

November 3, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
House Committee on Education and the
Workforce
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert C. “Bobby” Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Education and the
Workforce
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Boozman, and Ranking Member Scott:

As organizations dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of Latinos across the country, we write to urge you to support the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) proposed evidence-based revisions to the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food packages. We are particularly supportive of the proposed update that would ensure that breakfast cereals purchased by WIC dollars contain a whole grain as the first ingredient.

USDA’s proposed improvements to the WIC food packages are based on the recommendations of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (National Academies). Grounded in science and evidence, the proposed changes advance access to healthy, safe, and affordable food and promote increased choice among WIC participants.

Latinos make up the largest group of WIC participants, with more than [2.7 million Latinos](#) enrolled in the program. The WIC program has demonstrated [significant success](#) in identifying nutritional deficiencies in vulnerable populations, including Latinos, and in providing access to foods with nutrients tailored for medically at-risk women and children.

As a public health program, WIC is positioned to address racial disparities in child and maternal health outcomes given its [high participation rates](#) among eligible Latinos. Previous updates to the food packages were shown to help [increase access to healthier foods](#) and overall diet quality for Latino WIC participants.

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

Implementing the National Academies' recommendation for whole grain breakfast cereals would significantly improve health outcomes for Latino communities facing disproportionately high rates of diet-related diseases. Limited access to healthy and affordable food contributes heavily to the [17% diabetes rate](#) among Latinos, more than double the 8% rate among non-Hispanic whites. More than [40% of Latino](#) children are overweight or obese, compared to 27% of non-Hispanic white children.

A large body of research shows that increasing consumption of whole grains, especially from breakfast cereals, substantially reduces diabetes and obesity risks:

- A Harvard study found that consuming one or more servings of whole grain breakfast cereal a day [lowered type 2 diabetes risk by 19%](#).
- Another study showed children who consumed 1.5 daily servings of whole grains were [40% less likely to be obese](#) compared to children who received less than one serving.
- Recent research analyzing over 4.5 million people found consuming just 2-3 daily servings of whole grains can [reduce type 2 diabetes risk by 29%](#) compared to lowest intakes.

Data also indicate that Latino families and other communities of color are likely to respond positively to the proposed improvements to the whole grain breakfast cereal standard. When access to healthier foods is improved and families are educated about their benefits, Latino parents consistently make choices that prioritize the well-being of their children. A prime example of this occurred when WIC nutrition standards were last updated in 2009, mandating that half of WIC cereal products meet whole grain-rich standards. This sparked a surge in Latino parents choosing healthier options, resulting in noticeable improvements including a [17%](#) increase in fiber consumption and a [10%](#) reduction in childhood obesity rates among Hispanic toddlers participating in WIC.

Outcomes in Oklahoma are particularly relevant, as it is the sole state already implementing the proposed whole grain-rich breakfast cereal standards. In Oklahoma, Latino parents have demonstrated their commitment to enhancing their families' health by utilizing WIC to purchase these healthier cereal options. According to the National WIC Association, Oklahoma's Latino families make [21%](#) more WIC cereal redemptions for whole grain-rich cereals compared to all other families in the state. An impressive [46.7%](#) of Oklahoma toddlers now consume whole grains at the nationally recommended levels, a stark contrast to the mere [7%](#) of toddlers nationwide.

Implementing stronger WIC nutrition standards would also boost access to healthy and affordable food in low-income communities. The 2009 food package updates [brought significantly healthier options to](#) markets and corner stores in [low-income neighborhoods throughout the country](#). If the WIC food packages are enhanced to incorporate USDA's proposed updates, all WIC-participating stores will be required to offer their shoppers the

choice to buy whole grain cereals. This update will extend healthier options to low-income Latino communities across the country, benefiting WIC participants and other families alike.

We urge you to support the science-based revisions to the WIC food packages and oppose any efforts to impede these evidence-based updates. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Umailla Fatima, Health Policy Analyst, at ufatima@unidosus.org.

Sincerely,

Esperanza United (formerly Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network)

GreenLatinos

Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)

Hispanic Federation/

LatinoJustice PRLDEF

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE)

National Hispanic Medical Association

National Hispanic Media Coalition

National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA)

SER-National

UnidosUS

United States Hispanic Leadership Institute, Inc.