers, they can ask information about the products that they want, and tell the other children about the shopping that they had.\footnote{McNeal Ju (1964), Children as Consumers, (Austin: University of Texas Bureau of Business Research:55-58).}

Most of the things that children love to buy are candy, soft drinks, ice cream and, fast food: those food particularly unhealthy, but more attractive because more enjoyable and tasty.

For these reasons, the kind of companies that direct their marketing to children are fast food companies and those that sell snacks and others food high in calories and fat.

Children influence a big proportion of the total annual sales of these kind of foods: 25% of salty snacks, 30% of soft drinks, 40% of frozen pizza, 50% of cold cereals and 60% of pasta.\footnote{Troiano Rp., Flegal Km., Kuczmarski Rj. (1995), Overweight Prevalence and Trends for Children and Adolescents, (Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine: 1085-1091).}

Because of these reasons, it is possible to understand why children of any age are irresistible marketing opportunity and why food companies are attractive by them and always develop new strategies to infiltrate in their every day life. Soft drinks companies usually target children from 8 to 12 year-old, McDonald’s has a web sites aimed specifically to children aged 8-13 and others fast food companies also are developing campaign for children.

To reach children of any age, food marketers have a lot of methods all very successful. The most visible, are advertising on television and on the Internet; but there are many others that are more hidden. The basic elements of advertising, for marketers researches are package design, pictures, typefaces, contents. Food companies defend their targeting of children in different ways and they retain their use of advertising to children as an expression of freedom of speech. Moreover, they
argue that advertising contributes to nutrition education and that no one food contributes to obesity, because the primary responsibility for determining dietary intake rests with parents. However there are many skepticism about these arguments for the reason that the food marketing to children is a huge business. Psychologists retain children advertising a manipulation of the young and a big business for food companies driven by money. Critics claim that is easy to demonstrate that advertising influences children’s’ brand preferences and even children can prove it, as shown by a research made in Oregon by eight-graders school children that won a science project.

The 13-year-old researchers asked their classmates to say whether they preferred to drink Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola, or a no advertised store brand of cola. All students answered the question choosing either Coke or Pepsi, none mentioned the store brand.

The researchers also asked their classmates to try samples of three colas that could not be identified visually.

The results were that the 73% were not able to identify their favorite cola taste, the 27% chose the unpopular store brand as best in taste. The conclusion was that most of people chose at the beginning Coca Cola and Pepsi because they are the most famous and advertised brand; but the reason of their choice had nothing to do with the taste of the drink. The impact of television advertising on children’s health, on their dietary habits, emotional state has been seen as a concern in recent year for the reason that children watch television for many

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175 Jackeson C, Peifer M. “The cola wars: does the media influence your choice of cola and can you taste the difference between different brands?” Science fair project, St. Ignatius elementary school, Portland, Oregon, May 25, 1999.
hours a day, and that programs have a lot of commercials advertisement and that most of the time they are repeated.

In 1990 a report found that the average child in the U.S. spent at least 22 hours weekly watching television. Today, children aged 2-7 watch about 11 hours of television each week, but those of 8-18 years-old still watch about 22 hours.

The drop in television viewing unfortunately does not mean that children have become more active, but they compensate the time using computers, going on the web or playing video games.

Recently there has been an increase in programs designed for the youngest children, for example, many television programs are linked to commercial products; teletubbies, a program for toddlers was sponsored by Burger King and Mc Donald’s who was delivering toys representing teletubbie’s characters. Marketers think that no child is too young enough to be targeted but that they can be exploit for companies’ interests.

Many years ago children’s television-advertising market was considered “soft”; it accounted just $750 million in 2005, but just after one year it had quickly hardened accounting $1 billion.\textsuperscript{176}

Prior to the age of 9 or 10, children cannot understand the difference between programs and commercial; apparently many children don’t see commercials different from the others television programs,\textsuperscript{177} this could be view for food companies and marketers an additional chance to infiltrate in their mind.

A research made in 2003 counted 225 commercial made on major network channels during Saturday morning hours; the number raised to 433 in 2006 and to 997 in 2008.

\textsuperscript{176} Center for Science in the Public Interest, Survey of advertising on children’s TV, press release, 2005.

