

# Food Companies' Calorie-Reduction Pledges to Improve U.S. Diet

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**Abstract:** Heretofore, corporate voluntary pledges to improve the health of Americans have been linked neither to explicit measurable commitments nor to a framework for an independent evaluation. The Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (HWCF), whose members include 16 of the nation's leading consumer packaged goods food and beverage manufacturers, voluntarily pledged to collectively remove 1 trillion calories from their products by 2012 (against a 2007 baseline), and 1.5 trillion calories by 2015. The pledge is designed to reduce the calorie gap commensurate with the HWCF companies' role in the U.S. diet. To date, no system exists for documenting the nutritional and public health impacts of industry-led changes in the food supply on individual diets.

The current study represents a unique opportunity to understand how the consumer packaged goods food and beverage sector is changing and how these changes are associated with changes in the American diet. It presents data on national caloric sales from this sector, purchases of these goods by various subpopulations, and methods linking these to individual intakes of Americans. Findings show that HWCF companies accounted for approximately 25% of calories consumed in the U.S. in 2007 and that the 1.5 trillion-calorie pledge (about 14 calories/day/capita) accounts for 0.8% of the calories sold across all consumer packaged goods food and beverage brands in 2007. The authors hope that this evaluation will continue to create models and methods for demonstrating the effects of changes in the food supply on individual diets, particularly among those from vulnerable subpopulations.

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## Introduction

Reducing overweight and related consequences is a national priority. The important role of food companies in improving the food supply is not disputed.<sup>1–3</sup> Recently, pledges from consumer packaged goods food and beverage companies to reduce calories sold have created a need to understand how changes in this food sector affect U.S. diets.

The current U.S. food monitoring system does not adequately track brand-specific changes in food composition or sales to understand their unique impact. Presented here are baseline data and methods to monitor one set of pledges from these companies. Food and beverage companies globally have made numerous voluntary pledges and commitments to reformulate products, improve diet quality, and improve marketing practices targeting children.<sup>4–8</sup> Although scholars have attempted to delineate whether and how such voluntary efforts produce positive outcomes,

these evaluations have not tracked actual changes in diets.<sup>9–13</sup>

In this context, the voluntary pledge from the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation (HWCF) is unique. The HWCF is broad, including initiatives in schools, worksites, and the marketplace. In the marketplace, HWCF's focus is on "reducing or controlling calories while preserving or enhancing the overall nutrition of healthier product options."<sup>14</sup> Using 2007 as a baseline year, 16 major HWCF food-manufacturing companies pledged to collectively remove 1.5 trillion calories from the marketplace by 2015, with an interim goal of 1 trillion calories by 2012.<sup>15</sup> This target was based on the estimated HWCF company share (25% of total energy consumed in the U.S.) of the published estimates of the calorie gap needed to prevent excessive weight gain.<sup>16–18</sup> The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) committed to fund an independent evaluation of the HWCF marketplace pledge focused on the calorie reduction targets as well as the impact on U.S. child diets.

## The Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation Marketplace Pledge

Sixteen companies pledged to reduce calories sold in the U.S.: Bumble Bee Foods, LLC; Campbell Soup Company; ConAgra Foods; General Mills, Inc.; Kellogg Company; Kraft Foods, Inc.; Mars, Incorporated; McCormick &

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Company, Inc.; Nestlé USA; PepsiCo, Inc.; Post Foods/Ralston Foods, LLC; Sara Lee Corporation; The Coca-Cola Company; The Hershey Company; The J.M. Smucker Company; and Unilever. Their pledge includes all of their companies' food and beverage products with a barcode or Universal Product Code (UPC) sold through vending machines and in stores (grocery/food stores, drug stores, mass merchandisers, and convenience stores). Excluded products are listed in [Appendix A](#) (available online at [www.ajpmonline.org](http://www.ajpmonline.org)).

## Evaluation Overview

This paper provides the baseline benchmarks on which to evaluate the HWCF marketplace efforts. To track how marketplace changes relate to individual diets, the evaluation utilizes existing public and commercial data sets, each with their own strengths and limitations (see [Appendix B](#), available online at [www.ajpmonline.org](http://www.ajpmonline.org), for a comparison of these sources).<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the evaluation is composed of three distinct studies designed to answer the following questions:

Study 1: Did the HWCF companies reduce their **total calories sold** by 1 trillion between 2007 and 2012, and by 1.5 trillion between 2007 and 2015, and **what food categories were sources of the caloric changes**?

Study 2: What are the changes in **average daily calories purchased** and **top sources of calories purchased** from HWCF, non-HWCF, and private label products by U.S. households with children aged 2–18 years between 2007 and 2012 (and between 2007 and 2015)? Are the changes different for lower-income and race/ethnicity subpopulations at greatest risk for childhood obesity (African Americans and Hispanics)?

Study 3: What are the changes in **average daily calories consumed** and **top sources of calories consumed** from HWCF, non-HWCF, and private label products by U.S. children aged 2–18 years between 2007 and 2012 (and between 2007 and 2015)? Are the changes different for lower-income and race/ethnicity subpopulations at greatest risk for childhood obesity (African Americans and Hispanics)?

To ensure the highest scientific integrity and transparency, RWJF and the University of North Carolina Food Research Program (UNCFRP) established an independent Evaluation Advisory Committee of eminent scholars to provide scientific review and advice.<sup>20</sup> A critical dimension of all work by the UNCFRP and its collaborat-

ing groups, the committee, and RWJF, is full transparency in decisions regarding data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation for all three studies.

## Data Sources

For transparency and reproducibility of findings, the proposed evaluation does not utilize proprietary company data. Instead, the authors rely on existing data available either at no cost or for purchase by any research group.<sup>19</sup> To the extent legally permitted, the authors plan to make select data created through the evaluation publically available.

## Commercial Data Sources

**Nielsen Scantrack (consumer packaged goods sales data).** Nielsen Scantrack data from 2007, 2012, and 2015 will be used to track sales of HWCF products. These store-based scanner data provide records of weekly price, dollar sales, and units sold of all UPC transactions at participating grocery, drug, mass merchandiser, and convenience stores. These represent aggregate sales and are not linked to individuals.<sup>19,21</sup> Scantrack is a stratified systematic probability sample designed to measure consumer sales across 52 major markets and can be projected nationwide for the stores captured within its sample.<sup>19,21</sup> Sampling limitations are offset by combining these data with the Nielsen Homescan data discussed below.

**Nielsen Homescan (consumer packaged goods purchase data).** Nielsen Homescan data from 2000 through 2015 will be used for longitudinal analyses of purchases of HWCF products. Homescan contains detailed UPC-level information about household food purchases brought into the home and contains all UPC transactions from all outlet channels, including grocery, drug, mass-merchandise, club, supercenter, and convenience stores.<sup>19</sup> The data are collected daily by providing scanning equipment to a sample of more than 50,000 households each year from 2000 to 2015.<sup>22–24</sup>

**Nutrition Facts Panel consumer packaged goods nutrition data.** These data are the nutrition data found on food and beverage labels. Label information from each UPC (all macronutrients, other vitamins and minerals, ingredients)<sup>25</sup> is obtained from several commercial sources, the primary source being the Gladson Nutrition Database.

## Public Data Sources

**What We Eat in America (dietary intake data).** These data come from the dietary intake interview component of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Sur-

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