

And Now a Word From Our Sponsors



Are America's
Nutrition Professionals
in the Pocket of Big Food?

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Executive Summary

By any measure, the nation is currently suffering from an epidemic of diet-related health problems. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,¹ chronic diseases – such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes – “are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems.”

Against this backdrop, we must ask: what is the role of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND)—the nation’s largest association of nutrition professionals—in preventing or at least stemming the tide of diet-related health problems? What responsibility does this influential group of registered dietitians bear to be a leading advocate for policy changes to make eating healthfully more accessible? Does forming partnerships with the food industry compromise such a group’s credibility? And what does the food industry gain from such partnerships?

Why does it matter? As this report will show, the food industry’s deep infiltration of the nation’s top nutrition organization raises serious questions not only about that profession’s credibility, but also about its policy positions. The nation is currently embroiled in a series of policy debates about how to fix our broken food system. A 74,000-member health organization has great potential to shape that national discourse – for better and for worse.

Findings:

- Beginning in 2001, AND listed 10 food industry sponsors; the 2011 annual report lists 38, a more than three-fold increase.
- The most loyal AND sponsor is the National Cattleman’s Beef Association, for 12 years running (2001-2012).
- Processed food giants ConAgra and General Mills have been AND sponsors for 10 of the last 12 years.
- Kellogg and the National Dairy Council have been AND sponsors for 9 of the last 12 years.
- Companies on AND’s list of approved continuing education providers include Coca-Cola, Kraft Foods, Nestlé, and PepsiCo.
- Among the messages taught in Coca-Cola-sponsored continuing education courses are: sugar is not harmful to children; aspartame is completely safe, including for children over one year; and the Institute of Medicine is too restrictive in its school nutrition standards.
- At AND’s 2012 annual meeting, 18 organizations – less than five percent of all exhibitors – captured 25 percent of the total exhibitor space. Only two out of the 18 represented whole, non-processed foods.
- Based on square footage, only about 12 percent of the expo floor was taken up by fruit and vegetable vendors, using AND’s own generous classification.
- The AND Foundation sells “nutrition symposia” sponsorships for \$50,000 at the annual meeting. In 2012, Nestlé presented a session on “Optimal Hydration.”

- The Corn Refiners Association (lobbyists for high fructose corn syrup) sponsored three “expo impact” sessions at the AND 2012 annual meeting.
- Roughly 23 percent of annual meeting speakers had industry ties, although most of these conflicts were not disclosed in the program session description.
- In an independent survey, 80 percent of registered dietitians said sponsorship implies Academy endorsement of that company and its products.
- Almost all RDs surveyed (97 percent) thought the Academy should verify that a sponsor’s corporate mission is consistent with that of the Academy prior to accepting them.
- A majority of RDs surveyed found three current AND sponsors “unacceptable.” (Coca-Cola, Mars, and PepsiCo.)
- The AND lobbying agenda reveals mostly safe issues benefiting registered dietitians. To date, AND has not supported controversial nutrition policies that might upset corporate sponsors, such as limits on soft drink sizes, soda taxes, or GMO labels.
- AND’s sponsors and their activities appear to violate AND’s own sponsorship guidelines.
- In 2011, AND generated \$1.85 million in sponsorship revenue, which represents about 5% the total revenue. This is down from 9% in both 2010 and 2009.
- For the AND Foundation, corporate contributions were the single largest source of revenue in 2011: \$1.3 million out of a total of \$3.4 million or 38 percent.
- In 2011, the AND Foundation reported more than \$17 million in net assets, more than six times its expenses for that year.

Recommendations

1) Greater Transparency: AND should make more details available to the public (or at least to members) regarding corporate sponsorship—far beyond what it currently provides in its annual reports.

2) Request Input from Membership: Trade group policies should reflect the desires of its members. Many RDs object to corporate sponsorship but don’t know how to make their voices heard.

3) Meaningful Sponsorship Guidelines: AND should implement much stronger and more meaningful sponsorship guidelines, possibly looking to the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group’s stricter guidelines as a model.

4) Reject Corporate-Sponsored Education: AND should reject outright corporate-sponsored continuing education, as well as corporate-sponsored education sessions at its annual meeting. AND should also consider placing more distance between its credentialing arm and the main organization.

5) Increased Leadership on Nutrition Policy: In recent years, AND’s leadership has taken important steps to improve its policy agenda and create a positive presence in Washington. However, while the staff in the D.C. office is lobbying on behalf of AND’s membership, “education sessions” are being taught to RDs by Coke and Hershey’s. This disconnect will continue to undermine AND’s credibility on critical policy issues until the conflicts are resolved.

Introduction

By any measure, the nation is currently suffering from an epidemic of diet-related health problems. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,¹ chronic diseases – such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes – “are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems.” The numbers are stunning: 133 million Americans – almost half of all adults – have at least one of these chronic diseases, which cause seven out of 10 deaths each year. In addition to factors such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet plays a major causal role in chronic disease.

There is also irrefutable evidence that the food industry’s incessant marketing of unhealthy foods, especially to children, is at least partly to blame for America’s poor eating habits. It’s nearly impossible for “eat healthy” messages to compete with an industry that spends billions of dollars a year marketing “dollar menu meals” to adults and Happy Meals to children.

Against this backdrop, we must ask: what is the role of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics—the nation’s largest association of nutrition professionals—in preventing or at least stemming the tide of diet-related health problems? What responsibility does this influential group of registered dietitians bear to be

a leading advocate for policy change to make eating healthfully more accessible? Does forming partnerships with the food industry compromise such a group’s credibility? And what does the food industry gain from such partnerships?

Formed in 1917, the American Dietetic Association changed its name in 2012 to the Academy of Nutrition of Dietetics (AND). The organization’s 74,000 members are mostly registered dietitians (RDs), among other health and nutrition professionals. (It’s incorporated as a 501(c)(6), the IRS tax designation for “business league” or trade group.) The organization’s stated mission is “empowering members to be the nation’s food and nutrition leaders;” and its vision is: “optimizing the nation’s health through food and nutrition.”² The group seems to do well financially. In 2011, AND enjoyed close to \$34 million in revenues, from a mix of membership dues, sponsorships, and other sources.³

Controversy surrounding the group’s relationship with the food industry is hardly new. In 1995, *New York Times* reporter Marian Burros wrote about criticisms of the group for taking funding from industry groups such as the Sugar Association, the Meat Board, and companies such as McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, and Mars.⁴ According to Burros: “Nothing negative is ever included in

materials produced by the association, a fact that critics attribute to its link to industry.” In that same article, veteran sustainable food advocate and Columbia University Professor Joan Gussow noted that giving money to registered dietitians is how industry silences its critics.

In her seminal 2002 book, *Food Politics*, New York University Professor Marion Nestle documented the American Dietetic Association’s (its name then) troubling ties to the food industry. For example, Nestle cited a 1993 collaboration between ADA and McDonald’s to develop “Food FUNdamentals” Happy Meal toys as part of a shared “commitment to nutrition education.”⁵ Equally worrisome, Nestle found industry advertisements in the

ADA journal, along with a 20-page “educational” insert from the Dannon Institute in the April 2000 issue.⁶

Little has changed since then—except that things have gotten even worse. As this report will show, the food industry’s deep infiltration of the nation’s top nutrition organization—the Academy of Nutrition of Dietetics—raises serious questions not only about that profession’s credibility, but also about its policy positions. The nation is currently embroiled in major debates and disputes about how to fix our broken food system, from agricultural subsidies to GMO labeling to marketing to children. A 74,000-member health organization has great potential to shape that national discourse - for better and for worse.

A Decade of Loyal Food Industry Sponsors

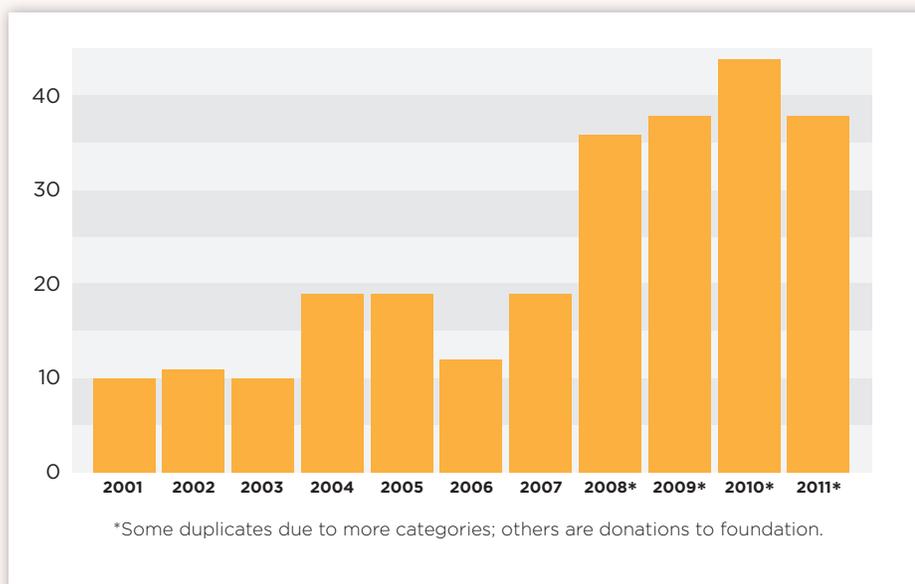
An examination of AND annual reports from 2001 to 2011 reveals a sharp rise in the number of food industry sponsors. Beginning in 2001, AND listed 10 food industry sponsors. The 2011 annual report listed 38, a more than three-fold increase. Although in later years some companies are listed more than once for different forms of sponsorship, the figures suggest a marked increase in sponsorship opportunities. (See table.)

According to an article published in the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental*

Nutrition, the Academy implemented a new corporate relations sponsorship program in 2007, including “partners” for the first time, which confers an ongoing relationship, sometimes over several years.⁷ The first Academy partners were Aramark, GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare, the National Dairy Council, and Unilever, with PepsiCo and Coca-Cola Company becoming partners shortly thereafter.

Certain food companies and industry trade groups have become especially loyal sponsors over the years, suggesting

TABLE 1: Number of food company / trade group sponsors of AND over 10 years



a deeper relationship of cooperation and influence. The top loyalty prize goes to the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, which has sponsored AND for the past 12 years (2001-2012). NCBA is a large and powerful lobbying organization representing the nation’s beef producers. Most notoriously, NCBA has flexed its lobbying muscle over the years to influence federal nutrition guidelines to ensure that beef remains a dietary staple.⁸

Other loyal AND sponsors include processed food giants ConAgra, General Mills (for 10 of past 12 years), and Kellogg, along with the marketing group, the National Dairy Council, each listed for nine of the past 12 years.

Over the past five years, AND’s most loyal Academy Partners (for all five years) have been Aramark, Coca-Cola, and the National Dairy Council. During that period, the following companies were listed as either “Partners” or “Premier Sponsors:” PepsiCo, Kellogg, Mars, General Mills, and Abbott Nutrition.