Among these commercial 160 (71%), 264 (61%), and 564 (57%), respectively advertised: presweetened breakfast cereals, candy, fast food, cookies, sodas and chips and there was no a single commercial for fruits, bread, vegetables or fish.\textsuperscript{178}

The conclusion from this studies is obvious: television advertising works well and it affects caloric intake, health, fitness and social outlook of American children.

The advantage that television have on children’s’ behavior is wide, but today children have replaced some commercial programs with others on the web.

Internet has almost replaced television; by the late 1990s, one-third of American house had computers; this development created a huge market for advertising both for children and adults; around 12 million children aged 2-12 (25%) were online in 2000, the number grew to 32 million the next few years.\textsuperscript{179}

Today with this fast development of technology, places to advertise to children are unlimited for marketers; food companies put their logos on toys, clothing, games; they create magazines, distribute coupons, they add their logos on balloons.

For example, the M&M candy company offers a huge catalog of items such as toys, jackets, caps, they have opened stores all around the world; in addition, McDonald’s offers movie coupons, toys, cups and special toys.

Especially soft drinks company are interested in the approach to young consumers; for example Coca Cola puts its logo on a lot of items such as clothes, toys like Barbie doll, baby bottles and runs a chain of stores to sell them. In addition to this strategy, the Coca Cola company, for


example, sends copies of “Coke cards” to school officers, cheerleaders, sport participants, hoping that they will pass those extras to their friends.

Moreover, Pepsi-Cola, Coca’s major competitor, has planned many marketing programs, commercial through MTV and an entertainment web site to aggressively promote its products.¹⁸⁰

In the United States twenty-five years ago only few American companies like Disney, McDonald’s, toy makers and candy makers directed their marketing at children; today children are being targeted by phone companies, clothing store, restaurants chains and automobile companies.

In 1980s there was the explosion of children’s advertising; this era was called by one marketing expert “the decade of the child consumers” and the growth of children advertising has been implemented in order to increase not only the consumption of that time but also the future consumption. To understand how effective is commercial advertising, market research has shown that children can recognize a brand logo before they can recognize their own name.

For example, Camels, a cigarettes company was using cartoon character called Joe Camel in his advertising campaign.

A study conducted in 1991 by the American Association, found that the 70% of America’s six-year-old could recognize Joe Camel; the only character that was recognized with such a high percentage by children was Mickey Mouse.¹⁸¹

Recently can be observed a new phenomenon called “kid costumers” that concern children advertising.


The purpose of children advertising today has a specific goal that is to give them a specific reason to ask for the product.

Advertisers before trying to manipulate children’s behavior have to learn about their tastes; they conduct market researches and organize focus groups for kids even of two or three years old, they examine children’s artwork, stage parties and question children into the night, they goes to stores, fast food restaurants and to many places where children can be found, they focus on fantasy lives of young children to find the best advertisement and the right product, they observe their habits and educate them to become the perfect customer.

Dream research is essential; studies shows that at until the age of six, around 80 percent of children dream most of the times animals, this suggest that Disney’s animated characters and the Teletubbies have a great impact on children’s mind.\(^\text{182}\)

Although the web has become a source of particular importance today, television remains the most important primary medium for children’s advertising.

Marketers and Food Company will do whatever they can to encourage even the youngest children to ask for their products hoping that will become lifetime costumers. They are always trying new strategies, and to infiltrate in every aspects of their life. Another method that they have developed is to infiltrate in school, when children spend the most of their time every day.

4.2 Food Industries and School

Schools are important place where food companies can exercise their power. All children attend school; for these reasons, food companies view schoolchildren as both current and future customers.

Food Companies try to exercise their purchase power in various ways and one of these way is through television advertising. The most prominent intrusion of commercialism in school is represented by Channel One, an American television channel that is showed every day into school throughout the United States and viewed every day by 8.3 million of students. Two minutes of every program are dedicated to commercials. The private company responsible for Channel One provides for schools televisions sets and installation hardware for a total amount of $17,000. The commercials pay for the programming and food companies are particularly prominent among school advertising.

As seen before, kids are always attracted by food fat and high in salt. For these reason, the companies that usually sneak in this kind of market are those that sell snacks and fast food. With the infiltration of this kind of food the health of children is hidden behind the interest and the politics of this companies.

