

A Growing Crisis of Overfeeding

January 19, 2005

The opening to Kelly D. Brownell's recently published essay "Overfeeding the Future."

1. In its peak year, the primary U.S. government nutrition education program (called 5 a Day) was given \$3 million for promotion. The food industry spends 1000 times that much just to advertise fast foods, just to children.
2. The most recognized corporate logo in China aside from Chinese companies is KFC.
3. Ronald McDonald is the second most recognized figure in the world, next to Santa Claus.
4. Creating major news in September of 2002, McDonald's announced that by February, 2003 it would change the oil used for its fried products to decrease (but not eliminate) trans fats. McDonald's President Mike Roberts spoke of a "healthier nutrition profile" in heralding the company's concern for public health, and the CEO lauded his company for being a "leader in social responsibility." In February of 2003, the company quietly announced a change in plans (there would be a "delay"). The delay is still in effect.
5. Kraft Foods announced in 2003 it would cut portion sizes of some products to "help arrest the rise in obesity." Less than a year later, Kraft announced this plan had been scrapped.
6. Child marketers have declared the cell phone their next horizon, noting that tens of millions of children power up a cell phone at the same time each day (after school). Satellite technology allows marketers to know a child's precise location and will beam advertisements, coupons, and directions to nearby eating establishments.
7. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid recommends that meat, poultry, fish, and eggs comprise 14% of the diet, yet 52% of USDA food promotion resources are allocated to these foods. The pyramid recommends 33% of the diet from fruits and vegetables, but they receive 5% of the USDA budget. The meat and dairy industries "outlobby" the fruit and vegetable sectors by orders of magnitude.

This list could be thousands strong. Stampeding technology, corporate interests, authorities caught unaware, and stigma directed at overweight people (which emphasizes personal over corporate responsibility) has allowed an environment to evolve that guarantees poor diet, physical inactivity, and obesity. The world now faces a crisis of overfeeding.

Excerpted from "Overfeeding the Future," an essay that appears in the collection *Feeding the Future: From Fat to Famine*, just published by House of Anansi Press, www.anansi.ca. Copyright Dr. Kelly D. Brownell. Reprinted with permission.