

HOME (/)  
ABOUT  
JOURNAL (/ABOUT)  
MASTHEAD (/NEW-PAGE)  
PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS (/PROSPECTIVE-MEMBERS)  
SUBSCRIBE (/SUBSCRIBE)  
STAFF RESOURCES (/STAFF-RESOURCES)  
PUBLICATIONS  
PUBLICATION ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE)  
VOLUME 1 (2009) (/VOLUME-1-2008-2009)  
VOLUME 2 (2010) (/VOLUME-2-2009-2010)  
VOLUME 3 (2011) (/VOLUME-3-2010-2011)  
VOLUME 4 (2012) (/VOLUME-4-2011-2012)  
VOLUME 5 (2013) (/VOLUME-5-2012-2013)  
VOLUME 6 (2014) (/VOLUME-6-2013-2014)  
VOLUME 7 (2015) (/VOLUME-7-2014-2015)  
VOLUME 8 (2016) (/VOLUME-8-2015-2016)  
VOLUME 9 (2017) (/VOLUME-9-2016-2017)  
VOLUME 10 (2018) (/VOLUME-10-2018)  
SYMPOSIUM  
INFORMATION (/SYMPOSIUM)  
BLOG  
FULL BLOG (/FULL-BLOG)  
BLOG ARCHIVE (/BLOG-ARCHIVE-1)  
  
SUBMISSIONS (/SUBMISSIONS)

September 20, 2011 (/full-blog/2011/09/cutting-calories-one-act-at-time.html)

## Cutting the Calories: One Act at a Time (/full-blog/2011/09/cutting-calories-one-act-at-time.html)



By: Ashley Addo, Staff Member

Envision a working mother who resorts to the McDonalds' dollar menu to feed her children because Subway is too expensive, or a single father who feeds his kids cookies and chips for breakfast because he does not understand the value of good nutrition. This is a reality for millions of American children. Unsurprisingly, child obesity has become a pressing concern in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 25-million children are considered obese and the health risks associated with obesity are potentially devastating.[1] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn1](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn1)) To combat these issues, First Lady Michelle Obama has initiated a national program called "Lets Move" that focuses on improving the nutritional value of school lunches.[2]

([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn2](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn2)) The First Lady collaborated and discussed her motives with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), parents, prominent political figures, and school officials throughout the nation.[3] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn3](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn3)) As a result, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act[4] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn4](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn4)) and President Barack Obama signed it into law on December 13, 2010.[5] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn5](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn5))

This legislation coincides with Michelle Obama's primary objectives for her Lets Move campaign. The Act received federal funding of \$4.5 billion dollars and it has the potential to create great results because children consume 30-50 % of their daily calories in school.[6] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn6](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn6))

The Secretary of the USDA, Tom Vilsak, has explained: "This is an historic victory for our nation's youngsters. This legislation will allow USDA, for the first time in over 30 years, the chance to make real reforms to the school lunch and breakfast programs by improving the critical nutrition and hunger safety net for millions of children."[7] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn7](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn7))

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Act places the USDA in a position to make great strides in decreasing child obesity. The USDA will provide nutritional standards to school districts, and districts that comply will receive a six-cent increase in their school lunches.[8] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn8](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn8)) Although this raise does not seem significant, it is the first reimbursement rate increase schools have received in over 30 years. These nutritional standards will also apply to foods sold in vending machines as well as school breakfasts.[9] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn9](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn9)) Additionally, more students will be eligible for school meal programs based off of Medicaid data, which will help identify students in need of such food programs. Furthermore, approximately 21 million *more* meals will be served annually to at-risk children after school, due to funding reimbursements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program, another health initiative in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.[10] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn10](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn10)) Additionally, Secretary Vilsak has encouraged schools to plant community gardens and to involve their students in the gardening process.[11] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn11](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn11)) This is an interactive activity that could simultaneously entertain and educate children on the importance of fruits and vegetables.[12] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn12](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn12)) Many children from lower-income homes might not be exposed to gardening outside of school.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act has great attributes, but enforcement to ensure compliance with USDA standards will be important. As part of the process, the Act calls for school audits every three years.[13] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_edn13](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_edn13)) Although these audits will be costly, there *should* be more frequent audits since this Act is in its beginning stages. Implementation is the first step with any legislation, but enforcement is always needed to ensure results. Moreover, future revisions to the Act should provide for direct education of families regarding the importance of good nutrition, e.g. through structured evening classes at schools for parents and guardians interested in learning about good nutrition. While the Act is focused on school meals, there could be an even greater change if children's meals at

home mirrored the standards imposed on school meals. The USDA cannot control what children eat at home, but it is unfortunate that the Act has not taken the additional step of educating willing families on the value of good nutrition. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, coupled with stronger awareness to parents and guardians, could significantly impact the ongoing fight against child obesity.

[1] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref1](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref1)) Mimi Hall & Nancy Hellmich, *Michelle Obama Aims to End Child Obesity in a Generation*, USA Today (Feb. 9, 2010, 6:24 PM), [http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/weightloss/2010-02-09-1Afirstlady09\\_CV\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/weightloss/2010-02-09-1Afirstlady09_CV_N.htm) ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/weightloss/2010-02-09-1Afirstlady09\\_CV\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/weightloss/2010-02-09-1Afirstlady09_CV_N.htm)).

[2] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref2](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref2)) *Id.*

[3] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref3](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref3)) Eddie Gehman Kohan, *US Passes Historic Child Nutrition Bill Championed By First Lady Michelle Obama*, Obama Foodorama (Dec. 2, 2010, 3:38 PM), <http://obamafoodorama.blogspot.com/2010/12/house-passes-first-lady-michelle-obamas.html> (<http://obamafoodorama.blogspot.com/2010/12/house-passes-first-lady-michelle-obamas.html>).

[4] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref4](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref4)) 7 U.S.C.A. 7 § 3179 (2010), *available at* [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf) ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf)).

[5] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref5](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref5)) *Id.*

[6] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref6](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref6)) Hall & Hellmich, *supra* note 1.

[7] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref7](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref7)) Kohan, *supra* note 3.

[8] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref8](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref8)) 7 U.S.C.A. 7 § 3179 (2010), *available at* [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf) ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf)).

[9] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref9](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref9)) *Id.*

[10] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref10](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref10)) *Id.*

[11] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref11](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref11)) Hall & Hellmich, *supra* note 1.

[12] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref12](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref12)) Hall & Hellmich, *supra* note 1.

[13] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref13](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref13)) 7 U.S.C.A. 7 § 3179 (2010), *available at* [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf) ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf)).

[11] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref11](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref11)) Hall & Hellmich, *supra* note 1.

[12] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref12](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref12)) Hall & Hellmich, *supra* note 1.

[13] ([http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#\\_ednref13](http://www.blogger.com/post-edit.g?blogID=8202935745006855383&postID=1940467123824973048&from=pencil#_ednref13)) 7 U.S.C.A. 7 § 3179 (2010), *available at* [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf) ([http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child\\_Nutrition\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_12\\_10\\_10.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/Child_Nutrition_Fact_Sheet_12_10_10.pdf)).

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