Some food companies that are advertised in school are especially those considered unhealthy and that sell fast food. We find among them: Domino’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Frito-Lay, Kraft, Nabisco, McDonald’s, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Nestle’ and Kellogg’s.

Although the United States is facing an obesity crisis that concerns also children and adolescents fast and unhealthy food are still served and sold in cafeterias and vending machines in many private and public schools. Even in the case that the schools just advertised fast food and does not sell it, this can be easily found nearby.
The rise in obesity in children and students has been accompanied by an increase in the number of food options made available for the whole school day.\textsuperscript{183} Researches show that expensive advertising campaigns often undertaken by fast food companies have encouraged the students to choose junk food rather than healthy food and vegetables. Moreover, researches shows that 20 percent of public schools sell branded fast food, especially in high schools. McDonald’s is often used as a sponsor in school’s team, masquerades are used as educational programs such as Pizza Hut’s “Book it” program, where children can read and gain information about Pizza Hut pizza and promotional items.

A study conducted in American schools has revealed that about 80 percent of schools have at least one fast food half a mile away. The fast food companies often consider important to establish a restaurant chain’s close to schools for the reason that this is the best way to stop a child while going to school for a snack, or a hamburger while he is going home or even for lunch, if he is allowed to leave the school.

The school food environment has a great impact on the eating habits of children and adolescents for the reason that they consume a large part of between 19 and 50 percent of their total daily calories at school.\textsuperscript{184} Food and beverages in schools are classified into two main categories; federal school lunch and breakfast programs and food sold outside the formal meal programs, particularly food and beverages sold outside of meals, foods sold in school cafeterias and in


places outside the canteen such as vending machines, stores, Snack Bar. This kind of category of food is called competitive foods because nutritionally compete with the school meal program. Recently also the World Health Organization has paid more attention to this phenomenon and, in addition to advertising on TV, feels responsible for the phenomenon spots present on the internet and unhealthy food that are sold or served in the American schools. The World Health Organization has pointed out that the promotion of junk foods has been recognized as one of the risk factors for the development of childhood obesity and other diet-related diseases.\textsuperscript{185}

The WHO therefore calls on governments to urgently greater controls on advertising campaigns made in schools of foods high in sugar, saturated fat and salt and pointed out that reforms are needed for school lunch program and the amount of unhealthy food sold out of school meals should be restricted. School policies and national health programs study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that 33 percent of elementary schools, 70 percent of middle schools and 89 percent had a high school shops, have vending machines in schools where students could buy food and drinks. The most common beverage sold are sports drinks, sodas, fruit drinks to (with chemical additives, not 100 percent juice), and the foods sold are higher-fat and salty snacks.

Since 2000, schools in the United States have improved the school-food environment; from 2000-2006, the percentage of school districts banning vending machines offering foods that are high in calories is decreased and schools that sell water in vending machines has increased 30-46

percent\textsuperscript{186}, and the percentage of schools that sell cookies, cakes and high-fat baked goods in vending machines has dropped 38-25 percent.

Data of the SHPPS\textsuperscript{187} 2006 show that even if some progress has been made, much more is needed. SHPPS 2006 gives a tremendous picture of the continued widespread availability of low-nutrition, snacks, and high-sugar foods in U.S. schools, especially high schools.

State agencies can dictate restrictions on the sale of all foods and beverages sold at schools participating in federal school meal programs. Since 2004, state legislative activity started to be active in the area of school nutrition due to concerns about childhood obesity.

Recently, 27 states have adopted competitive food policies that are more restrictive than those of the USDA 11 states have adopted taken legislative action to require higher nutritional standards than those who are the minimum USDA\textsuperscript{188} requirements;

In 2007, the Center for Science in the Public Interest published a report that analyzed all fifty states' school nutrition policies regarding foods sold outside school meals.\textsuperscript{189} The report showed that even if many states had reinforced their school nutrition policies, the changes, although positive, were fragmented and sequential. It concluded that the nation has many different policies addressing the nutritional quality of school foods and beverages and that two-thirds of states have no policies.


\textsuperscript{187} \textit{School Health Policies and Practices Study}.

With so many different standards and different amounts of fats, sugars, calories, and portion sizes, food companies will have difficulty formulating products and is difficult to create a healthy and controlled nutrition; the report emphasize that a uniform national policy is needed to establish nutrition standards in schools.

