

The Baird Plan for National Nutrition

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The American Public Health Association, the United States Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and many other public health authorities have all voiced concerns recently with diet, nutrition, obesity, and lack of physical activity having a deleterious effect on morbidity and mortality, especially in America.

At last, our society has noticed that there is an obesity epidemic in America. Observant travelers returning from Europe and Asia in the past decade often commented about how big, bulky and chubby Americans of all ages seemed by comparison, but this observation was dismissed as anecdotal.

Recently, a few of the fast-food chains, under criticism, legal threats and government pressures, have started reducing the fats, refined sugars, starches/carbs, and salt content in their products, and have even agreed to stop offering to "super-size" every unhealthy item on the menu. Some have added salads or salad bars, and a few even have some fresh fruit available. A good next step would be to make all bread and bun mixes with at least 50 percent whole-wheat flour, instead of all white flour.

In addition, a "behavior modification" approach (partly suggested by my lovely wife) would be to require all grocery store chains to make the cookie, cake, candy, and ice cream (the "4Cs" - well, almost) aisles for one-way traffic only, and much narrower in width; not wide enough for a standard shopping cart, but just wide enough for people under 200 pounds to walk through once - for no more than two minutes, in a single-file, timed procession. Aisles containing health food and/or fresh produce would be widened considerably. Smaller-sized shopping carts would be reserved and mandated for people over 200 lbs. (Fatter people = smaller carts; smaller, but of course, still too wide to fit down the 4C aisles.)

I suggested most of the above more than 20 years ago in an article I never finished, under the title of this article - "The Baird Plan for National Nutrition." At that time, I also included a requirement that all manufacturers of processed foods reduce the sugar, salt, and white flour content of all products by at least 10 percent per year for five years, until the goal of an overall 50 percent reduction was achieved; those who progressed at a rate higher than 10 percent per year, or who jumped "cold-turkey" to a 50 percent reduction, would receive a tax credit incentive.

Also included in that article were restrictions on television and electronic game time and content, and incentives for physical fitness activities and regular exercise. (Today, I'd add restrictions on recreational personal-computer use.) And I suggested a corollary research design to test my personal hypothesis that every hour spent watching most regular TV series programs lowered the viewer's IQ by one point.

I never finished that article, because the first several peers to whom I showed the draft laughed at the very absurdity of it all. They called me an alarmist, silly, and a curmudgeon. (I kind of liked being called a curmudgeon.) I saw a few of them just the other day. They are now middle-aged, quite fat, and have fat children and fat teenagers. They all drive SUVs because, frankly, they are

too bulky to be comfortable in any other vehicles. In a few more years, they will have to be fitted - prematurely - for "super-sized" coffins.

But I do wonder what it would be like now if the "Baird Plan for National Nutrition" had ever gotten off the drawing board in 1982, when, as an idealistic chiropractic intern, I first conceived of it. ...

Ah, to paraphrase a Milton title (almost): "Wellness Lost."

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