Big Food’s vice grip at a nutrition professionals’ conference. | November 2013
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report by Dietitians for Professional Integrity (“DFPI”) provides a summary and analysis of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' (“The Academy”) 2013 Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo (“FNCE”).

DFPI is a grassroots advocacy group co-founded by 14 dietitians in February of 2013, following the release of public health lawyer Michele Simon's hard-hitting report, "AND Now A Word From Our Sponsors", on the Academy's Big Food ties. DFPI's main mission is to advocate for the Academy to sever its ties to its current Big Food partners and sponsors (including, but not limited to, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, General Mills, and Kellogg's) since these partnerships compromise professional integrity, get in the way of sound nutrition messaging, and can inhibit public criticism of these companies' more egregious practices. DFPI also aims to educate RDs, other health professionals, and the general public on the general issue of problematic partnerships between Big Food and the public sector (i.e.: health organizations, federal health campaigns, food and nutrition non-profits).

It is DFPI's hope that this report provides an informative perspective of Big Food's presence and influence at this year's FNCE, and that the suggestions provided at the end of this document can spur further dialogue between concerned dietitians and Academy leadership.

DFPI's efforts stem from the appreciation and respect its co-founders have for the RD credential, which we want to be represented with the utmost professionalism and integrity. Our intent is not to bash the credential, but rather shine the light on problematic areas that need to be addressed in order to help elevate it in such a way that other health professionals and the general public can trust it. While this is a systemic problem that involves many health organizations, our advocacy is focused on the Academy since that is the organization we belong to and the one we have the greatest chance of changing.

Although FNCE is a large conference that spans four days, over 200 sessions, and is regularly attended by approximately 8,000 dietitians from around the world, this report is specifically focused on areas that relate to DFPI's work and mission.

Website: http://integritydietitians.org/
Email: integritydietitians@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/DietitiansForProfessionalIntegrity
Twitter: twitter.com/integrityRDs
Every year upon arriving at FNCE, attendees pick up a complimentary tote bag that contains general conference information booklet as well as 'educational materials' provided by the Academy’s partners (to clarify: Abbott Nutrition, The Coca-Cola Company, and the National Dairy Council are Academy partners; General Mills, Kellogg's, PepsiCo, Soyjoy, and Unilever are Academy premier sponsors; Alaska Seafood, Campbell's, ConAgra Foods, Del Monte, Haas Avocado Board, Jamba Juice, Nature Made, and Safeway were this year’s FNCE sponsors).

The tote bag itself is an issue of contention for many dietitians. While one side of the bag features the Academy’s and conference’s respective logos, the other side features the logos of the three Academy partners: Abbott Nutrition, The Coca-Cola Company, and the National Dairy Council.

One of the perks that comes with Academy corporate sponsorship is the opportunity to include 'educational materials' in the FNCE tote bag. Two handouts, in particular, caught our eye.

One information sheet, titled “Aspartame: One of the Most Studied Ingredients in the World”, was provided by Coca-Cola’s Beverage Institute for Health and Wellness. Among the statements:
- “[Aspartame was] discovered in 1965.”
- “Over 200 million people around the world eat and drink products with aspartame.”
- “These organizations all recognize low & no-calorie sweeteners can SUPPORT weight management when used as a substitute for caloric sweeteners and part of a balanced diet: American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.”
- “Used in 100+ countries around the globe”

Not surprisingly, this information sheet fails to mention recent neurological research which states that artificial sweeteners alter the brain’s food reward-system response (which certainly has implications for eating behaviors and satiety). As DFPI co-founder Elizabeth Lee tweeted in response to this handout: “Most studied ingredient is not the same as ‘safest’ ingredient.”

Another educational sheet – provided by The Dairy Council and titled “How One Cow Contributes to A Sustainable Food System” – states the following:
- “1 cow produces 17 gallons of manure per day; that’s enough fertilizer to grow 56 pounds of corn or 84 pounds of tomatoes.”
- “75% of a cow’s diet is not consumable by humans. By-products from the human food and fiber industries are converted to milk rather than sent to landfills.”
- “Dairy intake is associated with strong bones and teeth, reduced risk of...”
cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, lower blood pressure in adults.”

