**The Writing Prompt:**

Write an explanatory essay about the efforts being made to combat obesity in the United States. Your essay must be based on ideas and information that can be found in the attached passage set.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

* read the passages;
* plan your response;
* write your response; and
* revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

* include a claim;
* use evidence from multiple sources; and
* avoid overly relying on one source.

# **Packaged foods pack fewer calories; obesity still a problem, experts say**

By Los Angeles Times

1. American kids are eating healthier because companies have cut down the amount of calories in their packaged foods.
2. A new study found that parents bought food with 101 less calories per person per day in 2012 than they did in 2007. But experts said it's not enough to stop children from becoming too overweight.
3. The study looked at the results of a promise by big food companies to reduce the number of calories in their products. A calorie is a unit of energy in food. Too many calories lead to weight gain. The study was published Wednesday in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.
4. The study followed an earlier report on the work of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation. The group is made up of 16 big food companies. The companies agreed to reduce by 1.5 trillion the total number of calories in the packaged food they sold by 2015. Together, the companies make products that contain about a third of all the calories sold in America.

## Calorie Count Cut

1. The companies reduced the number of calories in food they sold by an average of 78 calories per person. That comes to a total of 6.4 trillion calories.
2. An independent review called it an “impressive” accomplishment. However, just 78 calories won’t stop children from becoming obese, or extremely overweight, which is unhealthy. Poor people and some minority groups need to eat even fewer calories per day and eat more vegetables and grains.
3. “There has been a cultural shift in this country — especially households with kids have really started buying fewer calories,” said Barry Popkin. He is a professor in the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina. Popkin and another researcher wrote the study.
4. “The calories (in foods people) purchased has really gone down. And most of the decline is in the kind of food you and I would call junk food or junk beverages,” Popkin said.
5. Not all the news is positive, he said. “What we don’t have is an increase in beans, whole grains, produce.” People might buy them more if they became cheaper than packaged food.
6. People are buying far less unhealthy foods, which means they are eating healthier, said Derek Yach. He is the executive director of Vitality Institute, a health research company. "In other words — both food quantity and quality is starting to improve,” he said.

## Fighting Childhood Obesity

1. The 16 companies worked to reduce calories by making products with less calories. They also reduced calories in food by making servings for one person and changing the recipes of existing products, said Lisa Gable. She is the president of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation.
2. The companies include General Mills, Kellogg, Kraft Foods and Cola-Cola. They are selling more lower-calorie versions of popular products, but that doesn’t mean they’re healthy, several experts said.
3. “The lower-calorie products are driving the bus,” said Hank Cardello. He is a food analyst and former food industry executive. Nearly all the increase in food the 16 companies sold came from lower-calorie foods.
4. There is more positive news in the fight against obesity in some groups of Americans. People who are obese are very overweight and have a body mass index (BMI) of more than 30.
5. The overall average reduction of 78 calories a day is not enough to reduce obesity in children ages 2 to 19, Popkin and others wrote. It's actually less than half of what's needed to bring the obesity rate down to where it needs to be. They recommended that children should reduce the number of calories by at least 157. African-American young people and poor Americans should eat even less calories.
6. Researchers congratulated the companies and called "upon them and other industry leaders … to go even further.”

## Legumes And Whole Grains

1. Dr. James Marks is senior vice president at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The foundation paid for the study. He said researchers still need to keep watch on the food companies. He called it a good first step.
2. The companies’ pledge was part of first lady Michelle Obama’s work to end childhood obesity. In 2010, she began the "Let's Move" campaign to get kids to eat healthier and exercise.
3. “She focused on kids and kids eating healthy. She brought a lot of attention to it,” Popkin said. “She did a big announcement with these companies and that put some pressure on them.”
4. Packaged foods account for nearly two-thirds of the calories Americans eat, the researchers wrote. Some people think that people need to eat more fresh produce, legumes and whole grains.
5. Food companies “recognize that the challenge of reducing obesity is one that requires everyone to do their part,” the Grocery Manufacturers of America said in a statement. The group said food companies have introduced more than 20,000 healthier products. These have with fewer calories, less fat and sugar, and more whole grains. The group also noted that full-calorie soft drinks aren't being sold in schools anymore.

# **The potato's nutrition is questioned**

By The Philadelphia Inquirer

1. PHILADELPHIA — The humble white potato has lately been at the center of a rollicking debate.
2. Congress is pushing hard to get the spuds included in the WIC program. Founded 40 years ago, WIC provides food for low-income women who are pregnant or breast-feeding, and their infants and children.
3. Senators and members of the House of Representatives say it is their right to get involved. Doctors, nutritionists and others accuse Congress of improperly imposing itself on nutrition science.
4. The WIC program provides coupons that help feed poor women and children. Known as vouchers, these coupons can only be used to buy certain foods, such as milk, eggs and bread. Each item’s inclusion is based on medical research into the particular needs of the people who use WIC.
5. Five years ago, WIC began to include fruits and vegetables. White potatoes were left out.

## The Rejected Potato

1. That’s not because potatoes aren't considered healthy enough, according to the Department of Agriculture (USDA), which runs WIC.
2. Rather, it is because the 8.7 million women and children covered by WIC already eat enough white potatoes.
3. Saying that the exclusion makes potatoes look unhealthy, the National Potato Council has been pushing members of Congress to speak out. It has been approaching both Democrats and Republicans, many of them from potato-growing states.
4. This same group, with the help of Congress, took on the Obama administration in 2011 when the president wanted to limit potatoes in school lunches. In the end, the group was successful in forcing the president to back down.
5. Mark Szymanski, spokesman for the council, said the decision to leave out the potato is not "founded in good nutritional science or common sense." The Department of Agriculture, he said, "is singling out one item from the entire food basket." It is saying, "Do not eat this because it’s somehow lacking.”
6. Senator Susan Collins, a Republican from the potato-growing state of Maine, praised the crop. The potato, she said, contains a lot of potassium, which is "important for pregnant women and new mothers.”

## Congress Told To Butt Out

1. Meanwhile, nearly 100 health and science organizations have joined to ask Congress to stay out of scientific matters. Among them are the American Pediatric Association, the American Medical Association, the National PTA and the March of Dimes.
2. Congress should not interfere with "science-based rules regarding the federal child nutrition programs,” the organizations wrote.
3. Last Tuesday, around 100 doctors went to Capitol Hill to urge Congress to back away from potatoes.
4. WIC officials, meanwhile, are furious.
5. “The National Potato Council has declared war on WIC,” said the Reverend Douglas Greenaway, president of WIC. “I would call it nothing more than industrial greed. This is all just a public relations battle on the part of the potato industry.”
6. Campaigners on behalf of the poor say Congress is going too far.
7. Congress has never before interfered in this way, based on pressure from an industry, said Julie Zaebst of the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger. “It’s just ridiculous.”
8. Zaebst said she worries that Congress is setting a dangerous example. She fears that what is happening now may encourage other industries to push for "foods that wouldn’t help families.”

## Basic Potato Is Not So Bad

1. White potatoes themselves pose a problem, said dietitian Chelsea Anderson.
2. White potatoes don’t offer as many health benefits as other vegetables, she said. Another problem, she added, is that there are "not a lot of healthy ways people prepare them.”
3. Doctor Hans Kersten agreed, saying, “I often hear women say french fries are their favorite vegetable.”
4. White potatoes need not be villainized, said nutritionist Alison Ventura, who sees things a little differently.
5. “They’re a very healthy part of a diet,” she said. Nonetheless, she added, “young children’s diets are much higher in french fries” than they should be.