

SECTION: 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis reported in this paper is based on findings of the School Milk Pilot Test, a demonstration study jointly sponsored by the National Dairy Council and the American School Food Service Association. In this pilot, a national sample of elementary and secondary schools and their suppliers adopted a variety of measures designed to improve the attractiveness of the fluid milk served to the students in these schools. Of the 146 schools taking part, 99 served as "test" schools and the remaining 47 as "control" schools. The purpose of the analysis is to estimate the impact of implementing these measures nationally.

Information regarding student participation in the meals programs and the quantity of milk sales in the pilot schools was gathered daily throughout most of school year 2001/02. A comparison of findings for "test" and "control" schools revealed a net improvement of 4.4 percent in program participation in test schools at the secondary level. Differences in program participation among elementary students were not statistically significant.

The quantity of milk sold (adjusted by level of participation) increased measurably in both elementary schools (+15 percent) and secondary schools (+22 percent). Projected nationally, these rates of increase would result in an additional 63 million gallons of fluid milk marketed in schools each year.

It was found that children's diets were affected by the test in different ways. Some children were attracted to participate in school meals programs who hadn't before. Some children who were already participating in the school meals programs but weren't drinking milk with their meals were prompted to become milk drinkers. And, finally, some children remained outside the school meals programs but increased their consumption of milk through a la carte or vending machine purchases.

On the basis of the SMPT findings, it was estimated that participation in the school meals program would increase by about 430,000 students if the test measures were adopted nationwide. No measurable change in the rate of participation among elementary school students was found. A somewhat larger number of students who were already participating in the meals programs (over 2.1 million) would be attracted to the consumption of milk as a result of the actions taken to enhance the image and quality of the product.

Though most of the health consequences of children's dietary patterns do not become evident until the individual reaches middle-age or older, the economic impact associated with poor diets can be very large. Those influences that are known to be diet-related were identified and the literature was searched for evidence of the effect of dietary intervention on these conditions. There is accumulating evidence that a dietary intervention that contributes to a lasting improvement in eating habits can have a large payoff.

School Milk Pilot Test: Estimating the Effects of National Implementation

To estimate the dimensions of this benefit, the health-care cost savings associated with the reduced incidence of six common illnesses for the 2.6 million children that would be directly affected by these changes were calculated. The annual savings, measured in present value dollars, were estimated to range between \$0.8 billion and \$1.1 billion. While this estimate is based on the most authoritative evidence available, it is necessarily dependent on assumptions and fragmentary evidence. It should therefore be considered an approximation of what would occur.

There would also be additional costs resulting from national implementation of these measures. Increased participation in the school meals programs would increase Federal outlays for meal reimbursements by around \$104 million. Milk processors would incur additional costs for packaging, labeling, and product improvements. Depending on the extent of the changes required, these costs would range between \$161 million and \$308 million. Finally, additional coolers, display cases, and vending machines would be required in the schools. The annual depreciation charge for this equipment would be about \$39 million. In total, it is estimated that these costs would be in the \$300 million to \$450 million range.