Many school districts are unwilling to enact policies that restrict competitive food offerings, being afraid of the possible consequences.

A systematic review of the literature analyzed seven studies, and the evidence suggests that most of the schools have been able to improve the nutritional value of foods without their changing overall revenue.\(^{190}\)

### 4.3 Soft drinks

The term “soft drink” refers to beverage that does not contain alcohol or, as according to the law, it can contain a maximum of 1%. Soft drinks are divided in “sparkling” with the presence of carbon dioxide, natural, or “functional” which contain ingredients that can encourage certain physiological functions.

In the list of the category of Soft Drinks can be found natural flavored iced tea, iced coffee, fruit and herbs.

The soft drink, called “functional”, contain salt supplements. The “low-calorie soft drinks” (which contain a lower intake of sugar) are obtained with low-calorie sweeteners, specified as "without sugar" or "soft light".

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The drinks called “Ace”, are characterized by the presence of vitamins: A, C, E, - usually associated with orange juice, carrots and other fruits.

Soft Drinks can be considered the quintessential of junk food, a food low in nutrient extremely unhealthy and linked to the raise of obesity.

A normal can for example contain about 1.5 ounces of sugar and 160 calories and a little else of nutritional value; for that reason, any other beverage, or water from a nutritional standpoint is a better option.

Moreover, soft drinks are a huge source of caffeine: a 12-ounce can of cola contains 45 milligrams of caffeine and more potent soft drinks can keep 100 milligrams.\(^{191}\)

Recent studies claim that they have a close connection with violent and aggressive attitudes. It appears that recent studies show how children and young people who drink a substantial amount of soft drinks containing this substance are more likely to assume aggressive attitudes.

Studies conducted by a group of American researchers, show that there is a lot of strong association between the two, but not a clear and proven cause and effect relationship between soda and violence.

The results of a study, published online derived from a research conducted on 1900 students in Boston shown that 43% of young people who consume more than 14 cans of soda a week claims to possess a firearm, opposed to the 23% that consumes less than a can of soda a week. The research reveals an association between soda and weapons even with a lower consumption of soda. Moreover, 33% of adolescents who consume 2 or 4 cans a week claims to carry a knife or a gun, and the same goes for 38% of young people who drink 5 to 7 cans a week.

There are also other links that bind the amount of soft drinks consumed and violence. About 27% of teenagers who drink 14 cans of soda a week admits taking violent behavior towards their partner. In addition, 59% of teenagers who drink 14 or more cans a week have violent attitudes towards their peers, as opposed to 35% of those who only drink a can a week. Teenagers who consume a lot of soda seem to have aggressive attitudes also against their own brothers. Nutritionist wouldn’t be concerned about soft drinks if they were occasional treats, but they are produced and consumed in large quantities.

Soft drinks are a big business in the United States; they created $50 billion in annual sales just at the beginning of the 21 century. Two companies dominate this business: Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, who share a competition for market that is known as the “Cola Wars”.

In 2000 Coca Cola sold worldwide 160 brands of soft drinks in 200 countries for $19.8 billion of profits; Coca Cola held a 44% market only in the United States.192 PepsiCo held around a 30% share of the U.S. market; both companies were doing well in that time, but the market of soft drinks started to expand really fast and in the late of 1990s both companies wanted to increase their incomes.193

To expand his sales Coca-Cola used the most evident marketing strategy: advertising. Coca-Cola global advertising budget reached the amount of $1.6 billion in 2002; In 2008 the company spent in the United States alone $867 million for advertising; $174.4 million for Coca-Cola beverages, $68.4 million for Sprite, $41.4 million for Minute Maid, and $17.6 million for PowerAde.194

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In addition, Coca-Cola put his logo where can be easily seen by large number of people; Coca-Cola sponsored the Olympic games since 1928 and many local sporting events. The company gives away $12 million annually for educational programs and scholarships.195 These combinations of activities over the years have firmly established Coca-Cola as an American icon.

Soft drinks companies look for consumers especially among younger children; their strategy is to establish brand loyalty early in the consumer’s life; some soft drink companies license their logos to makers of infant-feeding bottles. The public relations of the company explain that the logos on the bottles are made to “be fun and enjoyable”.

