Impact of Limiting Language in Government Recommendations on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

During a time when consumers are not eating even half of their recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH) commissioned research to measure the impact of the federal government’s fruit and vegetable recommendations on consumers’ perceptions of, and intent to purchase, various forms of fruits and vegetables.¹

An on-line survey of 1,200 consumers was conducted in October 2015. Half of respondents were exposed to inclusive recommendations for increased intake of fruit and vegetables and the other half were exposed to limiting language that reinforced fresh produce intake at the expense of packaged forms. All were then asked a series of questions after being exposed to both sets of current government recommendations.

Research Results

Perception of Healthfulness
Government guidelines impact consumers’ perceptions of the healthfulness of packaged fruits and vegetables:

- **Inclusive language** more strongly and consistently reinforces the healthfulness of all forms of fruits and vegetables — fresh, frozen, canned, 100% juice and dried.

- **Limiting language** that over-emphasizes the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables, compared to packaged forms, detracts from the perceived healthfulness of packaged fruits and vegetables.

- Among vulnerable² consumers, **inclusive language** more consistently reinforces their perceived healthfulness of packaged fruits and vegetables.

- Vulnerable consumers feel that **limiting language** recommendations would most likely cause a decrease in their intake of packaged fruits and vegetables.

Intent to Purchase
Government recommendations with **inclusive language** more strongly and consistently increase consumers’ intent to purchase packaged fruits and vegetables, without decreasing their intent to purchase fresh produce.

Impact of Policy Statements on Consumer Perceptions about Fruits and Vegetables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Statement</th>
<th>Inclusive</th>
<th>Limiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More realistic</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More encouraging of all forms</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More affordable on current budget</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages decreased intake of packaged fruit &amp; vegetables</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases likelihood fresh fruit &amp; vegetables would go to waste</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PBH thanks the American Frozen Food Institute (AFFI), Canned Food Alliance (CFA), Can Manufacturers Institute (CMI) and Seneca for their support of this research.

Endnotes:
1. Inclusive of beans, like kidney beans.
2. Vulnerable consumers are those individuals who receive government food assistance, eat less than the recommended levels of fruit and vegetables or have limited access and budget for purchasing fresh fruit and vegetables.