It is not surprising that information provided by the dairy industry would overlook the many genuine environmental concerns that surround conventional methods of raising cows. Note that this ‘information sheet’ does not differentiate between conventional and organic dairy; nor does it even touch on dairy products made from grain-fed vs. grass-fed cows.

Despite the Dairy Council’s attempt at greenwashing its practices, many health and news organizations have pointed out the dairy industry’s environmental consequences:

- In a report titled “The Hidden Costs of CAFOs”, the Union of Concerned Scientists detailed the many environmental concerns that surround Big Dairy’s concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), including the fact that dairy cows’ CAFO diets produce nutritionally inferior milk, and concludes that “the price we pay as a society to support CAFOs is much too high”.
- A 2009 NPR report on dairy pollution stated that “the New Mexico Environment Department reports that two-thirds of the state’s 150 dairies are contaminating groundwater with excess nitrogen from cattle excrement.”
- A 2009 New York Times piece on runoff from Wisconsin Big Dairy CAFOs stated that: “In Brown County, part of one of the nation’s largest milk-producing regions, the dairies collectively create as much as a million gallons of waste each day. Many cows are fed a high-protein diet, which creates a more liquid manure that is easier to spray on fields. In 2006, an unusually early thaw in Brown County melted frozen fields, including some that were covered in manure. Within days, according to a county study, more than 100 wells were contaminated with coliform bacteria, E. coli, or nitrates — byproducts of manure or other fertilizers.”

National Dairy Council educational handout included in tote bag.
This handout was referenced in one session on sustainability sponsored by the National Dairy Council, where once again the dairy industry was highlighted as the epitome of sustainability, not only due to its supposed environmental stewardship, but also because, per the Dairy Council, milk is both affordable and culturally appropriate.

The FNCE booklet, meanwhile, contained some full-page advertisements from Academy partners. General Mills, for instance, advertised its sugar reduction efforts with its Big G cereals. What was most misleading about this "educational" advertisement was the implication that a bowl of General Mills cereal with milk is a better choice than fruit simply because it is lower in sugar (never mind that the sugar in General Mills cereals is added during processing). That is precisely the sort of misleading and deceptive nutritionism that Big Food often employs to healthwash its offerings.

Also included in the FNCE booklet were descriptions of every exhibitor at the expo hall. This is how McDonald’s was described (bold emphasis ours):

“McDonald’s USA, LLC, is the leading foodservice provider in the US, offering a variety of wholesome foods made from quality ingredients to 26 million consumers each day. We continue to evolve our menu to meet customers’ needs and tastes, and through our “Commitment to Offer Improved Nutrition Choices”, continue our journey to champion children’s well-being, expand and improve nutritionally-balanced menu choices, and increase customers and employee access to nutrition information and education.”

While the grams of sugar per serving in many General Mills cereals have decreased by a few grams over the past few years, it should be noted that Big G cereals include highly processed and minimally nutritious offerings like Golden Grahams, Count Chocula, Cookie Crisp, Frosted Toast Crunch, Lucky Charms, and Cocoa Puffs. And, while a whole grain may be the first ingredient in these cereals, most of them only offer 1 gram of fiber per serving (many list sugar as the second ingredient and contain artificial dyes).

Wholesome foods? The chain’s “whole grain” bun offers eight grams of whole grain, (roughly what you would get in one-sixth of a cup of cooked oats), and contains over 20 ingredients, including high fructose corn syrup, soybean oil, and azodicarbonamide, a dough conditioner banned in Australia and the European Union (the United Kingdom being the exception).

Additionally, how does a chain that spent $115
million marketing Happy Meals in 2010 champion children's health and well-being? 

This was the description for Coca-Cola (again, emphasis ours):

“Since 1886, The Coca-Cola Company has been dedicated to offering quality beverages, marketing those beverages responsibly, and providing information consumers can trust. As the world's largest nonalcoholic beverage company, we operate in more than 200 countries and market nearly 500 brands and more than 3,000 products. We offer more than 180 low- and no-calorie beverages, which represents nearly one out of every three drinks we sell in North America.”

