



Food and
Nutrition
Service

August 17, 2009

3101 Park
Center Drive

Alexandria,
VA
22302-1500

Ms. Loretta Savoy
Maryland School Nutrition Association
10013 Herding Row
Columbia, Maryland 21046

Dear Ms. Savoy:

Thank you for your April 6, 2009, letter regarding the sodium content of Department of Agriculture (USDA) cheese. We have been working diligently to reduce fat, sugar, and sodium in all of our USDA food offerings for domestic nutrition programs.

Specifically, we have asked the Farm Service Agency, Kansas City Commodity Office (KCCO), which procures cheese on our behalf, to research contracting options that might help us lower the sodium levels in cheese procured for calendar year 2010. We are also working with the food processing industry to find ways to lower the sodium levels in our cheese. Please be advised, however, that because we must use commodity specifications that attract bids from a variety of commercial vendors, this will be an ongoing challenge.

Nevertheless, please allow me to share some of the actions we have taken to meet that challenge since receiving your letter.

- We have asked KCCO to provide us with data on the range of sodium levels from our recent Mozzarella vendors.
- We have asked KCCO to solicit information from academia and industry on appropriate levels of salt for our cheese.
- The American Commodity Distribution Association Processing Committee has formed a subcommittee of commodity processors, State agencies, and school districts to address sodium levels in cheese. The subcommittee is actively assembling a survey for our USDA cheese vendors and commodity processors to determine the challenges and formulation potential for reducing sodium.
- The cheese subcommittee is also addressing the issue of ingredient order of predominance variations among supplier, which causes labeling problems for manufacturers who utilize our American cheese.

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- We have also contacted Nardone Bros. Baking regarding the example you cited. They have provided the product specification and nutrition information for the 50% LMPS Mozzarella / 50% Mozzarella Substitute Blend cheese they utilize, and we have forward it to Ms. Klatko. We have asked Nardone to review their product formulation to determine other sources of salt and sodium not contributed by the cheese.

I hope you can see by the actions we have taken since receiving you letter than we are serious in our mission to provide the recipients of USDA Foods with the most nutritious foods available in the American market place. Please stay in touch with us periodically to review our progress.

Sincerely,



Cathie McCullough
Director
Food Distribution Division

cc: Mary Klatko, MSNA Federal Legislative Chair