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A Partnership for Public Health: *Branded Food Products Database*

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Abstract

Assessing the nutritional health of Americans depends on comprehensive data regarding the nutrient composition of foods. USDA, ILSI North America, and the ATIP Foundation have formed a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to enhance public health by augmenting the USDA National Nutrient Database with nutrient composition of branded and private label data. A PPP provides the framework to convene the expertise to compile this nutrient data, secure the private sector engagement in providing this information, obtain the broad-based constituent funding necessary for maintenance, and provide timely information for nutrition, agricultural, and diet-related health policy on the nutrient composition of the food supply.

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1. Introduction

Assessing the nutritional health of the American people depends on accurate and comprehensive data regarding the nutrient composition of commonly consumed foods. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) maintains the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference (SR) which is considered the “gold standard” for food compositional data. It is used by government agencies, academic researchers, policy makers, and the food industry and it provides the foundation for many other databases. Yet, there are fewer than 8,500 entries and only a fraction of these are branded food items. In 2013, there were more than

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43,844 individual items in the average U.S. supermarket.¹ Although the food industry has compositional data for their own products, very little of that data is publicly available through the USDA National Nutrient Database.

On October 28, 2011, President Barack Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum that directed agencies to develop public-private partnerships (PPPs) in areas of importance to the agency's mission.² In response, Dr. Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) and Chief Science Officer of the USDA, developed multiple initiatives, including one to augment the USDA National Nutrient Database with compositional data on branded food products. As part of the USDA's response to the Presidential Memorandum, the USDA, the Agricultural Technology Innovation Partnership (ATIP) Foundation, and the North American Branch of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI North America) established "A Partnership for Public Health: *Branded Food Products Database*" (hereafter referred to as the Partnership) in January 2013; the stated purpose of the PPP is to enhance the public's health, which is significantly dependent on diet, through increased knowledge of the nutritional content of the nation's food supply. This Partnership will ensure that this information will be made publically available to those who utilize such data, including federal agencies, the research community, proprietary databases and end users, and the food industry. The USDA's previous efforts to accomplish this goal on its own had seen limited success, which is not unexpected given the volume and fluidity of branded food products in the U.S. marketplace.

The USDA interacts with members of the PPP through formal agreements. In addition, it interacts with the ATIP Foundation through a seven-member Liaison Committee which functions as the formal "portal" for communication between the USDA and the ATIP Foundation. The Liaison Committee serves three primary purposes: (1) to ensure the independence of USDA research activities, (2) to maintain mission relevance, and (3) to align the purpose of research and mission with the work of the ATIP Foundation. The Liaison Committee consists of the four Deputy Administrators of ARS programs that manage the research portfolio of ARS, the Assistant Administrator for Technology Transfer, and a representative of the eight Area Directors that supervise the execution of all ARS research. The seventh member is the Under Secretary for Research Education and Economics (REE), whose responsibilities include oversight of the four agencies that comprise REE: ARS, National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Economic Research Service (ERS), and National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

The ATIP Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity that was formed as a host for technology transfer and business facilitation and incubation. Its primary purpose is to serve as a catalyst for the adoption and commercialization of USDA research outcomes. The foundation achieves its purpose through the formation of PPPs, facilitating and enabling the integration of industry, academic, and government research and discovery with capital, talent, and know-how.

ILSI North America's involvement in the PPP stemmed from its work on a publication on best practices for the establishment and operations of research PPPs.³ The Partners have modeled the governance and operations of the Partnership on these 12 principles (Figure 1).

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