Justin Svendsen

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United States School Nutrition vs. Canadian School Nutrition

As strong of a race as humanity is, one common restriction capable of hindering man weak and vulnerable may also lead us to strength and longevity. The food humans eat on a daily basis provide energy for survival, repair, and renewal, but food itself can also lead humans into an early grave. As we see now in our society, obesity and diabetes have been claiming the lives of countless adult individuals in America, and we are just starting to see its devastation trickle down to the American youth in recent years. Due to the lax rules and regulations of nutrition standards in American schools, children of all ages are unknowingly being harmed, in some cases, permanently. Canadian health and nutrition standards for their school aged youth, on the federal and provincial levels, far supersede American standards.

Canada, unlike America, favors a less centralized form of government in which provinces and territories enjoy more freedom of self-governing. Due to this, the responsibility for regulating the nutrition standards within cafeteria walls in schools falls upon the shoulders of the provinces and territories. That being said, the Canadian federal government represents a regulatory power over all commercialized sale of food items and food supplements. Holding themselves to better and better standards over the decades, Canada has successfully resourced and managed a few major successes in nationwide nutrition assessment and improvement. One such success story comes in the form of a public access database known as The Canadian Nutrient File, or the CNF for short. This database is a 15-year long collection and assessment of 5960 of Canadian citizens most commonly eaten foods, and measures 152 nutrients present in these foods so as to give deep insight of all nutrients present, be they naturally occurring or synthetic. The federal government also regulates the contaminant levels of most farmed foods in their borders, creating strict standards based on healthy consumption levels of these contaminants in infants 5 years and younger.(Canadian Nutrient File) These same contaminants are required to be listed under the CNF as part of the 152 nutrients measured so as to allow public awareness and scrutiny to be transparent. In addition, Canada has a list of longitudinal studies currently in the works that further distances itself from the low standard which is the American diet.

Through use of widespread health and nutrition surveys throughout Canada’s 6 major provinces, the federal government has been able to conduct continuous longitudinal studies of specific populations of people and their health habits. The first of these studies is known as the National Population Health Survey (NPHS), a longitudinal study of adults within the six provinces having started in 1995, which asks health and nutrition related questions, along with personal physical statistical questions, to gain insight on the general health and health concerns of the population at large. This study in particular updates information on each participant every two years and is still in progress today.(Canada, Health) One other major success of the Canadian federal government in the fight for healthier populations is known as the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS). This study is the single most comprehensive widespread population study conducted in Canada. The biomonitoring component allowed for this study to take bodily fluids from each participant in the form of urine and blood samples, allowing for the analysis of blood triglyceride levels and other important disease measurements. In addition, the survey included 20 detailed questions about the nutrition habits, concerns, and pitfalls of each individual painting a comprehensive picture for the researchers when paired with the fluid samples.(Canada,Health) The final major survey conducted by the Canadian government is known as the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a joint operation between four of Canada’s major population analysis organizations. These four organizations included the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and Statistics Canada. The survey itself took a more exact approach, asking specific nutrition issue related questions to gather intel on sociocultural nutritional norms and beliefs.(Nutrition Survey In Canada p230-231)

Through taking an in depth look at the efforts of the Canadian government to better the lives of its populations health, it is clearly obvious that their efforts outdo and supersede the efforts of the United States Government. In standing true to their main values, the ideals of peace, order and good government are clearly visible within the protocols and priority sets that the government shows in its efforts towards raising the national health standard. Focusing now on the new generation of individuals growing up, an analysis of Canada’s provincial laws towards nutrition make the laws of the states look pitiful.

Due to the delegation of powers within the Canadian government, Provinces are responsible for maintaining and regulating a wide range of government protocols and activities that the states do not have the luxury of overseeing. One of the most pivotal of these laws have been school lunch nutrition standards, a hotly debated issue by the populations of every province as of late. Due to this being the case, there is room for corruption to prevail over justice and greater good. On average though, the provinces maintain higher standards than that of the most prestigious of private schools in America. In contrast to the American values of life, liberty and property, which are often utilized towards corruption, provinces more closely align to the Canadian ideals of peace, order, and good government. Starting with analyzing the laws in Quebec, major action was recently taken in 2009 by the Quebec government organization, The Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), to over-hall and refresh the nutrition standards for their youths.(Going the Healthy Route at School) The new framework policy created was specifically targeted towards child daycares, primary schools, high schools, and playcenters along with local restaurants around these targeted areas. This was a preventative action taken by the Quebec government to stamp out child obesity and weight related issues which had just begun to prevail within certain school districts. The primary goal of the policy was to shift focus away from fried foods, opting instead for baked foods, and to set strict limits on sodium and sugar content of foods offered within the cafeterias, vending machines, and snack bars alike.(Going The Healthy Route at School) In looking at the province with the highest nutrition standards for their school children, Nova Scotia checks out on top of the list. The provincial government of Nova Scotia utilizes macronutrient limitations and micronutrient minimums on the foods served within cafeteria walls.(Nova Scotia: Maximum Nutrition) The strict requirements also emphasize minimal or no processing, a wide array of required nutritious foods to be served throughout the week, and no tolerance for sugary, artificial junk food of any kind. These strict standards of Nova Scotia are found to be on the opposite side of the spectrum in comparison to American school lunches.

America is suffering from the compounding snowball effect that is bad nutrition. Ever since the sugar craze in the 1920’s, Americans have become petrified of fat and began opting towards eating their way into a sugary grave. Today, much is being done to prevent this mindset from flowing into the heads of our vulnerable adolescent youth. To much grief, sorrow, and regret is being seen within adults, teenagers, and even children who are beginning to show signs of hypertension, early onset diabetes, and even obesity. The Federal Food and Drug Administration, who regulates the national recommended diet for all Americans, along with the United States Department of Agriculture, are directly responsible for the nutrition standards and regulations within American public school. As specific as they may be, very few standards are set to ensure the quality of these recommended foods. Public American schools are required to provide one fruit group or one vegetable group per meal counting for up to 1/5th of the total caloric value of that meal. Two to four servings of grains are also allotted, depending on the grade level, which should comprise no more than 1/3rd of the total calories. A meat-based product of some type must be included within the meal. For choice of drink, children are allowed to choose between fruit juice or fat free/2% milk.(School Meal Flexibilities) None of these lunch foods are required to be organic, non-gmo, artificial sweetener free, or minimally processed. Recently passed in 2017, legislation requiring grains within school lunches to be whole grains and not fortified grains was passed. Within this piece of legislations, sodium limits were placed on snack products not allowing them to exceed 280mg per serving.(School Meal Flexibilities) As of late, major progress has been made on improving the nutrition standards of American schools during the Obama administration. Programs such as the my plate program and 60 minute active programs helped to curb the rise in obesity and other nutrition related diseases, but with the new administration comes new agendas. Many of these programs and regulations generated to improve the lives of the nations most vulnerable have been repealed by the Trump administration due to quote,” Damaging the meat, sugar, and dairy industries with strict regulations.” The values of life, liberty, and property are clearly being reflected in the most corrupt of ways, with an emphasis on property being key.

America is quickly falling back into its old agendas and biases towards nutrition, leaving behind science and research for the sake of profit and culture. In comparison to Canada, America holds a childlike like notion of nutritional wisdom, much like a child with its hand in the cookie jar. A sense of permeability is lacking within the American government, treating issues and problems as nonexistent until they’ve reached breaking point. Canada showcases a bright and hopeful future for the nutrition of its people, holding the best regard for the health of the population in mind. On the topic of nutrition, Canada serves as a role model for America to follow.

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