



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4100

September 13, 2012

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which was signed into law in December, 2010. One area of the law requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture to update nutrition requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, some of which are just beginning to take effect. I appreciate the goal of ensuring that we have healthy food for our school children. I do, however, have concerns that the resulting consequences and impact are not meeting the intent of the legislation.

I have heard from parents and school officials across South Dakota that their kids are not getting enough to eat in order to learn and stay energized throughout the school day. As a mother of three, with two children in the public school system, I know that providing a meal means more than food on a plate. Every child is different, and therefore their activity level and caloric requirements vary.

Since these are the first major changes in school meals in over 30 years, I believe any changes should be adequately evaluated for cost, consequences, and impact on the people the law is intended to help. Considering the feedback I received, I have questions about the process USDA has in place for determining the impact of these new requirements:

- Will the Department conduct an evaluation of the actual cost to school districts in implementing this program?
- Will the Department do a before and after food cost analysis of expenses and waste of food served to the school districts?
- Will the Department consider differences in the amount of food offered versus served (children buying a second breakfast or lunch) before and after implementation of this program?

- Is the Department considering giving schools the flexibility to adjust calorie levels?
- What flexibility does the local school officials have in implementing the new guidelines?

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act should have flexibility to meet the needs of these kids in a way that does not further burden our already strained school systems or waste taxpayer dollars. Thank you in advance for your attention to this issue and for responding to my inquiry in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



Kristi Noem
Member of Congress