THE EXPO

FNCE’s expo floor is often the center of controversy. This year was no different. Last year, for example, a large “Promoting the Registered Dietitian” poster at the Coca-Cola booth attracted significant – and rightful – criticism.

The usual Big Food and Big Ag players had large booths at this year’s expo, including Coca-Cola, PepsiCo (remember that PepsiCo is the largest food company in the world, and owns various brands, including Tropicana, Quaker, Gatorade and Frito-Lay, which had separate booths for Fritos, Lay’s, and its new line of popped chips), Nestlé, Unilever, General Mills, Monsanto, ConAgra, and Kellogg’s.

Was There a Photo Ban?

This year’s FNCE attendees were surprised to learn of a newly-instituted photo ban on the expo floor.

While companies like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo – remember, the former is an Academy partner, while the latter is a premier sponsor – were well aware of the ban (many attendees who attempted to take photos of their booths were immediately approached and notified of the photography ban, which, according to some Coca-Cola reps was not new), most other booths were unaware of the ban and even encouraged photography.

Some attendees reported that the photography ban was announced over the expo floor’s sound system a few times a day. But, again, the only booths that seemed concerned with photography and aware of the ban were the Academy’s partners and sponsors, leading many to believe the “ban” was a last-minute decision that provided Academy partners and sponsors a legitimate reason to prohibit photographs at their respective
booths.

Given the controversy over its partners and sponsors, this photo ban was misguided, as it only fostered mistrust and suspicion. As DFPI co-founder Lauri Boone tweeted during the conference, “rather than enforcing photo ban at the FNCE expo, create an expo you are proud to show the world.”

I’m a positive RD, but think the photo ban by @eatrightFNCE #FNCE violates 2 things consumers crave most: transparency and trust.
--- @Greeneating

**Educational Materials**

The expo is a chance for food companies to advertise their products to dietitians and also engage in some corporate damage control. What follows is a small sample of the materials available for dietitians from different companies. Keep in mind that this is messaging the food industry hopes dietitians will share with clients and patients.

- Coca-Cola’s “Balancing Act” pamphlet emphasizes “energy balance”, and recommends burning 100 calories by gardening for 19 minutes, playing soccer for 13 minutes, or climbing stairs for 10 minutes. The pamphlet also reminds readers that soda and juice can all help meet hydration needs. This is the food industry’s favorite tactic: focus only on calories and calorie control to avoid dealing with issues of the nutritional quality of said calories. In Coca-Cola’s eyes, 100 calories of almonds are no different from 100 calories of soda.

- Coca-Cola’s “Live Positively” handout touches on the company’s seven core areas that relate to sustainability: water stewardship, sustainable packaging, energy efficiency and climate protection, beverage benefits (“We aim to quench every thirst and need while providing quality consumers can trust”), active and healthy living, workplace, and

Why is Coke teaching RDs about nutrition at #FNCE? Wasn’t 4 years of school + internship + licensure test enough?
--- @Fooducate
community. This is a concerted attempt at greenwashing, considering Coca-Cola's sketchy environmental history.

- Coca-Cola’s “What is Weighing Us Down” fact sheet on calorie balance states that the top three calorie contributors in the American diet are grain-based desserts, chicken dishes, and breads, and that “since the 1960s people are burning fewer calories at work”. AKA: “don't blame our beverages.”

- ConAgra’s oil comparison chart argues that the company’s Mazola “heart-healthy” corn oil is superior to olive oil due to the presence of phytosterols. Conveniently, this handout does not compare the amount of healthful monounsaturated fats in corn and olive oil, which would make olive oil the clear winner. Among the “added benefits” of corn oil listed in this handout: “naturally cholesterol-free” (as are all plant foods) and “contains vitamin E” (as all nut and seed oils do).