On its promotional web page where AND solicits corporate sponsorships, the group offers its justification for these relationships: “We think it’s important for us to be at the same table with food companies because of the positive influence that we can have on them.”⁹ They continue:

For the Academy, relationships with outside organizations are not about promoting

TABLE 2: Most Loyal Corporate Sponsors

Academy Sponsors 2001-2012				
 National Cattlemen's Beef Association	 ConAgra Foods	 GENERAL MILLS	 Kellogg's	 NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL
12 years	10 years	10 years	9 years	9 years
Academy Partners 2008-2012				
 ARAMARK	 The Coca-Cola Company	 NATIONAL DAIRY COUNCIL		
Partners or Premier Sponsors 2008-2012				
 Abbott Nutrition	 GENERAL MILLS	 Kellogg's	 MARS food	 PEPSICO

companies' products; they are about creating nutrition messages that people can understand and act upon to improve their health and that of their families.

The top level of corporate sponsorship, "Academy Partner," garners a nice collection of perks, mostly buying access to educate nutrition professionals on how their particular products are conducive to a healthy lifestyle.¹⁰ For example, partners can co-sponsor "all Academy Premier Events," conduct a 90-minute educational presentation at AND's annual meeting, and host either a culinary demo or media briefing also at the annual meeting.

Partner status also confers this benefit: "The right to co-create, co-brand an Academy-themed informational consumer campaign." Examples include the Coca-Cola "Heart Truth Campaign," which involves fashion shows of women wearing red dresses and is also promoted by the federal government.¹¹

Another instance of partner/sponsor co-branding is the National Dairy Council's "3-Every-Day of Dairy Campaign," which is a marketing vehicle for the dairy industry disguised as a nutrition program. The partnership consists of several fact sheets that bear the AND logo, demonstrating the value of the group's seal of approval.¹² The National Dairy Council does not disclose that they paid for the right to use the AND logo.



PAST ACADEMY PRESIDENT SYLVIA ESCOTT-STUMP
AT COCA-COLA HEART TRUTH CAMPAIGN EVENT

It's important to view these materials as opportunities for positive and free publicity under the guise of "education" for both RDs and consumers. Dietitians working in clinical settings or as independent practitioners are an important vehicle through which many consumers become educated on how to eat healthfully. By putting its seal of approval on materials developed by Coca-Cola and the National Dairy Council, the Academy is sending a strong message that these are legitimate sources of health and nutrition information, using its members to then educate the general public. In reality, these materials are little more than public relations messages for food companies and trade associations to sell more products.

The Best Nutrition Education Money Can Buy

One of the most important ways that food companies promote themselves to RDs is through the Academy's credentialing agency, the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). The agency, housed within AND, oversees the credentialing process for RDs and numerous other credentials and awards. The CDR also approves "accredited providers" for Continuing Profession Education" (CPE) for RDs.¹³

To teach RDs, one must pay a \$250 non-refundable application fee, along with an annual \$300 "maintenance fee." The AND Commission promotes the "benefits" of becoming an accredited provider of CPE by emphasizing "marketing opportunities" such as exposure to Academy members, promotion of CPE activities, and being listed on the Commission's website.¹⁴ Judging from the list of providers, (about 200) quite a few food companies are taking advantage of this opportunity—including Coca-Cola, Kraft, Nestlé, and PepsiCo, often under the guise of the company's "institute."¹⁵

Accredited continuing education providers include:

- *General Mills Bell Institute for Health and Wellness*
- *Calorie Control Council [industry group]*
- *ConAgra Foods Science Institute*

- *Coca-Cola Company Beverage Institute for Health and Wellness*
- *Institute of Food Technologists [leaders tied to industry]*
- *International Food Information Council Foundation [industry group]*
- *Kraft Foods Global*
- *National Pasteurized Eggs*
- *Nestlé HealthCare Nutrition*
- *PepsiCo Nutrition*

The following continuing education session is available for purchase by RDs directly from AND's website: *Restaurant Menu Labeling: Impact on the Environment of Nutrition and Dietetics*.¹⁶ The two presenters are from the National Restaurant Association, the powerful lobbying organization for the restaurant industry, which fought for decades against menu labeling; thus having them present on this topic seems especially disingenuous.

Also available are two sessions presented by the public relations group, International Food Information Council, which only puts out information that favors its food industry members and funders:

- *Agricultural and Food Production Practices*¹⁷
- *Translating the 2010 Dietary Guidelines to Consumer Acceptance and Action*.¹⁸

Industry-spun Science is Not Continuing Education

Allowing industry representatives to provide continuing education is problematic on several levels. For example, the food industry is not in the education business: it's in the selling-more-food business. Just because Coca-Cola and Hershey's launch their own branded "institutes" does not change this reality. Likewise, inventing a group called a "council"

does not automatically mean your information is science-based.

The point of continuing education is to keep nutrition professionals abreast of their field's cutting-edge research and other trends. The food industry does not monitor

research: they select it; they spin it; and at times, fund it to get favorable outcomes. Often these companies rely on outside "experts" to teach their sponsored webinars, but while these instructors give the illusion of objectivity, the information can still be biased. Coca-Cola is not going to select (and pay) an expert who has anything bad to say about their products. These experts are hand-picked by companies precisely because

the messages they bring are in line with corporate goals to sell more. As a result, RDs are getting a very biased education on numerous critical health issues.

For example, Ronald Kleinman is an MD who teaches continuing education webinars for Coca-Cola. From a quick look at his bio, his credentials are impressive: professor at Harvard, chief physician at Massachusetts General Hospital, etc.¹⁹ But his resume also reads

like a who's who of the corporate food industry. In addition to Coca-Cola, Dr. Kleinman consults for Burger King and General Mills. Kleinman was also tapped by Monsanto last fall to be one of the numerous "experts" speaking out against

Proposition 37 in California, which would have required labeling of genetically-engineered food in that state.²⁰

Then it may not be surprising that one take-away message from his Coke-sponsored seminar is how sugar is just fine for our kids. The goal was to assuage parents' concerns about sugar's impact on their children. He dismissed such ideas as being (in his words) "urban



SLIDE FROM CONTINUING EDUCATION WEBINAR ON "BUILDING BETTER BONE HEALTH" SPONSORED BY GENERAL MILLS, MAKER OF KIX, YOPLAIT.²¹

myths” and “misconceptions.” Because the message is coming from a well-credentialed MD, it carries weight; but that message was still bought and paid for by Coca-Cola. (See Table 2, p. 11.)

What’s Missing from RD Continuing Education?

Equally concerning, if RDs are getting their continuing education units from the food industry, what messages are they missing? Coca-Cola or General Mills are not going to sponsor sessions on the harmful impacts of marketing to children despite the numerous studies demonstrating the connection. Nor will they hire a scientist to explain why excess sugar consumption raises the risk of heart disease, despite that growing body of evidence. Where else, other than their own trade group’s approved providers, will RDs get exposed to such information

while getting continuing education credits they need to further their career? Moreover, most of industry’s sessions are free, thereby furthering the RD’s incentive to choose these over other options.

Also, these companies not only have their own large budget for marketing these sessions, but also gain access to 70,000-plus RDs on AND’s email list. By comparison, an advocacy group such as the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, which does excellent webinars, does not have such access; as a result most RDs don’t know about them.

Finally, the messages being conveyed through the continuing education system by definition have the Academy stamp of approval. In fact, in some sessions, the Academy is cited as an authority on the issue being discussed, thereby closing the loop on corporate-sponsored public relations disguised as science.

TABLE 2: Sampling of Continuing Education Sessions

Addressing Questions About Aspartame and Stevia Sweeteners

Presenters: *Bernadene Magnuson and Marianella Herrera*

Coke-friendly messages:

- *Aspartame is completely safe, including for children over one year*
- *Aspartame allows enjoyment of sweet taste without raising blood sugar levels*
- *Aspartame and stevia can help with weight loss*

Understanding Americans' Approach to Weight Management

Presenters: *Adam Drewnowski and Robyn Flipse*

Coke-friendly messages:

- *Low-calorie sweeteners (LCS) do not overstimulate taste receptors, provoke hunger, cause overeating, or increase body weight*
- *Use of LCS may be index of healthier diets ("Diet soda consumers had better diets!")*
- *LCS intake reduces total calories consumed and improves palatability of foods*

Children's Dietary Recommendations

Presenter: *Robert Kleinman*

Coke-friendly messages:

- *Majority of studies have not found link between sugar and behavior in children. Despite the evidence, parents continue to believe sugar leads to behavioral problems in children due to their perceptual biases*
- *The safety of low-calorie sweeteners are supported by numerous peer-reviewed studies and major regulatory agencies*
- *Institute of Medicine is too restrictive in its school nutrition standards*

Source: Coca-Cola Beverage Institute for Health and Wellness website.²²

AND Annual Meeting Infused with Corporate Messages

Known as the “Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo” (FNCE) the Academy’s annual meeting brings together as many as 10,000 registered dietitians and other health professionals. AND offers the food industry a dizzying array of sponsorship opportunities for the organization’s flagship event. Those groups already designated as either “partner” or “premier” automatically get numerous perks at the conference. In addition, for \$15,000 one can become a “FNCE event sponsor.” If all you can afford is \$10,000 you can always be a “breakfast sponsor;” or any combination of the above. (See Table 3, p. 13.)

There are yet more sponsorship opportunities available through workshops, education sessions, and other presentations. Attendees at the AND annual meeting could sign up for a “Pre-FNCE Workshop” sponsored by Hershey’s, in which RDs could “take a trip to Hershey, PA, to experience the science of chocolate at the Hershey Company’s Chocolate Lab... [and] visit the Hershey Story Museum.” But to cover up the fact that nutrition professionals were visiting a candy store, the event was called “From Nature to Nutrition: A Hands-on Exploration of Natural Cocoa from the Bean to Health Benefits,” and was listed in the program as “Planned with Academy Partner: Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition.” To ensure maximum

participation, RDs earned four continuing education units for this full-day field trip.

Meanwhile, the Academy’s nonprofit, tax-exempt Foundation offers “Foundation Nutrition Symposia” for a cool \$50,000 plus travel expenses for speakers. The three companies that took advantage of this in 2012 were Ajinomoto (maker of many food additives including aspartame and MSG), Abbott Nutrition Health Institute (maker of Ensure), and Nestlé Nutrition Institute. Nestlé is a leading “maker” of bottled water and sweetened beverages aimed at children, including juices and chocolate milk. Their session was called “Optimal Hydration: New Insight” (to stress the “importance of maintaining good hydration in children”).

Each company offered two-hour sessions for which RDs could earn two continuing educational units. The name “Foundation Nutrition Symposia” and the way the sessions are set off in the program imply an endorsement by the Foundation.

