



ACDA Members Present Comments to USDA

On National School Lunch Program

On September 11, 2008, at the invitation of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Scott Mandell, CEO, President and Co-Founder of Enjoy Life Food, and Carol Shilson, Executive Director of the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center, provided comments on the National School Lunch Program saying that children with special dietary needs such as Celiac Disease, food allergies and other health concerns are not accommodated under the current program.

The meeting, held by the Food and Nutrition Service of the USDA, was a *Request for Public Comments for Use in Preparing for 2009 Reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Programs*, which includes the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program; and the Child and Adult Care Food Program, which support nutritious meals and snacks served to children in schools, child care institutions and afterschool care programs.

Speaking on behalf of the American Celiac Disease Alliance (ACDA) and Enjoy Life Foods, Mandell said, "On behalf of the children, their parents and caregivers that are currently excluded from receiving program benefits, I strongly urge the USDA to make the necessary changes to the *National School Lunch Program* to ensure that ALL eligible students can benefit from this important, federally assisted meal program."

Mandell supported his comments by citing the growing number of children affected by Celiac Disease, food allergies, food intolerances and autism:

- Celiac Disease, is the world's most common genetic auto-immune disease, and is estimated to affect at least 1% of the population [\[i\]](#). At this time, the only known treatment for Celiac Disease is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet for life (gluten is the protein that is found in wheat, barley and rye).
- Food allergies are estimated to affect 6 to 8% of children and 3 to 4% of adults [\[ii\]](#), and diagnoses are on the rise. For the over 12 million Americans with food allergies, symptoms can range from mild, such as gastrointestinal discomfort, to life threatening as is the case with anaphylactic shock.
- Another 30 million Americans have food intolerances [\[iii\]](#) that cause them to avoid certain foods.

- And finally, one in 150 children are affected by autism [\[iv\]](#) which can be effectively managed by following a diet free of gluten and casein (the protein found in dairy).

Carol Shilson, Executive Director of the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center and ACDA member, also provided comments on behalf of Stefano Guandalini, M.D., the Center's founder and medical director. "It is not right that children with celiac disease should be denied a safe meal or given food that is nutritionally inadequate. Surely we cannot expect our children to learn and thrive with such conditions. It is our duty to see that all children are provided with a nutritious and safe meal at school," Guandalini commented.

Shilson also presented results from a recent survey by the ACDA, which revealed that among 2,229 parents of children with Celiac Disease, only 111 were able to get a gluten-free lunch at school. The others had to pack a lunch or go without, according to the ACDA survey.

[i] Dr. Stefano Guandalini, University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center

[ii] FAAN

[iii] National Institutes of Health

[iv] Autism Society of America