Reducing Sodium Consumption at Universities and Colleges in New York State, 2016-2021

Problem: Americans consume about 50% more sodium than the recommended daily limit. Consuming too much sodium increases the risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and chronic kidney disease. In New York State (NYS), over 7.2 million adults report watching or reducing their sodium intake. Because an estimated 71% of sodium intake comes from sodium added during food manufacturing and preparation of restaurant foods, action to reduce consumption must focus on changing the sodium content of the food supply. [Source: NYS Information for Action Report #2021-15, released 8/4/21]

Intervention: In 2016, the NYS Department of Health (DOH) received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to reduce sodium consumption by increasing the availability, accessibility, and selection of lower-sodium foods. DOH partnered with three local contractors to recruit and assess universities and colleges in Erie, Niagara, Onondaga, and Rockland counties. Contractors provided universities and colleges with individualized training and technical assistance on nutrition standards, food purchasing and preparation, and nutrition promotion. They also worked with DOH to measure the impact of their strategies and activities.

Impact: During the funded period, five participating universities and colleges implemented nutrition standards, six modified menus, eight replaced products, and all ten changed nutrition environments. A total of 28,490 students benefited from these improvements.

Local contractors used the ***Sodium Practices Assessment Tool 2.0*** to assess policies and practices at 6 of 10 participating sites. Results demonstrate that several new strategies were adopted. The number of universities and colleges considering sodium content when purchasing food increased for baked goods, canned products, and sauces (see **Figure 1a**, below). The number of sites using standardized recipes and displaying sodium information also increased (see **Figure 1b**, below).

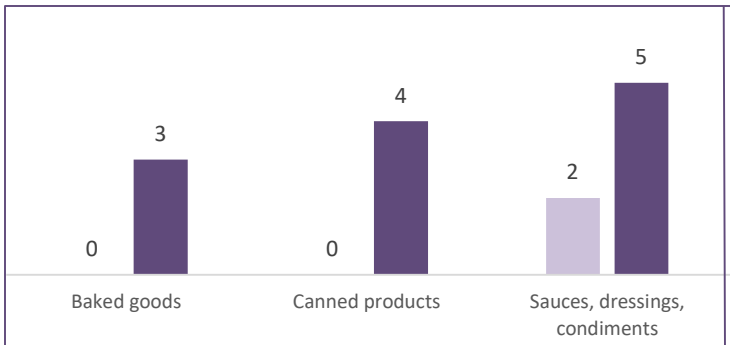

Figure 1a. Number of sites that consider sodium content when purchasing food, by category (n=6)

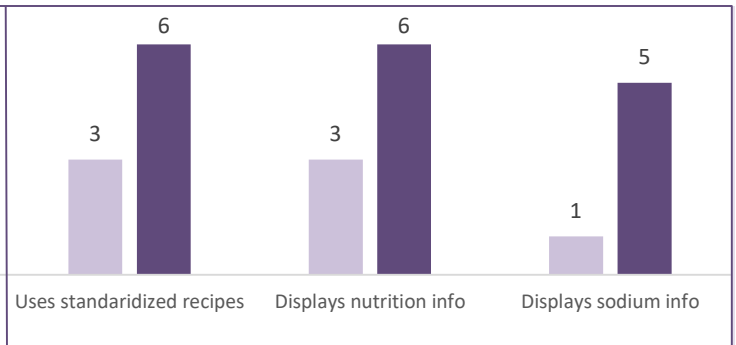

Figure 1b. Number of sites that implement selected strategies (n=6)

Reducing Sodium Consumption at Universities and Colleges in New York State, 2016-2021 (continued)

Impact: Local contractors used the ***Sodium Modification List*** to track changes in the sodium content of foods served. Results document reductions in 50 of 424 targeted food items. These reductions were achieved through product replacements (86%), recipe modifications (10%), and menu changes (4%). The average sodium content of targeted food items was reduced by 8% for baked goods and cereals; by 9% for canned vegetables and beans; by 18% for sauces, dressings, and condiments; by 11% for deli meats and cheeses; and by 8% for all targeted food items combined. Additional information is provided below in **Figure 2**.

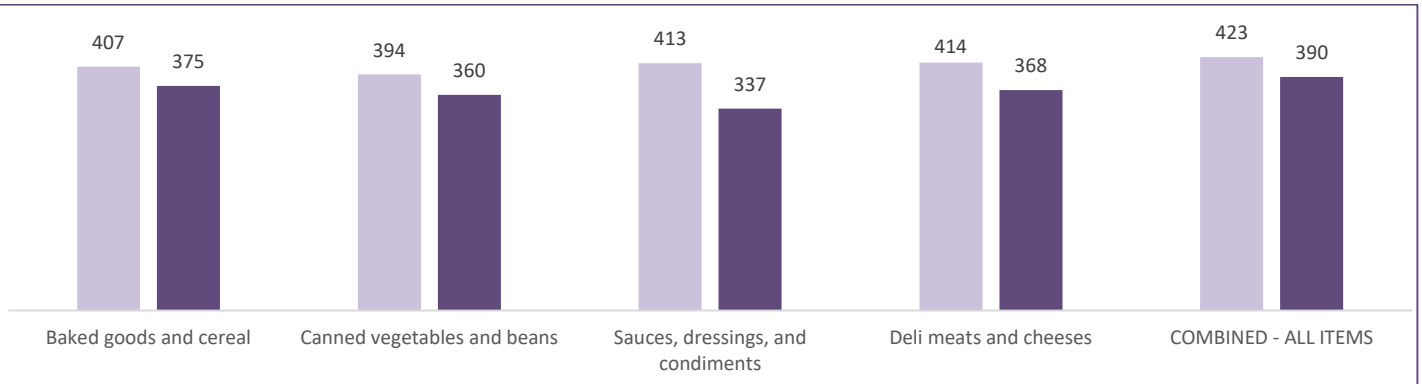

Figure 2. Average sodium content of targeted food items, in milligrams (n=424)

Conclusion: NYS's Sodium Reduction in Communities program successfully changed policies and practices at participating universities and colleges. These changes led to measurable reductions in the sodium content of targeted food items. Site-level changes like these will be more effective if food industry partners produce lower-sodium products, in accordance with FDA's Final Sodium Reduction Guidance (released 10/2021). For more information, visit https://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/sodium_reduction