

Campaign promotes calcium consumption for children

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit of the Alabama Department of Public Health is working in cooperation with the Alabama Osteoporosis Task Force to distribute educational materials to elementary grade students in central Alabama this fall to promote calcium consumption for children and offset a "calcium crisis."

Calcium is the major mineral that strengthens bones; milk and other dairy products have the highest concentration of calcium the body can quickly absorb. Studies find the following:

- At a time when they need calcium the most, many children are choosing soft drinks and other beverages over dairy products.
- About half of all U.S. children less than 5 years of age do not get enough calcium in their diet.
- Eighty-five percent of teen-age girls (and 61 percent of teen-age boys) do not get enough daily calcium (1,300 milligrams) at a time when most adult bone mass is established.
- Teens often abandon milk and other dairy products because they fear these choices will make them "fat."
- Children whose diets do not provide the nutrients to build bones to maximum potential are at risk for weakened bones and disabling injuries later in life.
- Research recently published in The Lancet reports that one extra soft drink a day increases a child's risk of obesity by 60 percent.
- A recent study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association suggests that milk may play a role in preventing obesity and insulin resistance syndrome--a key risk factor for Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

School principals in Montgomery and in 25 counties throughout central Alabama are being sent a packet with teachers' lesson plans, overheads for classroom activities, a poster for cafeterias and student coloring/activity books. The campaign, designed for fourth and fifth graders, features a group of cartoon characters called Nutraliens whose names and functions correspond with key nutrients found in milk. The cartoon characters present a picture of the important nutrients in milk and goals children can achieve when they give their bodies the best kind of fuel.

A member of the Osteoporosis Task Force, Birmingham-based Barber's Dairy, is donating the materials the company has developed. While the campaign is sponsored by Barber's Dairy, it

does not promote any particular brand of dairy products. Over the past year the company has also distributed growth charts and activity books through state child services agencies.

Johnny Collins, Barber's divisional manager, said the company's goal with the program is to educate children about healthy choices early enough to influence behavior. "New research points to the calcium-poor dietary habits of children jeopardizing long- and short-term health. Children are accustomed to learning through cartoon characters, and we think this program can make a positive impact on them."

Miriam Gaines, director of the health department's Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit, said, "These cartoon characters encourage children to make healthy food choices such as milk which have lifetime benefits for building strong bones, teeth and healthy bodies."

Following is a list of the 25 area counties that will receive these educational materials:

Autauga, Barbour, Bibb, Bullock, Butler, Chambers, Chilton, Choctaw, Clarke, Crenshaw, Dallas, Elmore, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tallapoosa and Wilcox. Distribution is based on zip code and some counties will not receive materials for all schools within the county. Plans are to distribute the materials to other part of the state in the spring of 2004.

Samples of the Nutraliens materials are available at www.barbersdairy.com.

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Note to the News Media:

For more information and electronic files of Nutraliens characters contact:

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