

January 6, 2005

Leslie Moonves Co-President and Co-COO Viacom Inc. 1515 Broadway New York, NY 10036

Dear Mr. Moonves:

We urge CBS, UPN, MTV, BET, VH1, Nickelodeon, and other Viacom stations to examine their food marketing practices and follow, to the greatest extent possible, the enclosed *Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children*. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) prepared the *Guidelines* after a thorough review of food advertising and marketing directed to children and in consultation with national nutrition and child development experts.

As you know, rates of obesity have been rising rapidly in children. In addition, even most children at a healthy weight eat poorly. The average child's diet is too high in calories, saturated and trans fats, refined sugars, and salt, and too low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fiber, and calcium. Such diets increase children's future risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and other serious, disabling, and costly diseases. In addition, many children, while still young, experience adverse health effects (such as obesity, diabetes, and high cholesterol) from poor dietary habits. Obesity can affect children's quality of life through social and academic discrimination and limited physical endurance and mobility.

Parents, of course, bear the primary responsibility for feeding their children. However, getting children to eat a healthful diet would be much easier for parents if they did not have to contend with billions of dollars' worth of sophisticated marketing for low-nutrition foods. Companies that manufacture, sell, and promote food to children have an enormous effect on parents' ability to feed their children a healthful diet given 1) the amount of marketing to which children are exposed, 2) industry's extensive expertise in persuasive techniques, 3) companies' access to resources that parents do not have, such as cartoon characters, contests, celebrities, and toy give-aways, 4) that foods of poor nutritional quality are marketed to children much more than are healthful foods, and 5) low-nutrition foods tempt children wherever they go.

No one disputes that the goal of food marketing aimed at children is to influence their food choices. In addition, studies show that food marketing is effective in shaping children's food preferences, food choices, and food purchase requests.

Uniquely, the *Guidelines for Responsible Food Marketing to Children* address not only how food is marketed, but also which foods should be marketed to kids. The nutrition criteria laid out in the *Guidelines* are a compromise approach. They include the most healthful foods, which are typically under-consumed by children. However, they also would allow for the marketing of products that may not be nutritionally ideal but that provide some positive nutritional benefit and that could help children meet the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (i.e., that help them to limit their intake of calories, saturated and trans fats, sodium, and refined sugars). This approach limits the promotion of some foods that are now commonly marketed to children. However, it allows companies to market nutritionally-improved alternatives to those low-nutrition products and a wider range of products.

The current regulatory environment does not require companies to change the way they market foods to children. However, it is the right thing to do:

- to protect children's health and wellbeing;
- to avoid negative publicity for company practices that undermine children's diets and health; and
- to demonstrate to your customers that your company is taking meaningful steps to support parents' efforts to feed their children a healthful diet.

We recognize (and applaud) that some companies are already making changes, from introducing more-healthful foods to reducing their advertising to young children. We look forward to learning what steps your member companies plan to take, or are already taking, to ensure that they market food to children in a manner that does not undermine children's nutritional wellbeing or parents' ability to act as gatekeepers for sound nutrition for their children. We hope that we can work together to promote and protect children's health.

Sincerely,

Margo G. Wootan, D.Sc. Director, Nutrition Policy

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.

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Executive Director

Enclosure