

Food Product DESIGN™

Beating Those Unsightly Bell Curves

Food Product Design

March 5, 2007

Everybody loves to blame factors outside their scope of influence for society's ills. When Johnny couldn't read, we blamed the schools and teachers. And when Johnny got fat, once again, the frothing masses called for the eradication of all "junk food" from school vending machines and cafeteria lines.

Of course, any sound-minded person would scoff at such simpleminded finger pointing (wouldn't they?), but highly publicized studies reinforcing such notions don't hurt. One such study by Ohio State University recently hit the press tickers, showing that, despite shrinking or disappearing physical education programs, kids tend to gain more weight during the summer than during the school year (see <http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news/ng.asp?n=74638&m=1FNU301&c=bbuvwkzgcpcxbyl>; results are poised for publication in the April issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, <http://www.ajph.org>). Swapping video-game controls for baseball gloves and soccer balls would likely do much to help this situation, but that's a bit outside the grasp of the food industry (although we can reformulate popular snack foods to carry fewer calories, less fat, more vitamins and minerals, etc.). Of course, many societal factors play into the equation that results in more kids leading largely sedentary existences, and we need to do everything within our power to reverse this trend.

In related scholastic happenings, earlier today, a number of industry concerns on both the non- and for-profit side of the fence—including General Mills, The Coca-Cola Company, USDA, the Food Research and Action Center, Share our Strength, and the Alliance to End Hunger—gathered to discuss a new "got breakfast" initiative that includes new grants for school-breakfast programs and a new publication highlighting the benefits of said programs. According to a release that crossed my desk, it "summarizes studies and the opinions of foodservice directors across the country that prove classroom breakfast raises test scores, reduces health issues and doubles, and in some cases triples, participation numbers in the federal School Breakfast Program." (See <http://www.gotbreakfast.org> for more on this line of inquiry.) Not to morph into a ninja of the obvious and mundane, but skipping breakfast is just about one of the best ways kids can negatively impact their health and performance at school (see http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?db=pubmed&cmd=Retrieve&list_uids=17116514 and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/29/AR2005082901415.html> for two relatively recent examples).

Looks like we can kill at least two birds with one stone by feeding more kids their oatmeal and cereal flakes at school—improving both health and academic performance. Now if we can just get them to eat breakfast during the summer, and perhaps run around the house a few times...

Mom?... Dad?...