

FRESH VERSUS PROCESSED - A LOSING BATTLE FOR EVERYONE

by Nick George

There are a number of food-related bills in Congress this session, including the 2007 Farm Bill, that fall under the category of shooting oneself in the foot. That can be said generally about a great deal of legislation but specifically, we are referring to legislation promoting fresh fruits and vegetables over processed.

For example, sections of the Farm Bill call for expanding the purchase and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables over processed, and legislation such as S. 1031, authored by Senator Clinton (D-NY) require government programs purchase only fresh fruits and vegetables. This type of "fence me in" legislation does a disservice to the food industry as a whole.

For the past 40 years consumers have been bombarded with information telling them to eat more fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile the fresh fruit and vegetable side of the industry continues to draw the line between fresh and processed implying that processed fruits and vegetables are less healthy than fresh. All of this, despite the 2005

Dietary Guidelines for Americans that acknowledges the nutritional equivalency of fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables.

We believe the industry should avoid pitting one segment against the other and instead encourage increased consumption of ALL fruits and vegetables. The industry should be promoting the availability and variety of fruits and vegetables throughout the year and let consumers, in this case individual and institutional recipients of government program funds, decide what works best for their budgets, locations and lifestyles. In addition the industry should be focusing attention on the safety of U. S. produce and work to keep it affordable and competitive.

Research supports the fact that frozen, dried and canned fruits and vegetables are healthy, safe and nutritious. In response to consumer demands, more products are introduced industry-wide with less sugar and salt. Because of their year-round availability, processed fruits and vegetables represent a more economic option for many American consumers and for the administrators of federal feeding programs. And

yet, the fresh over processed bias continues.

Drawing distinct lines between fresh and processed fruits and vegetables goes beyond produce and into other facets of the food industry. Constant promoting of fresh over processed implies that processed foods in general are inferior and lacking in nutritional quality - implications that ignore the facts and the constant quality improvements adopted over the years.

It is not our intent to disparage the fresh fruit and vegetable industry or to deny the quality and nutritional value of fresh produce. However, it is important that processed fruits and vegetables be recognized for their record of safety, nutritional value and affordability. Policy makers in Washington should remember that as they craft legislation that will determine government purchasing guidelines for years to come.

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