Moving up in age targets, PepsiCo said explicitly that its strategy is to expand soft drink consumption among children aged 6-11.

An common way to reach the younger group is through schools: soft drinks companies decided to sell their products through vending machines in college campuses, universities, elementary, middle and high schools.

At the core of the strategies used by soft drinks companies there are pouring-rights contracts. These are lucrative contracts made between school districts and soft drink companies for exclusive right. These contracts usually involve a large sum of payments that will be delivered to school districts and additional payments in return for exclusive sales of one company’s products in vending machines and at schools events.196


These contracts, can be seen as an elicit brand loyalty among young children who have a lifetime of purchases ahead of them; they are particularly questionable because they place schools in the position of "pushing" soft drink consumption among children. "Pouring rights" contracts deserve the attention from public health professionals concerned about the nutritional quality of children's diets.

In 2000 about 200 school districts were participating in such agreements. A stable base of sales in schools for drinks companies is a clear benefit. The results of these agreements can be seen also in advertising through display of company logos on vending machines, cups, brochures, sportswear and school buildings. With these methods all children at school, even those that are too young or too difficult to reach by usual advertising methods, are constantly exposed to logos and products. Using a single brand soft drink companies try to create loyalty among young people who have a lifetime of soft drink purchases ahead of them.

Moreover, soft drinks companies have enormous financial advantages in this business; for example water and sugars are not expensive ingredients and, the contracts usually charge $1.00 for a drink purchased on vending machines, or $24 for 12-ounce cans. Even taking the initial lump-sum payments and sales taxes into consideration, soft drink companies were unlikely to lose money on those deals. A lot of analysis made on school districts found out that students drink so many sodas that a big problem was to keep vending machines full. More recently


contracts deal with larger amounts of soda. In 2001, soft drink companies have placed 20-ounce sodas in vending machines and have priced them $1.00-1.50. This was a clear message that was encouraging children to “eat more”.

It is easy to understand why administrators of some school districts find these contracts irresistible. In recent years the American population aged, the gap between rich and poor is bigger and the tax for public schools has decreased. Schools at least are able to provide basic educational needs. So schools, make these kinds of contracts with Coca-Cola, Pepsi, or Dr. Pepper to have more money.

The Center for Commercial Free Public Education in 2000 identified 200 school districts in 33 states that had made these kinds of contracts. For example in 2013, the North Syracuse Central School District in New York state made a contract with Coca Cola which include a 10-year agreement that requires all 10 of the district’s schools and preschool programs which include a population of 10,000 students, to use Coca-Cola products in all vending machines, at booster club activities, at school sponsor events and at all athletic contests. The contract include that the company install, maintain and stock almost 135 vending machines in the school of the district, and the company guarantees a payment of $1.53 million, $900,000 upon signing and the rest distributed in annual installments of $70,000. With the assistance of a state legislator, the district was able to influence this contract to have state aid for $7.00 million sports facility for the high school.199 The most doubtful aspect of these contracts is that they link returns to the companies and to the schools to amounts that students drink. Most schools use these funds for sport facilities, sound system, furniture, computers and sometimes scholarship. These kinds of

contracts include additional benefits for consumption levels that surpass quotas, so, for these reason school administrators are in the position of pushing soft drinks to faculty, staff, and students.

Many critics are against these kind of contracts but, school officials justify these actions stating that vending machines already exist on school and that soft drinks are already diffused all around the country, adding that children are not forced to drink sodas. But it is obvious that these contracts encourage greater consumption of soft drinks and children that buy soft drinks are less likely to eat nutritious foods like those offered in school meal programs.