Then there was the “Kids Eat Right Breakfast Series,” all three of which were industry-sponsored. Those sessions:

- **Breakfast in the Classroom: Convictions & Controversies.** *Sponsored by: Premier Sponsor PepsiCo*

- **Shaping up America’s Breakfast: RDs and Consumers Choose MyBowl.** *Sponsored by: Premier Sponsor The Kellogg Company*

• **Choose MyBowl: Tools and Resources for Building A Better Breakfast.** *Sponsored by: Premier Sponsor The Kellogg Company.*

Both Kellogg and PepsiCo (owner of Quaker Oats) manufacture numerous child-friendly cereals that have come under fire for being too high in sugar. Through this sponsorship, the

companies are attempting to counter any potential criticism by positioning their products as being healthy for children. “Choose MyBowl” is Kellogg’s version of the federal government’s “MyPlate” educational icon for optimal eating habits. (Kellogg’s booth also had copious MyBowl materials.)

TABLE 3: Sponsorship Opportunities at 2012 Meeting

Foundation Nutrition Symposia – \$50,000



(Maker of many food additives including aspartame)



Breakfast Series – \$10,000



Foundation Photo Shop – \$10,000



Yoga – \$15,000

Foundation Kids Eat Right Gala



Foundation Gold FNCE Sponsor Package – \$20,000

Foundation Silver FNCE Sponsor Package – \$10,000

Foundation Bronze FNCE Sponsor Package – \$5,000

Next came numerous opportunities for industry to educate RDs on the expo show floor. “Expo Impact Sessions” took place in the exhibit hall; of five offered, all were corporate-sponsored:

- **Corn Refiners Association** (three)
 - 1) *Added Sugars and Sweeteners*
 - 2) *Fructose, Sucrose, and High Fructose Corn Syrup: Danger or Distraction?*
 - 3) *High Fructose Corn Syrup: Myths vs. Science*
- **General Mills: Zeroing in on the Whole Grain Definition**
- **PepsiCo: Social Nutrition Solutions: Inspiring Lifestyle Changes through Peer-to-Peer Motivation.**

The Corn Refiners Association has been spending millions of dollars on a marketing campaign it calls “Sweet Surprise” to disabuse consumers of any negative impressions they have about high fructose corn syrup. General Mills makes dozens of child-oriented sugary cereals and is trying to hide that fact by putting “whole grain” labels on brands such as Reese’s Puffs and Cookie Crisp. PepsiCo is the nation’s largest food company and in addition to soda, owns the Frito-Lay, Gatorade, Quaker Oats, and Tropicana brands, so has much at stake in the national conversation about healthy eating.

Next came “Culinary Demonstrations” in the exhibit hall; all six were corporate-sponsored:

- **Cracking the College Code: Fabulous Food Deconstructed.** *Presented by Academy Partner: ARAMARK*
- **In the Kitchen and Outside the Box: Cooking Lactose-free.** *Presented by Academy Partner: National Dairy Council*

- **Think Inside the Box: Increase Fiber with Food Ingredients.** *Presented by Premier Sponsor: Kellogg Company*
- **Taste, Versatility and Health: Soy as a Nutritious Kitchen Staple.** *Presented by Premier Sponsor: SOYJOY*
- **Seductive Nutrition: How to Make Healthier Foods Appealing to Your Clients.** *Presented by Premier Sponsor: Unilever*
- **Diabetes in a New Light: Diabetes-Friendly Fare with Flavor.** *Presented by Premier Sponsor: Novo Nordisk (with TV chef personality Paula Deen).*

Finally there were “Education Sessions,” the main event. Seven out of 136 total sessions listed corporate sponsorship:

- **From Evidence to Practice: Understanding Dietary Fructose - Intakes, Research and Implications.** *Presented by Academy Partner: The Coca-Cola Company*
- **Kids Are Drinking What?!** *Presented by Academy Partner: National Dairy Council*
- **Advancing Practice through Outcomes-Based Research.** *Presented by Academy Partner: ARAMARK*
- **You Have the Coolest Job! – RDs in the Food Industry.** *Presented by Academy Partner: Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition*
- **Food Additives: Impact on Consumers and Clients.** *Planned with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the American Society for Nutrition, the Institute of Food Technologies and the International Food Information Council*
- **Call to Action: Elevating Your Role in Patient Care.** *Presented by Academy Partner: Abbott Nutrition*
- **Hot Topic: Germ Warfare – The Impact of Home Food Safety™ on Safe Eating.** *Planned with ConAgra Foods and Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.*

But session sponsorships tell only part of the story of corporate influence, as many of the speakers also had industry ties. Out of more than 300 speakers, 26 were directly employed by the food industry, with another 44 speakers who had current or past ties to food or pharmaceutical companies. All told, roughly 23 percent of the FNCE speakers had industry ties. Most importantly, this potential conflict of interest wasn't always made clear from the session description. Keep in mind that RDs could earn continuing education units by attending these sessions. (See Table 4, p. 16.)

Also at the annual meeting, each “dietetic practice group” (DPG) or “member interest group” (MIG) holds its own event(s). The following are examples of meetings with corporate sponsorships:²³

- **Filipino Americans in Dietetics and Nutrition.** *Member Meeting and Reception Sponsored by Butter Buds Foodservice*
- **Medical Nutrition Practice Group.** *Gluten Intolerance Session Sponsored by General Mills and Schar (gluten-free products)*
- **Nutrition Educators of Health Professionals.** *1) Member Reception Sponsored by Distilled Spirits Council of United States; 2) Member Breakfast Sponsored by Corn Refiners Association*
- **Sports Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutrition.** *1) Member Breakfast Sponsored by Gatorade; 2) Member Breakfast Sponsored by Egg Nutrition Center; 3) Member Breakfast Sponsored by Cranberry Marketing Committee; 4) Member Reception Sponsored by Unilever; 5) Member Meeting Sponsored by Solae*
- **Weight Management.** *Member Breakfast Sponsored by Corn Refiners Association.*

Council Sounds Better Than Industry Front Group

Even more insidious is the influence of the International Food Information Council (IFIC), an industry front group. A front group is an entity set up and controlled by other groups, without its actions being attributed to the funders. In other words, when companies don't want to take responsibility for certain activities, they fund a front group instead.

IFIC presents itself as a legitimate research authority, and sponsors numerous education sessions at FNCE—but it's funded by the food industry. On its board of trustees²⁴ sit representatives from Coca-Cola, General Mills, Kraft Foods, and Mars, while its funders²⁵ include the likes of PepsiCo, Hershey's, McDonald's, Nestlé, and Monsanto.

IFIC's stated mission is “to effectively communicate science-based information about health, nutrition and food safety for the public good.” So what sort of “science-based” information was IFIC communicating to thousands of nutrition professionals at the AND gathering?

One of IFIC's sessions at the 2011 annual meeting was: “How Risky is Our Food? Clarifying the Controversies of Chemical Risks.”²⁶ The Academy did not see fit to mention IFIC's role in the session—despite the moderator, Marianne Smith Edge, being the group's senior vice president of nutrition and food safety. At no time during her remarks did she disclose IFIC's corporate funding, although AND's rules require speakers to disclose any conflicts of interest. The two panelists were Julie Miller

Table 4: 2012 Annual Meeting Speakers Employed by Either the Food or Pharma Industries

NAME	TITLE
Elizabeth Arndt, PhD	ConAgra Foods Director R&D
Sara Baer-Sinnott, MRP	President, Oldways
Susan Borra, RD	SVP, Food Marketing Institute <i>(grocery store trade group)</i>
Susan Crockett, PhD, RD, FADA	VP Health and Nutrition, General Mills
Amy DeMage, MS, RD	Dietetic Internship Director, ARAMARK
Cheryl Dolven, MS, RD	Director, Health and Wellness, Darden Group <i>(owns restaurant chains such as Olive Garden)</i>
Sylvia Emberger, RD, LDN	Corporate Nutritionist, Ahold USA
Sylvia Geiger, MS, RD	Consultant Dietitian, Price Chopper <i>(supermarket chain)</i>
Marianne Gillete, MS, MBA	VP Applied Research, McCormick and Company
Cynthia Goody, PhD, MBA, RD, LD	Senior Director - Nutrition, McDonald's Corporation
Mary Hise, PhD, RD, CNSD	Director, Baxter Healthcare
Glenna Hughes, MS	Research Scientist, Solae (owned by DuPont)
Beth Johnson, MS RD	Consultant to leading food companies and lobbying groups
Bonnie Johnson, MS, RD	PepsiCo Global Nutrition Senior Principal Scientist
Kim Kirchherr, MS, RD, LDN, CDE	SUPERVALU/Jewel-Osco Corporate Dietitian; Advisory board for Facts Up Front
Jess Kolko, RD, LD	Healthy Eating RD, Whole Foods Market
Idamarie Laquatra, PhD, RD	Director, Global Nutrition, H.J. Heinz Company
Elizabeth Pivonka, PhD, RD	Produce for Better Health Foundation
Erin Quann, PhD, RD	Director Regulatory Affairs, Dairy Management Inc.
Janice Raymond, MD, RD, CD	Clinical Nutrition Manager, Sodexo
David Schmidt	President and CEO, International Food Information Council <i>(industry-funded)</i>
Marianne Smith Edge, MS, RD, LD, FADA	SVP, International Food Information Council <i>(industry-funded)</i>
Lori Stockert, MS, RDH	Clinician, Pfizer, Inc.
Lisa Sutherland, PhD	Consultant to Walmart, others
Sara Swiderski, MBA, RD, LDN	Director of Patient Services, ARAMARK
Lindsey Toth, MS, RD	Nutrition Communications, PepsiCo

Additional speakers consulted with the following companies: Sara Lee, Monsanto, McDonald's, Ocean Spray, Nestlé, Coca-Cola, Hershey's, and Burger King, among others.

Jones and Carl Winter, both academic researchers, apparently hand-picked by IFIC for their industry-friendly positions. Each speaker downplayed the risks of chemicals such as pesticides, food dyes, and other additives in food, while poking fun at the value of organic production and dismissing the Environmental Working Group's "Dirty Dozen" report on pesticides on produce. It was a one-sided presentation, without any disclosure that the session sponsor had a conflict of interest that informed their panelists' biased information.

IFIC was back in action at the 2012 event with multiple presentations,²⁷ including one on food additives, again downplaying any concerns RDs might have, such as the connection between food dyes and child behavior problems. One panelist explained that additives are safe because, after all, strawberries and coffee contain "chemicals" responsible for their taste and aroma. So, why should we fear controversial preservatives such as BHT and BHA? The Center for Science in the Public Interest recommends²⁸ avoiding BHA because even the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers BHA to be "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen."²⁹

Here is how registered dietitian Andy Bellatti described this session:

Panelist Dr. Roger Clemens enthusiastically defended chemical additives while mocking survey results that showed how a significant portion of the public mistrusts the Food and Drug Administration. When I asked him why other countries have banned additives that the FDA has not, I was told it is simply a result of "a different

group of scientists" arriving at "a different conclusion." How convenient. What concerned me even more was how most of the audience appeared to find Dr. Clemens' defense of additives humorous. Sadly, it appeared that Dr. Clemens did not have to work very hard to convince many dietitians that chemical additives were safe.³⁰

Dr. Clemens' bio includes being past president of the Institute of Food Technologists (whose leadership³¹ has numerous ties to the food industry), and 21 years as Nestlé's scientific advisor.³² But the RDs at this IFIC panel wouldn't have learned of this expert's conflicted background at this biased presentation.