- General Mills' “Benefits of Yogurt” educational sheet features statements like “yogurt helps with weight management”, and “research indicates that adults who eat yogurt are less likely to be overweight”. It also contains misleading statements like “dairy provides 74 percent of the vitamin D in young children's diets” (that percentage is so high simply because dairy is ubiquitous in the American diet). ‘Educational’ materials like this one conveniently forget to mention that non-dairy alternatives are also fortified with vitamin D. This sheet also compares yogurt to other snacks (including a banana and an apple) to show yogurt's apparent superiority. Between this and the company's “a bowl of Trix is better than fruit for breakfast”, it seems General Mills is intent on painting whole fruit in a negative light.
General Mills' “Benefits of Cereal” handout states that a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios with skim milk is the best breakfast choice (even better than a bowl of oatmeal) because of its low caloric content (130 calories). Calorie-myopia aside (there is no mention of total nutrition quality) this breakfast item is conveniently compared with a blueberry muffin, a bagel with cream cheese, two fried eggs with toast, and a sausage/egg/cheese biscuit. The sheet also states that “cereal eaters have healthier weights” and that cereal accounts only for 4 percent of children's sugar intake (that is a reflection of the high amount of sugar in American children's diets, not that cereal is a low-sugar choice.). Interestingly, this General Mills handout shows that almost one quarter of children’s sugar intake comes from sodas and juices (this is why Coca-Cola focuses on “calorie contributors”, rather than “sugar contributors” in its materials).

Kellogg’s “Comply and Satisfy” booklet for school administrators promotes Eggo waffles, multigrain Frosted Flakes, Cheez-Its, and Pop-Tarts as examples of “good nutrition and simple grains.”

Kellogg’s advertised the various “helpful resources and client education materials” offered at KelloggsNutrition.com, HealthyBeginnings.com, SpecialK.com, and SnackPicks.com. Snackpicks.com’s “Snack Under 150 calories” section promotes 100-calorie snack packs of Cheez-Its and Keebler cookies, while the “Healthy Snacking” portion of the website highlights NutriGrain “SuperFruit Fusion” bars (the fruit filling in these bars has invert sugar and corn syrup as the first two ingredients, and is also made with Red Dye 40).

McDonald's “Enjoy Eating the Food Groups at McDonald's” handout, which highlights the
premium chicken sandwich’s bun as half a serving of whole grains (never mind the 1,410 mg of sodium in the crispy premium chicken sandwich), and a Canadian Style Bacon Egg McMuffin as an example of “protein” (that Egg McMuffin is cooked in partially hydrogenated oils).

- McNeil’s Nutritionals’ assurance that all Equal artificial sweetener products (made with aspartame, acesulfame potassium, sucralose, and saccharin) are safe and “great for people maintaining a healthy weight for overall health and quality of life.”

- Nestlé’s “quick and easy mealtime solutions” pamphlet suggests meals like a whole grain Lean Pocket (the ham and cheese variety contains over 30 ingredients, including partially hydrogenated oils) with a side salad; Stouffer’s frozen lasagna with fresh or frozen vegetables; Stouffer’s frozen macaroni and cheese with ½ cup of vegetables.

- PepsiCo’s “Sodium Content of Commonly Consumed Snack Foods” which makes Frito-Lay’s chip offerings seem like the best snack choices (in comparison to large muffins, beef jerky, pretzels, bagels, and cheese). Conveniently, other common snack foods that would make chips pale in comparison – like fresh fruit, nuts, and seeds – are missing.

Who We Were Happy to See

Although much of what took place at the expo concerned us, we also want to point out the bright spots. To begin with, RDs who have been in the field for two or more decades have mentioned that things have vastly improved. Twenty years ago, the organic and 'natural' (ironic that the Academy uses that word, given how loaded and controversial, yet meaningless, it is) pavilion was practically non-existent, and trade groups for lentils, beans, and nuts (which were present at this year’s expo) did not have booths.

This year, we were happy to see companies that make whole food products, value organic ingredients, and support GMO labeling (like Manitoba Harvest, Lundberg Farms, Nutiva,
Mary’s Gone Crackers, and Navitas Naturals) at the expo.

We also spotted a terrific new product: Just Food Blends. This company is the creation of a mother of a tube-fed child who, tired of the highly processed and minimally nutritious offerings out there, decided to make and market her own line of meals for tube-fed people using whole food ingredients.

In my counseling experience, some patients have expressed that they want fast, convenient, and portable options that don’t require preparation. But there have been many more who want to learn basic cooking skills and ideas for quick fix meals using fresh, whole ingredients.