4.4 History of Soft Drinks Regulations

Sale of soft drinks in school are permitted as a result od some amendments of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 which modify provisions od the National School Lunch act of 1946. The history of the regulations of sales of soft drinks and other “junk food” in school, is part of a history of 50-year saga of annual tinkering with the rules that govern the school lunch and school breakfast programs. The years spend on decide about the regulations for sales of soft drinks and other “competitive” foods show how the commercial interests prevail on congressional decisions about matters that affect the health of children. For more than 30 years, groups such as school food service officials, advocates for children’s health, nutritionists, in order to protect the nutritional and economic integrity of school’s meal programs and the interests of children, have tried to restrict sales of competitive food in public schools. For many years, soft drink companies opposed any restrictions against the sell of soft drinks in schools; there has been an historical conflict in which the advocates saw the regulations as a promotion of commercial interests of

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soft drink companies and a damage to children health. In 1960s vending machines selling soft
drinks and snacks could already be found at schools. School officials, parents, health authorities
could immediately recognize that these kinds of foods were competing with federal meal
program.\textsuperscript{201}

Therefore, the Congress asked the USDA to make some restriction on the amount of candy bars,
soft drinks and snacks sold in schools. In 1970 Congress passed amendments that allowed USDA
to stop sales of competitive foods in school cafeterias during lunch periods but permitted the
selling of these foods in cafeterias snack lines.\textsuperscript{202} After the establishment of these rules, soft
drinks companies lost income and so did the schools. To protect the profits that derived from
sales of snacks food, schools officials together with soft drink companies started to pressure the
Congress to allow the selling of competitive foods at any time and place also in cafeterias during
lunch periods. The proceeds reached the schools and were approved by student’s organizations.
Congress was induced also to remove the USDA’s authority to regulate competitive foods and
snacks. These decisions deregulated competitive foods, showing that finally profit had won over
nutrition.\textsuperscript{203} After 1972, sales from vending machines increased in most of the schools, and
Congress considered sales of competitive foods as an abuse of school meal program and restored
the authority of the USDA. After that, Congress demanded and received guarantees from the
USDA that the agency would not ban competitive foods but would only restrict sales of soft
drinks and other foods that do not meet minimal nutritional values. Having back its authority the

\textsuperscript{201} General Accounting Office of the United States (1996), \textit{School Lunch Program Role and Impacts of
Private Food Service Companies: Report to Congressional Committees}, (Michigan: University of

\textsuperscript{202} Ralston K., Newman C., Clauson A., Guthrie J., \textit{The National School Lunch Program Background,

\textsuperscript{203} Marion Nestle, (2001), \textit{Safe Food: The Politics of Food Safety (California Studies in Food and
USDA tried to ban sales of foods of minimal nutritional value just until after the end of the last lunch period. This plan created a lot of furious public comments so, the USDA withdrew it and solicited more input. In 1979, the USDA proposed again that idea, but this time, identifying the foods with minimal nutritional values in those with less than 5% of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for right nutrients, such as protein, vitamin A, ascorbic acid, niacin thiamin, calcium, and iron, per 100 calories or per serving. This meant that the restriction would be applied only to carbonated soft drinks, certain candies, water ices and chewing gum. Also this proposal had received more than 3,000 comments against it, some of them were directed to PepsiCo, to its employees telling that they suggest to the USDA that its health objectives would be better achieved through nutrition education. Even if there were these pressure, the USDA held firm and, in 1980 there were others rule that continued to ban vending of soft drinks until the end of the school lunch period. In the early 1980s, after the election of a more conservative administration, soft drinks companies started a more aggressive tactic. They decided to take the USDA to court stating that their regulations were unfair and that they represented an abuse of jurisdiction. The complain was dismissed by the court affirming that that vending machines could undermine health of children. Soft drinks producer appealed the decisions and won.204 The Appeals Court stated that the intent of Congress was only the one to control sales of competitive and junk food during meal service and that the USDA had no right to restrict the time and place of sales of competitive foods even those of low nutritional value. But the Court allowed that competitive foods other than those with a low amount of nutritional value, could be sold in the cafeterias, during meal service if this would be approved by students groups. This decision meant

that, USDA could ban the selling of soft drinks only in the cafeterias during meal service periods and had to allow sales of sodas at any another time or place. Consequently, this ruling stimulated sales of competitive food, but after a short time some individual actions were undertaken and leading advocacy groups used their efforts to restrict such sales. They encouraged senator Patrick Leahy and the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, to introduce a bill to ban the sales of soft drinks and competitive foods.²⁰⁵

One consequence was that Coca-Cola opposed the bill and created a letter-writing campaign among, superintendents, school principals, and coaches. After have received this letter, they where scared to lose their income generated by vending machines. Soon after, school principals opposed the bill stating that it could interfere with their ability to bring income for some activities.