Another industry group that AND associates with is the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI). While the name sounds innocuous, the group's board of trustees (listed in its 2010 annual report) includes representatives of Coca-Cola, Monsanto, PepsiCo, and Kraft Foods; the Institute's members are a who's who of the food industry.³³ And yet AND has deemed it appropriate to plan continuing educational seminars with this group.³⁴

Even more disturbing and ironic: AND accepted funding from ILSI for a research study, "to determine whether the funding source (specifically industry) results in a difference in study quality," according to ILSI's 2011 annual report. For its research, ILSI relied on articles provided by AND's own library. Not surprisingly, the resulting article— published online only—found "no evidence of bias...that could be attributed to industry funding sources in food and nutrition research."³⁵

Although the article states that the "fundings had no role in study design, data

collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript,” the outcome certainly benefits the industry group that funded the effort. That AND saw no conflict of interest in using industry money to study the potential bias of using industry money is troubling to say the least. Moreover, there is already a significant body of research demonstrating a clear bias in the outcome of studies funded by industry. For example, studies funded by the food industry on the health effects of soft drink consumption have been shown to have biased outcomes.³⁶

Dairy Industry Marketing Disguised as Science

As an “Academy Partner,” the National Dairy Council is a prominent presence at FNCE. But there is significant debate about whether dairy products are a necessary part of our daily diet. In recent years many top health experts have begun to question this nutrition dogma that has long been promoted by industry and government alike. In her books and on her blog, New York University Professor Marion Nestle has written about how:

[D]airy lobbying groups, aided and abetted by the USDA, convinced nutritionists that dairy foods were equivalent to essential nutrients and the only reliable source of dietary calcium, when they are really just another food group and one high in saturated fat, at that.³⁷

In other words, we can get the same required nutrients from other, healthier foods; there is nothing unique about dairy that makes it essential. Professor Walter Willett, chair of the nutrition department of the Harvard School of

The Academy is heavily sponsored by the National Dairy Council and their biases show in their recommendations.

- HEIDI TURNER, MS, RD, CD

Public Health, goes further, arguing that consuming dairy products is not only unnecessary, it can even be harmful. “By now there’s quite a body of data showing a higher risk of fatal prostate cancer associated with milk,” he told WebMD in 2011.³⁸ Even if one doesn’t give up dairy altogether, “it’s also important for people to know that they don’t have to drink milk to be healthy,” he added.

But no one at the dairy-sponsored sessions at the 2012 AND conference heard anything close to that message—quite the opposite. The “consume dairy” message was ubiquitous at the AND conference, throughout the expo hall (yogurt was everywhere) and in the breakout sessions.

Here is how registered dietitian Andy Bellatti described a National Dairy Council session he attended:

A session on children and beverages titled “Kids Are Drinking What?” was essentially an hour-long advertisement for milk. The dairy reps acknowledged how they target African-American and Hispanic communities with a “drink more milk” message, which I found particularly disturbing as both ethnic groups have high

rates of lactose intolerance...Even more disturbing was all the hand-wringing over children's high intake of sugar-sweetened beverages, as if the dairy council really cares about kids' health. This alleged concern disappeared when I asked about the added sugar in chocolate milk. The panelists' - all of whom were employed by the National Dairy Council - answer was that chocolate milk is a "nutrient-dense" beverage. Never mind how, with three teaspoons of sugar per cup, one serving of chocolate milk supplies the maximum daily amount of added sugar for children ages four to eight, as recommended by the American Heart Association.³⁹

More disturbing were the sessions with dairy industry influence that was not disclosed in the program. For example, the session description for "Beyond Belly Aches: Identifying and Differentiating Food Allergies and Intolerances," did not mention that all three speakers had ties to the dairy industry. This could explain how the panelists pushed dairy consumption, even for those who are lactose-intolerant. Apparently some RDs were having none of it and even

walked out of the session. One tweeted: "Encouraging Latinos to purchase increasing amounts of cheese? No thanks." And: "NO I won't recommend 3 dairy servings a day to someone who is lactose-intolerant."⁴⁰

It's too bad these RDs weren't able to get a refund on their registration fee. They came to their professional trade group's conference for scientifically sound information on allergies and instead got an infomercial from the dairy industry.

Registered dietitian Elizabeth Lee was also bothered by the dairy industry spin and what she called a "lack of regulation from the Academy on the content of some presentations." (It was her first FNCE experience.) She reported:

I was shocked at some of the recommendations for dairy consumption even if the individual has evidence of lactose intolerance. To me, that wasn't sound dietetic evidence and advice and shouldn't have been shared at a professional gathering.

Nutrition Trade Show or Junk Food Expo?

A major component of AND’s annual meeting is the expo, where more than 300 vendors have booths to sample their products and share information. It’s certainly the most dramatic and disturbing indicator of the extent to which the food industry has permeated the largest gathering of dietitians.

An examination of the expo exhibitors confirms what was all-too easy to see walking through the hall: major junk food companies dominated the show floor. Based on the pricing of the booths, exhibitor payments represent big money for the conference: about \$1.5 million.

(This figure does not include AND sponsors that received a “free booth” as part of their “partner” or “premier” sponsorship status; see Table 6, p. 22.)

When sorted from largest booths to smallest, 18 organizations – less than five percent of all exhibitors – captured 25 percent of the total exhibitor space (17,200 square feet out of 68,820).

Only two out of the 18 trade groups—Hass Avocado Board and the California Strawberry Commission—represented whole, non-processed foods. Moreover, based on square footage, only about 12 percent of the expo floor was taken up

Table 5: Largest Expo Vendors

Organization	Square Footage	Booth Fee
Nestlé	2,500	\$47,200
Abbott Nutrition	2,000	\$47,200
PepsiCo	1,600	\$38,000
Unilever	1,200	\$28,800
General Mills	900	\$21,900
Cargill	800	\$19,600
Hass Avocado Board	800	\$19,600
Hormel Health Labs/Diamond Crystal Brands	800	\$19,600
Kraft Foods (2 booths)	800	\$19,600
McNeil Nutritionals	800	\$19,600
Safeway	800	\$19,600
Biothera	600	\$15,800
California Strawberry Commission	600	\$15,800
Cambro Mfg. Co.	600	\$15,800
Campbell Soup Company	600	\$15,800
Chobani	600	\$15,800
Coca-Cola Refreshments	600	\$15,800
ConAgra Foods	600	\$15,800
Totals	17,200	\$411,300.00

by fruit and vegetable vendors, using AND's own very generous classification. For example, AND put the following vendors in the fruit and vegetable category:

- *Meatless Monday campaign (educational)*
- *Monsanto (biotechnology)*
- *Organic Valley (dairy, juice, eggs)*
- *Publications International (cookbooks)*
- *Stonyfield (dairy)*
- *Supermarket Savvy (educational)*
- *Suzanne's Culinary Tours*
- *Walmart*

The largest booth, sprawling 2,500 square feet, was occupied by Nestlé, which might reflect that Nestlé is the largest food company in the world. The booth was laid out like a house, complete with a rooftop. In each room one could find different products on display, usually in giant coolers. In the kitchen one could watch a chef demonstration, while in the dining room participants sat around the table while a rep described various processed food products. At the dining table, the company conducted a "water tasting." Nestlé Waters is the world's largest seller of bottled water. The "Nestlé house" cost the company \$47,200 in booth fees, plus the expense of staff covering all the rooms and other expenses.

What's Wrong with Having Corporate Sponsors at the Annual Meeting?

Some RDs don't seem to mind the corporate sponsorship, saying it's easy to avoid those booths and sessions and just take advantage of other aspects of the conference. Other RDs insist they

How can consumers trust us when our professional organization partners with junk food companies?

- **CARLA S CACCIA, RD, LDN**

are smart enough to not be fooled. But that misses the point: AND is sending the wrong message to its profession by allowing its annual meeting to be heavily influenced by the very companies that are undermining good nutrition and public health.

Also, FNCE is attended by many students and future RDs, thus exposing upcoming generations of professionals to this corporate influence. As RD Andy Bellatti notes: "Since the issue of corporate sponsorships is rarely - if ever - brought up in the RD curriculum, there is no reason to believe RD students attend the annual conference with skeptical minds or even a cautious attitude." Bellatti also disputes the claim that RDs can just ignore the industry PR:

If RDs are smart enough & know to ignore these corporate sponsors, why is the Pepsi booth, for example, always so full of RDs? And, why, in sessions about processed foods, are there so few comments where RDs acknowledge they are "on to" these companies?

Registered dietitian Elizabeth Lee reported being "quite taken aback by the number of attendees who lined up for product samples from McDonalds,

PepsiCo, and Coca Cola just to name a few.” She “expected a lot of cold shoulders from attendees to these companies but it was definitely not the case.”

Lee was also disappointed by the content presented at some of the sessions. At one session titled, “Can Government and Industry Work Together

for the Public Good?” Lee said she “expected to come away with thought-provoking info but the industry presenter was practically reading from a very dry script. The most useful portion of that session was the Q&A where a few RDs challenged the speakers and pushed the envelope a little bit.”

TABLE 6: 2012 AND Corporate Sponsors

2012 Partners



2012 Premier Sponsors



2012 Event Sponsors





Eat Drink Politics President Michele Simon's Experience at AND 2012 Annual Meeting

It's a truly surreal experience just to walk into the expo hall. You know it's supposed to be a nutrition conference and yet it feels like a food industry event. Junk food expo is really the best descriptor. As you walk in, all you can see are the massive booths of companies like Coca-Cola, Hershey's, and PepsiCo.

Once you get past those, you have to walk toward the back to see any "real food" booths, which are much smaller, such as the California Walnut Board. Then further back, tucked away in a special pavilion, are the organic and "natural" companies, such as Amy's Kitchen, Mary's Gone Crackers, and Manitoba Harvest (hemp seeds).

Other positive signs were the truly educational booths such as the American Cancer Society, Meatless Mondays, and several journal publishers. And the Center for Science in the Public Interest (a nutrition advocacy group) was given a free booth to promote its annual Food Day event. Another good booth was Corporate Accountability International, but it was stuck in the last aisle where there was far less foot traffic, as was the nonprofit Food and Water Watch. It seemed that vendors with more money to pay AND got better placement.

One interesting experience occurred at the Monsanto booth, where I struck up

a conversation with Wendy Reinhardt Kapsak, MS, RD, senior manager of public affairs for Monsanto. Apparently, she had only been with the company for a few months and told me she was the first RD Monsanto had ever hired. I asked her why she thought Monsanto hired a dietitian and she said it was because the company wanted someone to address any concerns RDs might have. She explained that her role at this event was to talk to her fellow RDs, find out what their concerns were about Monsanto, ask them how the company could better address those concerns, and then share that information with her superiors.