To better address our patients’ evolving needs, it is necessary to look beyond the conventional solutions on making pre-packaged convenient foods with less calories, fat, sodium, and sugar. At the end of the day, a less unhealthy frozen entrée still contains a number of additives and ingredients that home cooks wouldn’t have access to. A less unhealthy choice is vastly different from a truly healthy choice.

Elizabeth Lee, MS, RD

THE “POINT-COUNTERPOINT” DEBATE ON SPONSORSHIP THAT NEVER WAS

The Background:
One session we highly anticipated was the promised point-counterpoint on corporate sponsorship. This past February, a FNCE committee member alleged that a point-counterpoint debate on the topic had been planned since December of 2012 (interestingly, one month before this issue gained national coverage as a result of Michele Simon’s report).

We suggested that RDs should be part of this panel, but our FNCE committee contact ultimately turned down the idea since the plan was to have this be “an educational session.”

In late Spring, the point-counterpoint plan was apparently dropped in favor of having only one speaker, New Yorker writer Michael Specter. A few weeks later, a second speaker – University of Pennsylvania psychology professor Dr. Paul Rozin – was tapped to participate.

With so much confusion surrounding the planning of this session, we emailed our FNCE
committee contact to ask if the plan was to go back to the point-counterpoint format with Michael Specter and Dr. Rozin debating one another. That query was never answered, but we were told there would be an “extended” Q&A during this session in order to allow attendees to express their viewpoints (the standard amount for Q&A allowed at a FNCE session is 30 minutes).

Alas, this point-counterpoint session (titled “Private-Public Collaborations”) was a disappointment.

**The Session:**
The first speaker, Dr. Rozin, spent the majority of his time talking about the complexity of scientific research, the presence of bias in science, and how to analyze research studies. Toward the end of his time at the podium, he mentioned that what needs to be looked at critically is research – some of which is sponsored by the food industry – that emerges from universities and how findings may be reported in ways that are not representative of the actual data set.

While we appreciated the mention of research bias, there was no mention of the topic in question: collaborations between health organizations and the food industry. ways that may not be representative of what the actual findings are.

One rather frustrating aspect of this session was that a false dichotomy was set up: either you "hate" the food industry or you embrace it. There was no recognition of nuances, of the many different sorts of companies and players within the food industry. Big Food is at one end of the spectrum, but there are plenty of other types of companies that operate in a much different fashion. The underlying message throughout this whole session was: "You can’t just reject the entire food industry as evil" (essentially, a straw man argument that also conveniently frames anyone who disagrees with the Academy's partnerships with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo as having an extreme viewpoint).

Despite this being billed as a moderated point-counterpoint, both speakers did not debate each other. In fact, the session consisted of two separate presentations. Whereas Dr. Rozin focused on how to examine research, journalist Michael Specter went on various rants.

**From Research Bias to GMO Defense:**
Specter’s main issue of contention had to do with anyone who opposed GMOs, who he characterized as "afraid of science". Specter started his talk by stating that those who advocate for organics as a solution are elitist, self-involved, and out of touch. In his words, advocates of sustainability and organics live in an Old McDonald fantasy world.

Despite the fact that an abundance of food is thrown out and wasted on a daily basis, he based a large part of his talk on the myth that hunger is simply about not having or growing enough food to feed the world. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – a leading and respected authority on global food issues – has stated that the three main causes of hunger are poverty, conflict, and climate change. According to Specter, however, solutions for hunger that don’t have to do with GMOs are well-meaning and "cute", but will never work.

[@eatright prides itself on science & balance. @specterm take on public-private partnership is sensationalist & disappointing...](#)

--- @MindPeasNFoodRD
Specter also mentioned that if it weren’t for Big Food and Big Ag, no one in attendance at the session would be alive, and that blaming Big Food and Big Ag for problems was akin to blaming the Wright Brothers for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Some of Michael Specter’s other rants – in a session that had been created to serve as a point-counterpoint about collaborations between the food industry and the public sector – included Greenpeace and raw milk.

