

FEATURE – SCHOOL MEAL CHANGES FOR HEALTH AND NATIONAL SECURITY

INTRO: USDA is taking comments on its proposal to make school meals healthier. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more on the short term and long term goals behind this effort. (1:37)

GOVERNMENT DATA SAYS THIRTY TWO PERCENT OF CHILDREN AGES SIX TO NINETEEN ARE OBESE OR OVERWEIGHT. THEREFORE THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE HAS PROPOSED CHANGING THE SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM TO INCLUDE HEALTHIER FOOD.

Kevin Concannon, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services: More green and orange vegetables. More whole grains. Less fats. Milk that is either one percent or skim milk.

ONE REASON FOR THE PROPOSAL IS THE LONG TERM HEALTH EFFECTS FROM A POOR DIET EARLY IN LIFE.

Concannon: The problems of obesity translate into high rates of diabetes. So many young people now are developing diabetes. It's associated with weight.

A BENEFIT FROM A HEALTHIER DIET IS BETTER LEARNING AND LONGER ATTENTION SPANS.

Concannon: We know that kids who have a nutritious diet learn better. We hear that from teachers, we hear it from school nurses we hear it from pediatricians.

AND ONE OF THE MORE COMPELLING LONG TERM PROBLEMS CAUSED BY POOR DIET IS A SHORTAGE OF MILITARY PERSONNEL.

Concannon: Some twenty seven percent of American youth between the ages of seventeen and twenty four are so overweight that they are not eligible for military service. So the generals and admirals have really laid this out as a national security issue.

U-S-D-A IS ACCEPTING PUBLIC COMMENT ON PROPOSED MENU CHANGES THROUGH APRIL THIRTEENTH. THOSE WANTING TO REVIEW THE PROPOSAL OR COMMENT CAN VISIT THE REGULATIONS DOT GOV WEBSITE. IN WASHINGTON D-C FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.