I interpret her role (as she described it) as this: to gain trust from fellow RDs and find out what negative impressions of Monsanto they might have, try to change that impression, then relay the conversations back to company HQ so they can come up with better public relations talking points to counter them. That Monsanto would engage in this sort of intelligence-gathering to improve its PR is not surprising. What's disturbing is how the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics provided the biotech giant with the venue and opportunity to conduct this critical research. Based on the size of its booth (200 square feet), it appears Monsanto paid \$4,600 for the

privilege, a small price to pay compared to expensive focus groups.

In another conversation at the Monsanto booth, I asked a different rep about the company's trademarked Frescada lettuce, which apparently was created through "traditional breeding" (not genetic engineering) in which iceberg was crossed with romaine lettuce. When I asked why this was even needed, the company rep explained that some people like the "crunch of iceberg, but want the nutrition of romaine." OK. Monsanto also had a sign on display showing how their new version had more nutrients than iceberg. Again, that Monsanto would do this is not surprising, but having the product promoted at a nutrition conference gives it legitimacy. In contrast, plain old lettuce from a local farmer was not on display. (See Monsanto's "Biotechnology Quiz" in Appendix 4, p.46, for more spin.)

I also chatted with reps from the Corn Refiners Association, which was promoting high fructose corn syrup, apparently attempting to counter any negative information RDs might have heard. (The Corn Refiners also sponsored three "expo impact" sessions during the conference - see above.) I talked to John White, PhD, who told me he was hired as a consultant to the CRA because of his decades of experience researching the science of sweeteners. (His business card says he is president of "White Technical Research, The Nutritive Sweetener Experts.") White had lots of fancy charts and scientific articles at the ready to

show why HFCS is perfectly safe and no different than regular sugar.

As I approached the booth, I noticed two RDs leaving with the material that White gave them; one of them remarked, "We like corn." While I was there, two others approached and we got into a discussion about the economics of HFCS. (I noted it was cheaper than sugar, so that's why companies use it.) White explained that HFCS is also used for its specific properties like browning. When one RD tried to argue that HFCS is harmful, White opened up his slick materials with the charts and graphs to try to convince her otherwise.

Reasonable people can disagree about the science of HFCS versus other sweeteners, but the problem is, the rep at this booth was not sharing impartial research. Rather, he was a paid consultant only telling one side of the story. This scene was repeated over and over at booth after booth. The companies with booths at FNCE weren't just there to promote their food products and spin them as good for you; many of them were also there to spin the scientific research in their favor. For example, the American Beverage Association, a lobbying group representing companies such as Coca-Cola, had a booth promoting its PR campaign called "Clear on Calories." The trade group also had numerous "fact sheets" on how sugary soft drinks don't contribute to obesity. There is plenty of research countering this view, but where were those fact sheets? The ABA is not a scientific or academic institution: its mission is to

lobby on behalf of its clients. Again, we can have a reasonable scientific debate on this issue, but it's highly problematic that RDs were exposed to plenty of public relations disguised as science at their own profession's annual conference.

I was also struck by the booths that promoted various breakfast items to RDs to get them to come to their booths first thing in the morning. For example, Kellogg was giving away processed cereal at its "truck," which is ironic given that the recent food truck trend is mostly a symbol of independent food purveyors.

Among the most successful at this strategy was McDonald's. But they weren't serving up the company's common breakfast items like the Egg McMuffin or Sausage Biscuit. No, it was all about oatmeal; to visit the McDonald's booth, you'd think the fast food giant only sold oatmeal and smoothies. As I approached, a McDonald's rep offered me some oatmeal, insisting that I just try it. (I declined, explaining that I make my own at home.) I asked a few RDs why they were there and they just said they were hungry. Fair enough, but it was clear that McDonald's had succeeded in positioning itself as a purveyor of healthy food while feeding RDs breakfast.



MCDONALD'S BOOTH ADVERTISED OATMEAL, BUT FAILED TO MENTION THE 32 GRAMS OF SUGAR.

While visiting the very large booth for the National Pork Board (the industry's marketing arm) I noticed they had educational handouts, including a pad of tear-off sheets showing federal recommended serving sizes on a plate—with pork displayed as a sample meat serving. I watched as an RD took a bunch

of these handouts and I asked her why she was doing so. She said she wanted to educate her clients about serving sizes. When I pointed out that the material was from the Pork Board, and asked if that bothered her, she just said, oh, they don't have to know. (The Pork Board logo was on the back of the sheets.)

So, people who are paid to promote pork

succeeded in getting an RD to use their materials to promote pork to their clients. And where did this happen? Not at a meat expo, but at a nutrition conference, where almost no countering information could be found about how a meat-centered diet can lead to chronic disease. (See Appendix 5, p. 47 for FNCE prizes.)

Industry PR Presentations Disguised as "Education Sessions"

I attended several sessions that were either officially sponsored by the food industry or had industry representatives

as speakers. Each one was more surreal than the next. The first session I attended, called “Making a Difference: Improving Nutrition at QSRs,” was not listed in the program as being sponsored but consisted of two representatives of the fast food industry. (QSRs are quick service restaurants.) One was a consultant to numerous fast food chains who goes by “Dr Jo®” – yes, she actually trademarked her name. The other was Cindy Goody, director of nutrition for McDonald’s. Goody introduced the “McDonald’s nutrition team” (most were wearing red jackets, like a sports team), including several RDs and chefs.

This session was a 90-minute infomercial for the fast food giant. In fact, when I turned to an RD sitting next to me afterward, that’s exactly what she called it. She told me she was disappointed because she came to the panel expecting substantive information about what chain restaurants were doing about nutrition. Instead, we saw slide after slide about how wonderful McDonald’s is for posting calories on its menus (never mind how they lobbied for decades against laws to require menu labeling) and for adding apple slices to Happy Meals. Goody touted McDonalds “commitment to children’s well-being... Now parents feel better feeding their kids Happy Meals.” But not a word about how the Happy Meals still contain hamburgers or fried chicken, and are marketed to young children.

When it came time for questions, I was the only one willing to challenge what we

just heard. I asked Goody why McDonald’s continued to market to children as young as age two, despite calls from public health professionals and others to stop exploiting kids.⁴¹ She simply repeated the same PR line about alleged nutrition improvements, without addressing the ongoing problem of marketing to kids.

Later I had a troubling conversation with an RD friend about this session. As I began to tell her about it, she countered that McDonald’s did not “have a session” at FNCE. I had to insist that I had witnessed it myself to convince her. This exchange demonstrated the problem with how the sessions are listed in the program. Because this particular panel did not say “Sponsored by McDonalds,” this RD had no idea it was in fact a McDonald’s-run session. Moreover, because the speakers’ affiliations are only listed at the very end of the printed program, it’s easy for attendees to be misled about the sources of information presented.

Another panel, “Policy into Action in the Real World,” consisted of three industry reps. This seemed odd; I was expecting actual policy experts or policymakers (like from government) or maybe even lawyers. But in this upside-down scene, policy is being made by corporations, in this case the food industry. Presumably the “real world” is where industry replaces governmental policymaking with its own.

The three panelists represented Darden Restaurants (owner of Olive Garden among other chains), Disney, and Walmart. One by one, they glowed about the wonderful ways their companies are

being responsible corporate citizens. For example, Darden is improving its menu options for children. But no mention of the myriad labor violations the chain has been accused of.⁴² Next, the Disney rep boasted about that company's new food marketing policy for kids: using its characters to market only "healthy food." Finally, Walmart's rep spoke about how the retail chain was helping by opening stores in food deserts and putting little green man stickers onto its food products.

Again, I was alone in challenging these corporations' claims. I asked Walmart to explain the research showing how communities have actually suffered as a result of Walmart stores, resulting in less (not more) access to healthy food.⁴³ The rep (Lisa Sutherland, an independent consultant) claimed not to know what I was talking about, and declined to answer except to say I should ask someone at Walmart. Sadly, the session was listed in the program as being planned by AND's Legislative and Public Policy Committee and Government Relations Team, indicating that this idea of public relations disguised as policy was endorsed by AND's lobbying arm.

After the session, several RDs stopped to thank me for my question, prompting a very healthy and constructive conversation about the role of corporations at FNCE. These RDs were genuinely bothered by the public relations they had just witnessed and were generally unhappy with the infiltration of junk food companies at the event. This type of conversation was repeated numerous times over the three

days. I came away with the impression that while many RDs do not like the corporate sponsorships, their voices are not being heard by the AND leadership. (See Appendix 1, p. 42, for more from RDs.)

Of course there were numerous other sessions that I did not attend and I am sure many of them were worthwhile. But my experience in attending just a few of the many industry-influenced panels was that the information RDs were being exposed to was biased, non-scientific, and little more than industry PR.

On the positive side, I connected with many truly dedicated RDs who reject the conflicted corporate sponsorships, are embarrassed by it, and are actively trying to change it.

For example, the dietetic practice group (specialties into which AND members organize themselves) called Hunger and Environmental Nutrition offers an inspiring vision: to "optimize the nation's health by promoting access to nutritious food and clean water from a secure and sustainable food system."⁴⁴ I attended their evening film and panel discussion on fracking, during which I learned more than I had during the rest of the entire conference. I know many RDs come to FNCE to connect with their colleagues within their practice groups or specialties and are grateful for the opportunity to do so. I also heard from some RDs who come only to meet with their interest groups and avoid the rest of FNCE altogether, a sign of the growing disconnect between what AND offers and what members want.

Select images from 2012 Annual Meeting Expo



SIGN CLAIMING COCA-COLA PROMOTES THE RD AT THE SODA GIANT'S BOOTH



DISPLAY OF SMALL SERVING SIZES AT CANDY LOBBY BOOTH



HEALTHWASHING POTATO CHIPS AT FRITO-LAY BOOTH



PROMOTING LEAN BEEF AT BEEF COUNCIL BOOTH



PROMOTING CHOCOLATE IN MODERATION AT HERSHEY'S BOOTH



WATER TASTINGS AT NESTLÉ BOOTH

For additional image galleries, visit: EatDrinkPolitics.com.

Does Sponsorship Impact AND Lobbying and Policy Positions?

To its credit, AND has a political action committee, ANDPAC. More health groups should have PACs to be an effective political player. However, AND's policy positions remain mostly self-serving, relatively safe and non-controversial. While there is no way to know for sure if the corporate sponsorships are playing a role, it's disturbingly clear the group is not showing leadership on the most pressing nutrition policy issues of our day.

A look at the most recently reported activity for 2012 reveals that ANDPAC spent \$106,375 on campaign contributions to political candidates, with 86 percent going to Democrats and 13 percent to Republicans.⁴⁵ In 2012, ANDPAC spent \$86,250 lobbying on the following federal legislation:⁴⁶

- *Affordable Care Act – Prevention and Nutrition Reimbursement*
- *Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (Farm Bill)*
- *Medical Foods Equity Act - Nutrition Coverage and Reimbursement*
- *National Diabetes Prevention Program*
- *Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medications Act*
- *Preventing Diabetes in Medicare Act*
- *Older Americans Act Amendments*

These are all certainly legitimate policies for a nutrition trade group to lobby on.