Oddly, after Michael Specter finished his talk, Dr. Rozin asked to have the floor simply so he could announce that he agreed with mostly everything that Mr. Specter had said.

There was no “extended” question-and-answer period. In comparison to all other sessions’ 30-minute allotment for questions, this session only offered ten minutes.

The consensus from both Dr. Rozin and Michael Specter was that we need to recognize the good Big Food does. When asked about whether these partnerships hurt the RD credential, Dr. Rozin pointed to PepsiCo’s Tropicana and Quaker products as examples of the company offering healthier products (had this been an actual point-counterpoint, someone could have pointed out that PepsiCo spends most of its advertising budget on its unhealthiest foods, engages in problematic environmental and labor practices, and also to remember that fruit juice is not a health food, and that most Quaker products are laden with sugar -- some even with partially hydrogenated oils).

Michael Specter also defended the food industry during the Q&A portion by pointing to McDonald’s getting rid of battery cages (despite his intense dislike for PETA, which he spoke about at length, Specter forgot to mention that McDonald’s getting rid of battery cages was largely due to pressure from another animal rights group: the Humane Society) as evidence that these companies make meaningful changes.

Again, had this been a point-counterpoint session, someone on the panel could have mentioned that while McDonald’s has made some progress on the animal welfare front, the fact that they spend over $100 million marketing Happy Meals each year is cause for concern, as are their healthwashed items (i.e.: sugar-laden oatmeal, egg white McMuffins cooked in trans fats). There is also an important difference between recognizing a company making positive change and partnering with them or accepting funding from them.

To say this was a wasted opportunity for dialogue would be an understatement. One speaker’s hostility aside, this session did not address the topic, nor did it provide a platform for anyone who takes issue with Big Food’s partnerships with health organizations to speak out. The only thing this session demonstrated was an apparent unwillingness from the Academy to have that difficult conversation.

One RD’s Take on the Point-Counterpoint Session

This was billed as a dynamic and interactive session looking at questions regarding relationships between public and private entities in healthcare, academic and nonprofit sectors in a time of limited resources. The talk’s description set me up to hear questions such as: “Do corporate sponsorships help organizations achieve their mission and goals? How can cross-sector collaborations deliver social value? Can
safeguards maintain autonomy and accountability?"

Unfortunately the announced subject I expected to be applied specifically to the corporate sponsors of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics became the proverbial elephant in the room, identified only by some of the few persons who were able to ask questions following the two presentations!

The moderator introduced both of the speakers, describing their speaking order. Their presentations would be followed by a structured opportunity for questions from members of the audience at the end. Questioners would adhere to rules which would be announced. No learning objectives were given by either speaker.

Dr. Rozin’s slide presentation was well planned and organized, with citations and delivered with humor. He alluded to his long research career at the University of Pennsylvania in such a self-effacing manner that he didn’t mention that he had coined the term “the omnivore’s dilemma”, which later became the title of Michael Pollan’s book! He presented graphical data to support decade by decade rising and waning of trends of popular concern, with one hot concern waning when another nutrition or health concern emerged. He debunked the notion of “epidemic” as the wrong term to describe increasing rates of obesity in the US and globally. He touched upon brief examples of a public university conducting research projects with corporate financial support and some of the ethical problems that could arise in the process. At several points he checked his time meter and stated he was almost out of time.

Journalist Michael Specter opened by saying “After I spoke recently, a woman came up to me and said: “you weren’t as obnoxious as I expected!” He announced that the world will need to produce 50% more food to feed its population in the next 50 years. He stated he never used slides and had no written material or references to support his statements.

His rant of about 45 minutes included assertions like “we have been consuming GMO foods for at least 20 years and no one has died yet.” Since he never checked the time clock he seemed unaware of any time restraints. With exactly 10 minutes remaining in the session, the moderator took over and began to review the procedure for audience questions: State your name and ask one question. No statements allowed. Time remaining allowed about 5 audience questions. She interrupted the first person at least twice, requesting that he get to his question about the ethical failures of some of the corporate sponsors and partners of the Academy.

