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Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Presents Obama Administration's Priorities to Improve National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

Vilsack Urges Congress to Pass Strong Reauthorization of Child Nutrition Act for Overall Health and Nutrition of America's Children

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23, 2010 – Today, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack spoke at a National Press Club Luncheon to highlight the Obama Administration's priorities for the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act and to advocate for the rapid passage of a strong reauthorization bill to reduce hunger and improve the health and nutrition of our nation's children.

“The health of our nation – of our economy, our national security, and our communities – depends on the health of our children. We will not succeed if our children aren't learning as they should because they are hungry, and cannot achieve their potential because they aren't healthy,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “This reauthorization is a critically important opportunity to improve the health of our children and reduce hunger in this country.”

The reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act is the primary legislation of First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign, which seeks to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation. Through a comprehensive approach that builds on effective strategies and mobilizes public and private sector resources, *Let's Move!* will engage every sector impacting the health of children to achieve the national goal of solving childhood obesity in a generation, and provide schools, families and communities simple tools to help kids be more active, eat better, and get healthy.

“The upcoming reauthorization must substantially improve the nutritional quality of the meals being served to our children and play a central role in the *Let's Move!* campaign's effort to solve childhood obesity in a generation,” Vilsack said.

By passing a strong reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act, the Administration hopes to reduce hunger, promote access, and improve the overall health and nutrition of children throughout the country. Specific priorities in this area include:

- **Improve nutrition standards.** Establishing improved nutrition standards for school meals based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and taking additional steps to ensure compliance with these standards;

- **Increase access to meal programs.** Providing tools to increase participation in the school nutrition programs, streamline applications, and eliminate gap periods;
- **Increase education about healthy eating.** Providing parents and students better information about school nutrition and meal quality;
- **Establish standards for competitive foods sold in schools.** Creating national baseline standards for all foods sold in elementary, middle, and high schools to ensure they contribute effectively to a healthy diet;
- **Serve more healthy food.** Promoting increased consumption of whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and low- and fat-free dairy products and providing additional financial support in the form of reimbursement rate increases for schools that enhance nutrition and quality; ;
- **Increase physical activity.** Strengthening school wellness policy implementation and promoting physical activity in schools;
- **Train people who prepare school meals.** Ensuring that child nutrition professionals have the skills to serve top-quality meals that are both healthful and appealing to their student customers;
- **Provide schools with better equipment.** Helping schools with financial assistance to purchase equipment needed to produce healthy, attractive meals.
- **Enhance food safety.** Expanding the current requirements of the food safety program to all facilities where food is stored, prepared and served.

Secretary Vilsack also announced USDA’s support for a ‘Race to the Top’ concept for States willing to take strides to reducing and eliminating hunger in their communities. Through this program, USDA will provide competitive grants to Governors to implement creative and innovative approaches to eliminating hunger.

To highlight the nexus between nutrition and physical activity, the USDA continues to promote its HealthierUS School Challenge, which recognizes schools that do an exceptional job promoting meal participation, meal quality, nutrition education, and physical activity. More information can be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/healthierus/index.html>.

More information about USDA’s efforts to improve child nutrition can be found at www.usda.gov . Additional information on First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign is at www.LetsMove.gov.

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