

# Food industry self-regulation:

Changes in nutrition of foods and drinks that may be advertised to children



In the United States, 19 food and beverage companies have voluntarily pledged to limit unhealthy food advertising to children through an industry self-regulatory program called the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). In 2018, CFBAI announced revised nutrition criteria that were put in place in January 2020.

CFBAI regularly publishes a list of products that meet its revised nutrition criteria and that companies indicate may be advertised to children under age 12. The UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health evaluated the nutrition quality of the products that were included on this list as of August 2020 by using an NPI score, an overall nutrition score created by independent experts, and documented changes following implementation of the CFBAI revised nutrition criteria. The Rudd Center compiled their methodology, results, and recommendations into a report, available on the [UConn Rudd Center’s website](#). A summary is on page 2.

# Key Findings

## IMPROVEMENTS

The CFBAI revised nutrition criteria resulted in slightly stricter nutritional standards for products that companies may advertise directly to children.



More than three-quarters of the drinks did not contain added sugar or non-nutritive sweeteners.



Companies added healthier drinks such as water and milk.



The number of food products has declined.



The nutritional quality of sweet snacks and yogurts improved slightly.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

**CFBAI's revised nutrition criteria are insufficient.**



Thirty-seven percent of food products on the CFBAI list do not qualify as healthy. Companies listed zero fruits or vegetables.



Most products offered by brands that can be advertised to children are unhealthy. These can look similar to healthier products under the same brand. Advertising affects kids' preferences and desires for the brands, not just the healthier products shown in an ad.

**CFBAI's definition of advertising is narrow.**



Companies continue to market unhealthy products through other forms such as product packaging, in-store marketing, licensed characters, sponsorships, and social media.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**CFBAI is failing to protect children from the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages, which negatively impacts their food preferences, diets, and health.**

The UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Health recommends:

- CFBAI must strengthen nutrition criteria, expand its definition of marketing, and expand its child audience definition to include children up to age 14, and ideally to age 17.
- The U.S. federal government should eliminate unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children as a tax-deductible corporate expense.
- The U.S. Federal Trade Commission can establish voluntary guidelines for companies to ensure that the products they advertise to children promote a healthy diet.
- Policymakers at the state and local levels can restrict unhealthy food marketing to children in their communities, including in schools, fast food restaurants, and retail locations.
- Advocates can call on CFBAI to implement experts' recommendations to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing and create opportunities for youth-led counter-marketing campaigns to expose company practices.

A full list of recommendations, as well as the study's methodology, comprehensive key findings, and more can be found on the [UConn Rudd Center's website](#).