Most of them are about getting the profession insurance reimbursement of their services and expanding opportunities for nutrition services. One encouraging sign is ANDPAC's lobbying on the farm bill in favor of assistance programs such as food stamps.

Additional research shows that AND also has filed regulatory comments to several federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, on improving nutrition standards on school meals (AND also lobbied for passage of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, the underlying bill). It was also very encouraging to see that AND filed supportive comments to the Federal Trade Commission on the very contentious issue of junk food marketing to children. Inquiries to various nutrition advocates revealed that AND has been taking much more positive steps in recent years on these issues.

But much more remains to be done. The Academy remains either silent or counter-productive on too many pressing issues, as discussed below. The following table shows AND's own stated policy agenda over the next several years. Again, most of these issues are either internal to the profession or fairly safe territory politically—nothing that might ruffle the feathers of the likes of Coca-Cola or Hershey's.

AND's Public Policy Priority Areas (2012-15)⁴⁷

Consumer and Community Issues

1. Prevention and treatment of chronic disease, including health care equity
2. Meeting nutrition needs through the life cycle: Maternal and child nutrition to healthy aging
3. Quality food and nutrition through education, production, access and delivery
4. Nutrition monitoring and research

Professional Issues

1. Licensure: Protection of the Public
2. Workforce demand: Assuring the Public has access to nutrition services delivered by qualified practioners
3. Outcome driven nutrition services in changing health systems

There is one encouraging sentence in the document: "The Academy has identified sustainable food systems as a priority in their commitment to helping individuals enjoy healthy lives." But it's unclear how AND intends to promote this goal.

Historically, the Academy has never been much of a leader on nutrition policy and at times, quite the opposite. For example, in 1999, the Academy actually opposed mandated labeling of "trans fats" on food packaging.⁴⁸ Looking back, this seems shocking and yet, similar examples exist today.

One of the most pressing public health and nutrition issues is that of excess soda consumption. New York City is taking a commonsense and public health-oriented

approach to this problem by proposing reasonable cup-size limits served at food service establishments. Of course, this proposal has garnered much controversy. However, public health leaders such as Harvard's Walter Willett, Yale's Kelly Brownell, and New York University's Marion Nestle, along with nutrition advocacy groups such as the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and many others, are all strongly in favor.

Where then, does AND come down? Silence would be bad enough, but in May 2012, they put out a press release, titled: "In Wake of New York Soda Ban Proposal, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Encourages Education, Moderation."⁴⁹ Arguing that the New York proposal was "based on theoretical models," AND called for evaluation of such measures and said they had "convened a working group to examine the effectiveness of measures like proposed bans and taxes that are designed to influence consumers' purchases and their potential impact on people's health." Evaluation sounds reasonable, but why not recommend studying the policy while it's in effect? The release goes on to say that "even after we have more science-based information about measures like New York's, it is vital that we as registered dietitians educate consumers about the components of a healthful eating plan and help people make informed decisions that will positively affect their health." This last comment is stunning, especially for a "science-based" organization, which AND claims to be. The nutrition profession must face the reality that our nation's chronic disease epidemic

has worsened because educational measures have failed miserably. One can't help wondering how much Coca-Cola's sponsorship plays a role in AND's position on this issue.

The Academy's startling response to the soda ban initiative lost the group at least one member. (See Appendix 1, p. 42 for more from RDs.) Aaron Flores, an RD who decided to not renew his AND membership partly as a result of the organization's position on the New York City policy, explained:

When Mayor Bloomberg proposed his ban on large sugary beverages, it was such a controversial topic and everyone had an opinion on one side or the other. But instead of taking a stand, AND had no position. How could they have no position on such a topic? I felt that it was their partnerships with Coke and Pepsi that prevented them from taking a stand even if they wanted to.

During the 2012 election, AND inadvertently became part of the California Proposition 37 fight over the labeling of genetically-engineered foods. The No on 37 campaign claimed that AND was opposed to GMO labeling, apparently relying on an out-of-date position paper the organization had once published. While AND made clear

I think the partnership with big food companies ruins our credibility as nutrition experts.

- AARON FLORES, RD

this is no longer its position, many RDs and others were disappointed that the leadership chose to take a neutral position instead of speaking out in favor of the consumer's right to know.⁵⁰ The group is currently conducting a review of the issue, which it says will be released in 2013. While it's admirable that AND positions itself as an "evidence-based organization," and many of these issues are complex, not every policy issue or decision can wait for months (or years) of committee review and analysis. One also must wonder why AND ever opposed labeling GMOs in the first place, and why only now is it working to clarify its stance on this long-controversial issue of genetically engineered food. (See Appendix 2, p.44 for what food companies say about sponsoring AND.)

The Academy’s Money – Does AND Even Need Corporate Funding?

Data collected from the most recently available four years (2008-2011) of annual reports show the Academy in relatively decent financial health. (See Table 7.)

In 2011, AND enjoyed close to \$34 million in revenues and \$20 million in net assets, allowing the organization to spend a little more than it took in – \$34.8 million in expenses. While AND reported about \$1.8 million in “sponsorships,” it’s unclear

if that figure reflects all of its revenues from corporate sources; for example, a separate line item under “programs and meetings” (\$5.2 million in 2011) likely includes expo booth income.

Still, just looking at the “sponsorship” category, AND generated \$1.85 million, which represents only about 5% the total 2011 revenue. This is down from 9% in both 2010 and 2009. It’s also

TABLE 7: AND Financial Statements

AND				
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Net Assets	\$16,230,127	\$12,516,187	\$15,978,484	\$19,960,306
Expenses	\$31,366,596	\$32,911,641	\$31,669,141	\$34,815,498
Total Revenue	\$31,869,801	\$32,967,588	\$31,901,696	\$33,941,396
Revenue Sources (not all)				
Membership dues (net)	\$10,703,454	\$10,860,030	\$11,076,602	\$11,159,656
Sponsorships	\$2,703,736	\$2,949,786	\$2,771,453	\$1,854,316
Sponsorships as % of Revenue	8%	9%	9%	5%
CEO Compensation		\$240,339	\$368,583	\$368,583
CFO Compensation source - IRS 990 forms		\$212,654	\$229,348	\$229,348
AND Foundation				
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Net Assets	\$12,365,008	\$12,068,402	\$15,098,945	\$17,322,148
Expenses	\$1,823,939	\$1,963,456	\$2,588,722	\$2,668,653
Total Revenue	\$2,299,142	\$3,224,696	\$4,213,720	\$3,430,902
Revenue Sources (not all)				
Member Contributions	\$1,016,409	\$2,136,804	\$1,354,006	\$926,184
Corporate Contributions	\$1,032,764	\$541,132	\$991,339	\$1,258,858
Corporate Donations as % of Revenue	45%	17%	24%	38%

All data from annual reports, except compensation, which is from 990 forms.

possible that some corporate funding is coming from other sources than just the “sponsorship” category.

Since 2008, AND has been operating at more or less break-even, meaning expenses closely matched revenues. Since 2009, however, AND’s net assets have increased from \$12.5 million to \$19.9 million, a nearly 60% increase. These increases have come primarily from gains in investment returns, which totaled \$4.2 million in 2011 alone. In its annual report, AND acknowledges its investment reserves are strong and are ready to be invested in “new member programs and services.” Perhaps that money could replace corporate sponsorships instead?

The financial picture of the AND Foundation is more troubling because of the enormous sums of unspent funds. In 2011, the AND Foundation reported revenues of \$3.4 million with more than \$17 million in net assets. Given expenses ranging from a low of \$1.8 million in 2008 to a high of \$2.7 million in 2011, this is an unusually tidy sum to keep in the bank. The general rule of thumb is to have on hand between six months and two years of operating expenses.⁵¹ ADAF currently

holds net assets of more than six times its highest annual expenses.

Furthermore, since 2008, the Foundation has enjoyed an excess of revenue minus expenses ranging from \$475,000 in 2008 to \$1.5 million in 2010. Added to that surplus, the Foundation posted investment gains of \$2.1 million in 2011. This healthy financial picture raises the question: why is ADAF setting aside so much of its revenue year after year? The annual report does not appear to offer any explanation. Corporate contributions were ANDF’s single largest source of revenue in 2011: \$1.3 million out of a total of \$3.4 million, or 38 percent.

Taking a closer look at expenses, the main priority the 2011 annual report identifies is for “the Foundation to continue its investment in scholarships, awards and research to support the dietetics profession.” However, of its \$2.7 million budget in 2011, the Foundation spent around \$500,000 on scholarships, and less than \$35,000 on research. Both seem quite low given ANDF’s stated intention of “bringing more registered dietitians to the forefront and arming consumers with the most relevant and accurate food and nutrition information.”

Discussion

What Do RDs Think About Corporate Sponsorship?

At least two surveys of RDs give us some clues about what the AND membership thinks of corporate sponsorship. One, from the dietetic practice group Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN), showed that overall its members had a negative opinion of corporate sponsorship. Respondents felt strongly that corporate sponsorship has a “negative impact on the public’s perception” of the Academy, their profession, and even their “personal credibility.”⁵²

The survey also showed that a majority of respondents would be willing to pay higher membership fees to offset the need for corporate sponsorship. The authors acknowledge several limitations of their survey, including the small sample size (370) and self-selection bias: That those choosing to take the survey may have stronger views on the matter. It’s also likely that the HEN membership does not reflect the views of the AND membership as a whole.

In 2011, independent researchers conducted a survey of close to 3,000 AND members on this issue.⁵³ The results were published in the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*. Notably, AND leadership did not cooperate with the researchers on the study, as nutrition science blogger Colby Vorland explains:

Oddly, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics declined to offer [the researchers] a list of members to make the survey representative of the membership...That the Academy could not assist in research on a question that is beneficial for them to know is unfortunate. So instead they had to contact state or district affiliates, most who agreed to send out emails to members.⁵⁴

Survey results included: Only 13 percent disapproved of corporate sponsorship outright but 68 percent said it depends on who those sponsors are. The vast majority of respondents, 83 percent, agreed that members should have a say in deciding who the Academy sponsors are, which is certainly not the case now.

Almost everyone surveyed, 97 percent, felt the Academy should verify that a sponsor’s corporate mission is consistent with that of the Academy prior to accepting them, something that would be hard to do for most current sponsors. A majority surveyed said they would be willing to pay more dues if it meant having fewer sponsors.

Perhaps most revealing, 80 percent of registered dietitians said sponsorship implies Academy endorsement of that company and their products, despite the lack of an explicit endorsement.

However, the opinions regarding acceptability of specific corporate sponsors were somewhat disheartening.