I asked a question about the conflict of the Academy with its corporate junk food sponsors supporting affiliates to seek licensure for RDs in their legislatures. These sponsorships played into the hands of outside groups who alleged that RDs spout poor nutritional information provided by corporate sponsors. The moderator noted
loudly “bias on the part of the questioner” before asking the speakers to comment.

I happened to speak to Michael Specter when I saw him outside the Convention Center after the meeting. I know that the Commission on Dietetic Registration requires that educational objectives and anticipated outcomes be prepared prior to approval of sessions like this one, which provide continuing education units (CEUs) to attendees. When I told him this was an unusual expectation, he said he hadn’t been asked to prepare objectives and he wouldn’t have consented to speak if he were required to do so!”

Pat Bollinger, MS, RD

RECOMMENDATIONS & DFPI'S CONTINUING MISSION

DFPI sets forth the following recommendations for future FNCEs:

1. Remove the ban on expo floor photography. If some exhibitors are concerned with negative press or public outcry, they should consider more carefully the messaging displayed at their booths.

2. Only allow conference-related information in the FNCE tote bag (i.e.: a listing of sessions and a map of the expo floor), not materials written by industry.

3. Seek out and invite more advocacy groups like Corporate Accountability International, The Union of Concerned Scientists, The Environmental Working Group, and Food Chain Workers’ Alliance to the expo.

As far as DFPI’s continuing mission is concerned, we were grateful to meet with current Academy President Dr. Glenna McCollum and Past President Dr. Ethan Bergman for 15 minutes on the last day of the conference. At that meeting, DFPI submitted its Change.org petition (which called for the Academy to cut ties with its Big Food sponsors and garnered just over 25,000 signatures) and expressed its desire to engage in dialogue with Academy leadership over this issue.

DFPI is well aware that systemic change takes time, effort, and dialogue. We believe it is crucial to have ongoing conversations about this topic with Academy leadership and have incremental goals in place, with the hopeful end result of the Academy severing partnerships and sponsorships with Big Food.

In order to have more fruitful and productive discussions on this issue, DFPI’s current "asks" to the Academy are:

1. Revisit results of last year's survey on dietitians' attitudes on corporate sponsorship, published in Volume 7, Issue 2-3 of the Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition;

2. Share Academy financial summaries and highlight specific contributions from corporate partners and sponsors;
3. Evaluate the Academy's budget to:
   - Identify areas of potential savings that could help offset possible future changes in sponsorship.
   - Determine likely cost(s) members would need to absorb with possible future changes in sponsorship, and poll membership on willingness to absorb said costs (with specific figures given).

4. Continue dialogue with DFPI and other like-minded Dietetic Practice Groups in regards to minimizing or eliminating Big Food's sponsorship of educational sessions.

We believe that once this information is made available, future conversations about the Academy's sponsorships can move away from the hypothetical and theoretical and deal with actual figures and numbers that reflect the organization’s reality. Above all else, our goal is to continue our advocacy efforts in a passionate manner while engaging in civil and respectful discourse.

Attendees’ Comments to the Academy

"I sincerely hope the Academy has a standard process/SOP or committee that screens and selects partners and sponsors. I understand the Academy does not want to exclude Big Food because we want them to make appropriate changes, but as an organization that represents dietitians in the US, I urge them to choose ethical sponsors. The Academy’s current partnerships with Big Food negatively affect dietitians’ credibility and professional image. It looks we support and approve their products and marketing schemes."

Olivia Tzou, MS, RD

"I agree with DFPI that the problem at hand is not collaboration with the private sector, but rather who in the private sector we align with. For this reason it is critical to propose regulations and guidelines around partnerships in order to preserve the integrity of the RD credential. I strongly believe that companies aligned with the Academy should support practices for reducing the prevalence of obesity and disordered eating, and protecting global environmental welfare.

By minimizing ties with companies that deceitfully promote health in their public relations campaigns but not in actual practice, consumers are more likely to turn to dietitians to provide reliable evidence-based treatment recommendations. It is of paramount importance that nutrition education for dietitians be unbiased and based on objective evidence performed by independent researchers. I hope that open dialogue between DFPI and The Academy can improve communication and transparency so that sponsorships ultimately strengthen rather than compromise our reputation."

David Wiss, MS, RDN, CPT