These objections convinced the Congress to keep the permissive regulations. Later in 1994, the School Lunch Act passed and the Senate Committee suggested that the USDA should developed a “modern language” to restrict sales of soft drinks and other foods in elementary schools before the end of the last lunch period. In addition Congress suggested to the USDA to send a letter to secondary school reminding them that federal laws restricted profit-making sales of soft drinks in food service areas during lunch periods.²⁰⁶

When advocacy groups wanted that USDA imposed harder controls on vended and competitive foods, officials explained that Congress did not give the authority to the agency to regulate the sale of foods outside the food service area.


The 1994 amendments clearly invited state and local school authorities to adopt more restrictions on sales of soft drinks and competitive foods and some have done so. But, in the majority of cases rules are routinely ignored. One example could be that soft drinks companies often donate sodas to schools for free distributions during school meal periods. Moreover a survey, made in some high school in Minnesota shown that 95% of the schools had vending machines left unlocked and accessible during school hours, the 29% were unlocked the whole day long and the 15% were open during the lunch period, regardless state regulations that discourage the sales of soft drinks during lunch periods.  

A nationwide survey had shown that 20% of schools in the United States gave students access to snacks and drinks during lunch periods and that two thirds are allowed to serve competitive foods during school meals. These studies clearly prove the violations of the regulations.

4.5 The 2010 Dietary Guidelines and the Let’s Move Campaign

The Election of President Barack Obama in 2008 brought an unexpected bonus for food policies. The First Lady, Michelle Obama decided to use her position and to focus on childhood obesity through a campaign called “Let’s Move”, which she announced on February 2010. That day, the president designated senior officials of federal agencies to a White House Task Force that had an important and ambitious goal which consisted of developing an action plan to solve the problem of childhood obesity within a generation. One of the main objectives of the campaign was to improve nutrition information for the public and to provide dietary guidelines for Americans through easily, simple messages for consumers.

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During the subsequent year, the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Service, after pressures made by the White House published two documents related to nutrition information: the Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee and the 2010 Dietary Guidelines.

In June 2010 the advisory committee’s was released and was different from the previous one because for the first time was addressed to an American public now largely overweight and obese, therefore used the USDA’s developed Nutrition Evidence Library to answer scientific questions and it considered the total diet in marketing specific recommendations.208

From 2005 on, the guidelines were strictly “science-based” but this new one organized the scientific review into more than 50 questions, covering a wide range of topics such as the number of nutrients and dietary components consumed by the public, the dietary intake associated with childhood adiposity and the health effects related to consumption of chocolate. For every question, the committee wrote conclusion, review and implications.

Moreover, the report introduced SoFAS-solid fats and added sugars and explained that, for example, the reducing intake of SoFAS can lead to a reduction of calorie intake.209

Added sugars refers to any type of sugar, that is added to a food before selling it; solid fats, are mainly from animal foods, but also from hydrogenated vegetable oils containing trans fat. Moreover, for the first time the report advised to reduce intake of sodium but it does not suggest to reduce the intake of salty snacks and prepared food.


Furthermore, it recommended to improve school meals, offering financial incentives to purchase healthier foods, providing better household food security, promoting environmentally sustainable food production and encouraging restaurants and the food industry to offer foods that are low in sodium.

After that, the food industry lobbying began within hours of the report’s release. Some trade associations from the salt, meat, and soft drink industries protested about the science and warned of unintended consequences if the new guidelines adopted these recommendations and pretended to see the research used by the committee.

The next step came when the agencies had to convert the committee’s report into guidelines that are known as “the policy document”. These were released on January, 2013. After the publication, the innovation was that it included simple, direct messages for consumers that were including for example the refreshing direct advice to enjoy food, reduce portion size, and to cut down sugary drinks.

The 2010 guidelines contain 29 recommendations organized into four sections: balancing calories, “eat less” components, “eat more” components, healthy eating patterns.210

The “eat more” messages refer to vegetables, seafood, nuts, beans and the “eat less” guidelines refer to nutrient such as sodium and SoFAS and regulated the SoFAS into foods such as: sodas, sport drinks, fruit drinks, energy drinks, cake, cookies, deserts, ice cream, candy.