TABLE 8. What Dietitians Think About Corporate Sponsors⁵⁵

SPONSORS 2009	PRODUCTS	ACCEPTABLE/ UNACCEPTABLE
Abbott Nutrition	Pediasure, Ensure, Similac, Nepro	85% / 15%
Aramark	Food service & facilities management	83% / 17%
National Dairy Council	Milk, cheese, yogurt	83% / 17%
McNeil Nutritional	Spenda, Lactaid, VIACTIV	81% / 19%
Kellogg Company	Corn Flakes, Eggo, Fruit Loops, Pop-Tarts, Special K	79% / 22%
General Mills	Bisquick, Cheerios, Larabar, Pillsbury, Trix, Yoplait	79% / 21%
Soyjoy	Snack bars	78% / 23%
CoroWise Brand	Smart Balance, VitaTops, Minute Maid Heart Wise	76% / 25%
Truvia	Stevia-based sweetener	72% / 28%
Unilever	Slim-Fast Ben & Jerry's, Bertolli	68% / 32%
Mars	M&M's Dove, Pedigree, Uncle Ben's	45% / 55%
Coca-Cola	Danani, Powerade, Sprite	34% / 66%
PepsiCo	Frito-Lay, Quaker, Gatorade	34% / 66%

An overwhelming majority found sponsors such as the National Dairy Council, Kellogg, General Mills, and the maker of Splenda, acceptable. This could partly be the result of AND allowing these companies to be sponsors over the years, creating an accepted status quo. It's also a sign of how well these companies have succeeded in becoming a normal part of the American food experience.

Still that a majority of those surveyed thought three current top AND sponsors (Coca-Cola, Mars, and PepsiCo) were unacceptable should give the organization pause. The survey authors noted: "These results are inconsistent with the information e-mailed by an Academy staff member who stated that their internal survey results show approval of corporate sponsorship by Academy members."

The authors also singled out AND's partnership with Hershey's as a notable

conflict with the group's vision "to optimize the nation's health through food and nutrition:"

When the Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition became a partner of the Academy to collaborate on their new campaign titled "Moderation Nation," the announcement stated that they would be working with the Academy to provide resources for the American public to achieve a healthy balance in terms of food (including sweets) and exercise. The partnership with Hershey's is touted by the Academy as one example of pairing with companies that have strong research-based data on their programs and help the Academy to accomplish its mission for promoting healthy eating. Many survey respondents would question the validity of this claim.

The article concludes that the "entire membership needs to have the opportunity to make their voices heard," and that since age was a factor in the responses, "the growing membership

will continue to have strong opinions on this matter.” Finally, because AND is a membership-based institution, “the Academy needs to reevaluate the current role of sponsorship and how it fits within the values of Academy.”

Do Corporate Sponsorships Conflict with AND’s Own Guidelines?

The Academy does have “Guidelines for Corporate Relations Sponsors,” but it does not appear they are being followed. For example, AND says it is “mindful of the need to avoid a perception of conflict of interest and to act at all times in ways that will only enhance the credibility and professional recognition of the Academy and its members.”⁵⁶ The Academy also lists the following specific criteria under the header, “General Requirements for Acceptance of Corporate Relations Sponsors:”

- *Fit with Academy strategic goals*
- *Scientific accuracy*
- *Conformance with Academy positions, policies and philosophies*
- *Academy editorial control of all content in materials bearing the Academy name*
- *Clear separation of Academy messages and content from brand information or promotion*
- *No endorsement of any particular brand or company product*
- *The inclusion of relevant facts and important information where their omission would present an unbalanced view of a controversial issue in which the sponsor has a stake.*

For good measure, AND posts this disclaimer-like note below the guidelines: “If consumed in moderation with

appropriate portion size and combined with regular physical activity, all foods can fit into a healthful diet.”

Despite some clear conflicts between its policies and sponsorships, the Academy continues to defend its corporate funding. Consider this 2008 quote from past president Martin Yadrick, posted on a page titled, “Why Become an Academy Sponsor:” “We think it’s important for us to be at the same table with food companies because of the positive influence that we can have on them.” How this “positive influence” manifests itself isn’t at all clear, unless you count self-serving public relations. The former president’s explanation continues:

For the Academy, relationships with outside organizations are not about promoting companies’ products; they are about creating nutrition messages that people can understand and act upon to improve their health and that of their families.

But the question remains: How can companies that promote junk food possibly “fit with Academy strategic goals,” unless those goals include furthering the nation’s diet-related disease epidemic?

These two criteria from the guidelines seem especially questionable:

- *Clear separation of Academy messages and content from brand information or promotion*
- *No endorsement of any particular brand or company product*

Yet on a consistent basis, AND’s sponsors promote their brands, whether at the annual meeting or during continuing education sessions. Moreover, as the survey discussed earlier notes,

80 percent of AND members think sponsorship carries with it implicit endorsement, even if AND does not.

Another AND criterion—“inclusion of relevant facts and important information where their omission would present an unbalanced view of a controversial issue in which the sponsor has a stake”—would apply to almost every corporate-sponsored continuing educational session.

For example, Coca-Cola has a stake in all of its continuing education sessions and yet the information presented was completely one-sided. Similarly, the information presented by the National Dairy Council, that even those who are lactose-intolerant should consume dairy products, is not only controversial—it’s contrary to good health and common sense. And yet, RDs who attended the dairy industry sessions received very biased information with no counterbalancing views or facts.

Can AND Redeem its Tarnished Reputation?

Numerous health experts and commentators have criticized AND for its corporate sponsorships, further diminishing its reputation. For example, Michael Siegel, professor at Boston University School of Health explains how Coca-Cola is buying the Academy’s silence: “I defy anyone to find information on [AND’s] web site about the billions of dollars that Coke is spending annually to market its sugar-laden products.”⁵⁷ He goes further, saying that silence would be preferable

I feel like there should be some sort of internal boycott against supporting AND until they represent our views but no one is really doing that, so I am.

- DENISE JULIA GARBINSKI, MBA, RD

to AND giving the soft drink giant its explicit endorsement:

Concurrent with its acceptance of money from Coca-Cola, [AND] has actually become an enemy of critical public health measures to reduce obesity, not merely an innocent bystander, and at the far extreme from being a leader in the nutrition policy movement.

Harsh words, but it’s hard to argue with them. It seems clear that this is exactly what Coca-Cola is seeking to accomplish: silencing potential criticism within the AND leadership while using the organization as a vehicle to spread its public relations.

AND says as much in its own words. In a 2008 press release announcing its new partnership with Coca-Cola, AND described the significant benefits to the company, saying how it provided “a national platform via ADA events and programs with prominent access to key influencers, thought leaders and decision makers in the food and nutrition marketplace.” [Emphasis added.]⁵⁸

Food Politics author Marion Nestle has long criticized the Academy for its corporate sponsorship. (Nestle and

other experts also criticize other health groups for similar conflicts, but AND is considered particularly conflicted.) Nestle has implored RDs to speak out in defense of their profession: “As long as your organization partners with makers of food and beverage products, its opinions about diet and health will never be believed independent (translation: based on science not politics) and neither will yours...Is the goal of [AND] really the same as the goal of the sponsors—to sell the sponsor’s food products?”⁵⁹

Positive Signs of Change

Many RDs active within AND recognize this history of problems, but report that small positive changes have been afoot in recent years. Two years ago, the leadership cleaned house at the D.C. office, bringing in several new staff. Previously, the D.C. staff had strong ties to the food industry and not much background in nutrition or health, and operated with a lack of transparency.

Now most of the D.C. staff are RDs, and two vice presidents are members of the progressive HEN practice group. This change that has made a significant difference for AND’s presence in the nation’s capital. For example, now AND has relationships with key government agencies and well as nutrition and health advocacy organizations.

Some positive changes have been occurring at the group’s national headquarters in Chicago as well. For example, the CEO, Patricia Babjak, is more available and visible to members. In addition, HEN members are having one-on-one meetings with AND leadership. As a result of these constructive conversations, the Academy sent the more stringent HEN corporate sponsorship guidelines to all affiliates and dietetic practice groups as an example of “best practices.”

One minor change regarding corporate sponsorship at AND’s “House of Delegate” meetings demonstrates the leadership’s improved flexibility. After some delegates sent a letter asking to remove corporate sponsors from the two HOD annual meetings, AND changed the format so that the sponsor presentations would come at the end of the meeting, when delegates could choose to leave. This was apparently the only option because of current contractual obligations. As those obligations expire, it will be important to see if AND takes the next step and removes corporate sponsorships from these meetings altogether.

Based on survey results, there is still significant concern within the AND membership about how current sponsors reflect poorly on the organization.

Recommendations

1) Greater Transparency

In 2009, Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa sent letters to 33 groups including AND, requesting information about the financial backing they received from the pharmaceutical, medical device, and insurance industries.⁶⁰ Grassley's main interest was transparency. He said: "Letting the sun shine in and making information public is basic to building people's confidence in medical research, education and the practice of medicine."

AND responded to that inquiry two years later with a long list of sponsorship funding from pharmaceutical and medical device companies.⁶¹ Senator Grassley then sent AND another letter, this time requesting that the Academy "improve transparency and accountability" by making these materials available on its website.⁶² (It's not clear how AND responded, but to date those materials are not publicly available.)

Perhaps the time has come for Senator Grassley or other members of Congress to renew that call for greater transparency, this time asking AND and other health groups for full disclosure and greater transparency of the food industry's role in financing these organizations.

Barring a congressional inquiry, AND should on its own make more details available to the public (or at least

to members) regarding corporate sponsorship—far beyond what is currently provided in its annual reports. For example:

- *How much money each individual company gives to AND in the form of sponsorships, continuing education fees, and Foundation donations;*
- *How much money AND makes on the annual meeting from corporate sponsors versus registration and vendor fees;*
- *How much the "partner" and "premier sponsor" levels cost;*
- *What is the connection between sponsorship and continuing education?*

2) Request Input from Membership

The 2011 survey authors were correct when they said that the entire AND membership should be heard on the issue of corporate sponsorship. Trade group policies should reflect the desires of its members, not just the leadership. It was clear at the annual meeting that while many RDs object to corporate sponsorship, they had no idea how to make their voices heard. Some had never even considered speaking out, a sign that AND is failing to offer adequate and readily accessible opportunities for members to give their feedback. Also, gathering input should not take the form of a one-time survey. Rather, there should

be easy access to AND leadership so that members have clear channels of communication about ongoing policy matters. AND recently sent a survey to some RD members about corporate sponsorship, a positive sign.

3) Meaningful Sponsorship Guidelines

Once the membership has been surveyed for its views, AND should put that information into action. This could take different forms, depending on the members' views. For example, AND could implement much stronger and more meaningful sponsorship guidelines. As mentioned above, the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group has its own set of sponsorship guidelines, which could be a model.⁶³ Perhaps as other practice groups take up this issue, AND will be moved to reconsider its own sponsorships and guidelines. Other organizations' guidelines may be useful as well. For example, the American Public Health Association has relatively robust guidelines⁶⁴ and its annual meeting is a completely different experience than FNCE. For example, in the expo hall are mostly government agencies, publishers, schools, and other educational booths.

