

# Members of Congress Call on USDA Secretary Vilsack to Address Dietary Racism in National School Lunch Program

*Letter Represents Next Step in Advocacy by Animal Groups, Health Champions to Introduce Milk Alternatives*

WASHINGTON D.C., UNITED STATES, October 20, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, 31 members of Congress asked him to address the dairy industry monopoly in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) that is forcing a food staple onto the breakfast and lunch trays of millions of kids of color.

Because about three-quarters of African Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans and Latinos are lactose intolerant, children are getting sick or they are throwing away the product, undercutting the purposes of nutrition assistance and contributing to a massive food waste problem in schools.

“

We applaud congress for seeking to rectify what is one of the most egregious examples of racial inequity in nutritional policy.”

*Dotsie Bausch, Switch4Good*



Children of color are lactose-intolerant in large numbers. The USDA must stop forcing milk onto their trays for school breakfasts and lunches.

The letter, now submitted to Secretary Vilsack, asks the USDA to provide soy milk as an alternative to cow's milk because its current system “is delivering detrimental impacts on BIPOC school children.”

[Click here to view](#) or download the full letter, including a complete list of signers and citations.

Up to 80 percent of Black and Latinx people, up to 95

percent of Asians, and more than 80 percent of Indigenous Americans cannot digest lactose without adverse effects. Under the NSLP, the USDA reimburses public schools if they serve cow's

milk with every meal, but does not reimburse for nutritionally equivalent alternatives offered to children who cannot digest dairy. Letter-signers call this “a textbook example of dietary racism”: systemic, structural inequities surrounding food and nutrition that disproportionately and unjustly impact people of color.

The NSLP serves more than 30 million children in more than 100,000 schools, and its breakfast and lunch provides up to 47 percent of their daily calories. Children of color have historically been overrepresented in the NSLP.

In 2019, the reimbursement rate for milk was 20.5 cents per half-pint carton. If 90 percent of lunches were served with milk, the USDA spends more than \$2.1 billion on milk in the schools. However, a USDA analysis found that 29 percent of school milk cartons are thrown away untouched, equaling \$300 million tossed into dumpsters.

Experts say this might be one of the most inefficient programs run by our government in history.

“The reality is, millions of kids across America’s schools are given milk on their lunch trays that will make them feel sick, or that will immediately be discarded,” said Rep. Troy A. Carter Sr. (D-La.), who spearheads the effort. “It’s time that our school lunches reflect the reality that many of our children, including the majority of Black, Asian and Hispanic kids, are lactose intolerant. By providing a nutritionally equivalent substitute such as soy milk, we can help keep our kids healthier and full and decrease food waste. I look forward to working with Secretary Vilsack and the USDA to help bring equity to our nation’s lunch counters.”

Other signers include Reps. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.), Nanette Barragan (D-Calif.), Nikema Williams (D-Ga.), Marc Veasey (D-Texas), Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), Mark DeSaulnier (D-Calif.), Jamaal Bowman (D-N.Y.), Hakeem Jeffries (D-N.Y.), Debbie Dingell (D-Mich.), Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), Judy Chu (D-Calif.), Tony Cardenas (D-Calif.), Luis Correa (D-Calif.), and Katie Porter (D-Calif.).

“The stated purpose of the National School Lunch Program is to serve kids with foods that promote health and aid learning,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of [The Center for a Humane Economy](#), a nonprofit influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. “But the USDA has turned the program on its head, using the program as a marketing and profit-making opportunity for the dairy industry and denying kids the chance to opt for nutritious beverages that don’t make them sick.”

“We applaud congress for seeking to rectify what is one of the most egregious examples of racial inequity in nutritional policy,” said Dotsie Bausch, executive director of [Switch4Good](#), a nonprofit disrupting the disinformation Big Dairy feeds the public. “Advocates for food justice have been asking for these simple shifts, such as a proportional reimbursement to schools for soy milk, to give children of color a fair start in school and set up a lifetime of healthy choices.”

In 2020, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines recognized soy milk as a nutritionally equivalent fluid beverage product, thanks in part to scientific input from Switch4Good's coalition.

## Digestive Issues

The inability to break down lactose into simpler sugars for absorption into the bloodstream results in undigested lactose remaining in the gastrointestinal tract, which can cause diarrhea, nausea, cramping, bloating, and, in severe cases, vomiting.

In addition to digestive symptoms, cow's milk is the most common food allergen for infants and young children. Symptoms include rashes, hives, wheezing, vomiting, and anaphylaxis; long-term effects include compromised immune systems, respiratory, gastrointestinal, and skin problems. Because some symptoms may not occur until several days after consuming dairy, parents and pediatricians often don't identify this allergy as their cause.

Blended government and industry marketing programs teach kids that they will not be healthy or strong without milk. Given the discomfort that milk causes in so many children of color, this is a confusing and contradictory circumstance. Ubiquitous slogans such as "milk does a body good" are delivered with the benefit of a \$350 million annual budget from the federal government dairy check-off marketing program—a program to feed industry, not our nation's children.

## About The Center for a Humane Economy

The Center for a Humane Economy is a non-profit organization that focuses on influencing the conduct of corporations to forge a humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both.

## About Switch4Good

Switch4Good is an evidence-based nonprofit organization advocating for a dairy-free world and dismantling the disinformation Big Dairy feeds the public, for the sake of human health, food justice, and the future of our planet. Its coalition of health experts, athletes, social justice warriors, enlightened policymakers, and progressive corporations promotes ethical lifestyles and widespread behavioral change related to how we eat. For more information about founder Dotsie Bausch, the organization, or how to make the switch to a dairy-free diet, please visit: <https://switch4good.org/>.

WAYNE PACELLE

Center For A Humane Economy

+1 202-420-0446

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Other](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/596955116>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2022 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.