Finally, the guideline describe healthy patterns for diets ranging from 1.000 to 3.200 calories a day and suggested a reduction of sodium to 2.300 or 1.500 milligrams per day.

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Another useful innovation was the inclusion of diet plans for vegetarians and vegans, and the policy document pays attention to the need for the environment changes. It notes that the food environment affects the food choices of individuals, and it urged policy makers to act to improve access to healthy foods; to empower people with more nutrition literacy cooking skills, gardening skills and to reduce obesity. Finally the guidelines call for action to improve school meals, to increase physical activity and to reduce television and computer screen time.

Moreover after these documents, was the First Lady Michelle Obama who put a lot of efforts into combat childhood obesity. In 2010 she developed her ambitious nationwide campaign Let’s Move.

After three months from its creation, the Task Force released its report and set a “four pillar” agenda that included: to empower the parents and caregivers, providing healthy food in schools, improve the access to affordable and healthy food and to increase physical activity in schools.

Moreover, the Task Force included many recommendations such as: food labels, calorie labels in restaurant menus, farm-to-school programs, nutrition standards for school meals, school gardens, economic helps for the production of fruits and vegetables.

After two years the campaign had significant progress, in fact the Hunger-Free Act of 2010 was passed. These Act increased funding for an improved access to school meals and for more salad bars into schools.

Moreover others goals have been reached; since 2010 which, by law, the prepared food in school cafeterias must meet certain nutritional standards, in particular, the content in fat, sugar and salt.

One aim of the campaign include that even the contents of the foods served from vending machines will be placed under control: dried fruits, crackers and cereal bars should take the place
of marshmallows and chocolate. The health advocates, to discourage the consumption of "junk food" are using the same approach in the fight against smoking: educate children from an early age, in the hope that they grow up healthier, and maybe teach good eating habits and parents alike.

In particular, the experts said they were satisfied with the ban on selling drinks so-called "for sport," which actually contain a lot of sugar, but students misidentify for healthy, just because associated with the figures of footballers or tennis players.

Let’s Move encountered many food industry opposition to initiatives that could have changed food purchasing patterns; the food industries had succeeded in delaying federal standards for marketing foods to children. Even if something is already changing the campaign has to work hard and face the interests of the food company to achieve the predetermined goals.

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Conclusions

In developed countries people are lucky to live in a free market economy that offer and abundant food supply at low cost. What people choose to do with this supply is a matter of personal responsibility, but people do not make food choices in vacuum, they select diets in a marketing environment in which millions of dollars are used to manipulate their choice.

Fast food restaurants and their aggressive marketing campaigns targeted adults, youth and other vulnerable groups, trying to reach them in the best possible way.

People may believe to make informed decisions about food choice, but is difficult to know and to recognize the actions of the industry’s behind the scenes, their efforts in Congress, federal agencies, universities, courts and schools.

Food companies lobby government and agencies, and they are enmeshed with experts on nutrition and health. Although the food industry frames such tactics as promoting individual liberty and free will, its real purpose is “trade and unrestricted profits”.

Recently, people in the United States are increasingly recognizing the dangerous results of the “eat more” food environment obesity rates among adults are slightly decreased from 2011 to 2012 in every state and obesity rates among poor young children declined in 18 states from 2010 to 2012. Moreover, in January 2014 top food companies announced that they had fulfilled their promise to sell 1 trillion fewer calories in 2012. Indeed the companies surpassed their goal, reducing the number of calories by 6.4 trillion. Moreover, on January 16th 2014 America’s agriculture department published a report showing that Americans are eating slightly more healthily.

By 2010 the need for government action to reverse obesity trends had become evident, and there are finally some optimistic signs of change. Healthier foods are widely available than years ago,
vast numbers of people, old and young are interested in food and food issues and want to do something to improve food access and health. The first lady is using her office trying to improve the nutrition and the health of children. Since 2012 there are more school serving healthier meals, more farmer markets and a lot of young people going into farming, more concern about farm animal production and more attention to local.

Many communities are engaged in efforts to improve school meals, reduce childhood obesity and align agricultural production with health goals. These local efforts could well prove able to counter public relations.

In the last year obesity rates are slightly decreased, but there is a lot left to do to improve the condition of the country: the efforts already made to put new food politics in action are extremely important for the country’s future and deserve the support and the strength of every single person.
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