Another approach would be to do away with industry sponsorships altogether. Based on the financial information provided in the 2011 annual report, sponsorships currently comprise only five percent of AND's annual revenues—so why risk your profession's entire reputation for such a small amount? Not to say that a larger amount of money would be OK. Usually the reason given to justify corporate

sponsorship is that it's desperately needed to subsidize a group's activities, but that does not appear to be the case here. Still, more information is needed about where corporate sponsorship money is going.

4) Reject Corporate-Sponsored Education

AND should reject outright corporate-sponsored continuing education, as well as corporate-sponsored education sessions at its annual meeting. Continuing education units should not be tied to any business interest, as it diminishes the value of the credential. No sponsorship guidelines can change this simple truth: The food industry does not educate, it markets. Even when the companies hire "outside" experts to teach the session, the information is still biased, and the company still gets its brand name promoted.

Also, when corporations influence and control so much of the educational agenda, there is less room for learning about other important issues that might go against industry interests. Along these lines, AND should do more outreach to health, environmental, and nutrition advocacy groups that offer webinars on substantive and controversial issues to encourage them to apply for CEU approval to encourage more diverse viewpoints.

AND should also consider placing more distance between its credentialing arm and the main organization. One possible model is the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education, which oversees continuing medical education for physicians. That body is comprised of seven member organizations,⁶⁵ which

seems to offer more checks and balances than AND's internal approach.

5) Increased Leadership on Nutrition Policy

As discussed above, in recent years, AND's leadership has taken important steps to improve its policy agenda and create a positive presence in Washington. However, there is still a significant image problem that cannot be ignored. While the staff in the D.C. office is lobbying on behalf of AND's membership, "education sessions" are being brought to you by Coke and Hershey's. This disconnect will continue to undermine AND's credibility on critical policy issues until the conflicts are resolved.

Moreover, as long as AND remains on the sidelines on the most controversial issues of the day, there will be a perception that the organization has a conflict of interest. No guidelines will help shake that perception. AND will only truly become a leader on nutrition policy once it cleans up its reputation that has been damaged by being overly friendly with the junk food industry. Then, when the organization claims that it's not endorsing a certain policy based on scientific grounds, that claim can be taken more seriously. By rejecting corporate sponsorships from junk food companies and industry lobbyists, AND will become freer to make truly science-based policy decisions.

It's also unclear how strong AND can be on such a contentious issue as junk food marketing to children, given that all its top sponsors engage in this practice, not to mention lobby to undermine public

policy. As mentioned above, it was good that AND submitted comments to the FTC on the issue. However, by promoting industry-sponsored educational programs such as "Kids Eat Right," which provide zero information for parents about how to protect their children from predatory marketing (or engage in advocacy on the matter) AND sends the message that it's not serious about children's health. (See Appendix 3, p. 45.)

As long as the Academy and its foundation allow the food industry to sponsor a children's healthy eating program, it will remain in a conflicted position regarding junk food marketing to children.

A Call to Action

To conclude this report are the powerful words of registered dietitian and Academy member Andy Bellatti who believes his profession deserves better:

Now more than ever, members of the Academy who recognize the insidious nature of partnering with Big Food must speak up and let the leadership know how and why these partnerships are detrimental to the profession. We cannot allow ourselves to be steamrolled by the notion put forth by many in power that partnering with the likes of PepsiCo and McDonald's benefits our profession and the health of Americans. It is simply untrue. We will never be taken seriously as nutrition experts when our messaging and credential is co-opted by junk food companies who think we are just an easy sell. I urge my colleagues to think critically, ask tough questions, and relentlessly defend the ideas of healthful, real food. It is up to us, as registered dietitians, to take back our credential.

APPENDIX 1

Overheard: Former AND Members Speak Out

Carla S Caccia, RD, LDN

I am not a member of AND. I am so upset over their relationships with certain food manufacturers and lack of support for certain food policies, such as GMO labeling. However, I was thinking of checking into [the progressive dietetic practice group] HEN and seeing if it would be worth it to join AND.

[Corporate sponsorship] is unethical. Some of the food companies' products are full of questionable and/or harmful ingredients. The food companies are taking advantage of the whole "variety, moderation, balance" theme. They say "all foods fit." Well, I used to think that. But now I'm not so sure. Are GMOs safe in moderation? I don't know. Caramel coloring? High fructose corn syrup? Is lean meat still the healthy choice even though the animal was given general antibiotics? Is grilled chicken still the healthy choice even though it ate feed contaminated with arsenic? I don't know and I'm supposed to be the expert! I would like to turn to AND for these answers but I can't trust them because they are in partnership with food companies whose products are full of these things.

There are great handouts from AND. Also, the Nutrition Care Manual is a great resource, but some of the sample menus list brand names: i.e., Quaker, Nature's Own, Hot Pockets and I'm not OK with that because: 1) it indicates that those brands paid their way into the menus (I don't know if they did but why else would those brands and not others be listed?) and 2) those brands aren't the healthiest and I wouldn't necessarily recommend them to my clients. If I did provide these handouts, my clients might

think those brands are somehow better or more nutritious because it came from me, an RD, and has the "AND stamp of approval."

*AND says RDs are the food & nutrition experts and I like to think we are. There are many informed, professional RDs. Also, AND does a lot of great work. **However, it sends a message of corruption when we have relationships with food companies whose products are incredibly unhealthy. That can put all RDs under a cloud of suspicion. How can consumers trust us when our professional organization partners with junk food companies?***

Aaron Flores, RD

I was an ADA/AND member from 2002 (when I started school to become an RD) to this year 2013.

For the past few years I have really struggled with whether or not I should renew my membership. I do not like the fact that AND partners with organizations like Coca-Cola, Hershey's, Mars, General Mills and Kellogg's. I think that it sends the wrong message about our organization as a whole—whose primary goal is to promote good nutrition—while taking money from companies whose products are mostly thought of as not healthy. This year I have decided I will no longer be a member of the Academy.

What really disturbs me is that by partnering with agribusiness, I feel it dilutes our credibility as nutrition professionals. What really highlighted that to me was when [New York City] Mayor Bloomberg proposed his ban on large sugary beverages. It was such

a controversial topic and everyone had an opinion on one side or the other. But instead of taking a stand, AND had no position. How could they have no position on such a topic? I felt that it was their partnerships with Coke and Pepsi that prevented them from taking a stand even if they wanted to.

I think the partnership with big food companies ruins our credibility as nutrition experts. The perception is that because we partner with companies like Coke, PepsiCo, Mars, and Hershey's that we act on their behalf or in their interest. Even though that might not be the case, that is the perception and unfortunately, perception is everything.

I think it's important to note that I'm not anti-AND. I am proud to be a RD. There are some great people in AND who are doing some important work. I feel though that until they change this policy, that the biggest statement I can make is to vote with my pocket book. Some of my colleagues do not agree with me and what I hope for is that this conversation continues. I want RDs to talk about this issue. If more people start talking about it, AND might start to listen. If AND were to change its corporate sponsorship policy, I would happily re-join.

Denise Julia Garbinski, MBA, RD [current member re-considering]

AND's ongoing demonstration of being in bed with agribusiness big food and its 'neutral' (but obviously not neutral stance) on Prop 37 [labeling GMO foods] just disgusts me to the point where I am choosing to vote with my dollars against supporting AND. I don't attend their functions and am seriously considering withdrawing my membership next year. So many of the good folks in the HEN, DIFN and Veg DPG's [dietetic practice groups] keep up their AND memberships because it's mandatory in order to join the DPG.

And they pay to attend FNCE when all they really want to do is attend their DPG meetings. AND doesn't hear their battle cry in this case, as AND still gets their money.

I feel like there should be some sort of internal boycott against supporting AND until they represent our views but no one is really doing that, so I am.

Heidi Turner, MS, RD, CD

I left AND for a few reasons. One was its focus on mainstream dietetics. The recommendations they make to patients are industry-driven and out of date. If I was told one more time that dairy is the primary way to get calcium into patients I was going to scream. In this particular case, they are heavily sponsored by the National Dairy Council and their biases show in their recommendations. Their overall philosophy of what types of foods and diets to recommend to patients was not consistent with my own.

Also, I got tired of the fact that they continued to accept corporate dollars for advertising in their journals/conferences from what I would consider to be "junk" food companies. They seem to accept and celebrate the idea that Coca Cola, Hershey's, Pepsi, General Mills and others can be part of a healthy diet, completely ignoring the fact that these very companies are creating other products that are at the core of our obesity epidemic. I suppose they need to get money from somewhere, but, come on. **If you're trying to be at the forefront of changing what people eat, then at least accept funding from sponsors who truly share that vision, and aren't just looking to appear "healthy" via their association with AND.**

That said, AND has lobbied hard to ensure that RDs like me are considered a critical part of the health care picture and for that I am grateful.

APPENDIX 2

From the Mouths of Big Food

The Academy is not shy about promoting its corporate sponsors. Following is a sampling from a web page called, “What Our Corporate Sponsors Think.”⁶⁶ The theme throughout is the power this large group of nutrition professionals holds and why sponsorship is so valuable. (American Dietetic Association is the previous name.)

Coca-Cola

“We are proud to partner with the American Dietetic Association, one of the country’s leading authorities in health and nutrition education... Like ADA, Coca-Cola understands that a healthy lifestyle involves balancing many different elements — staying physically active, consuming a balanced diet, getting enough rest — and even keeping a positive attitude.”

General Mills

“ADA members play a valuable role in educating the public about nutrition and health, and we are pleased to support the American Dietetic Association as a Premier Sponsor.”

Hershey’s

“The Hershey Center for Health & Nutrition® recognizes the significant role that registered dietitians can play in empowering

consumers with the information, tools and resources they need to achieve a balanced lifestyle. We are thrilled to be an Academy Partner in the Academy’s sponsorship program and are excited to help people enjoy a well-balanced life.”

Kellogg

“When it comes to helping people understand how to make informed decisions about healthy lifestyles, ADA’s members are the most influential source of food and nutrition. Kellogg Company is proud to continue its longstanding relationship with ADA to benefit consumers.”

Mars

“We’re proud to collaborate with the American Dietetic Association, the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals, to support ADA members’ missions to improve the health and wellbeing of our nation.”

PepsiCo

“PepsiCo believes we have a responsibility to ensure the health and wellness of the communities we serve. We rely upon the expertise and commitment of ADA members to provide unique insight into the health and nutritional challenges people face every day.”

APPENDIX 3

Kids Eat Right: Pennies from Corporations Making Billions in Profits

The AND Foundation loves to tout “Kids Eat Right.” The annual conference makes a big deal about how the fundraising gala that benefits the program. What is it?

AND says the mission⁶⁷ of Kids Eat Right is “to support public education projects and programs that address the national health concern of obesity among our children by assisting Academy members in working with schools and communities to help kids eat better and move more.” But how?

The Kids Eat Right website contains mostly banal nutrition information and recipes that could be found in many other places, with zero information about the problem of junk food marketing to children, or even tips for parents on this issue. Perhaps that has something to do with the project’s sponsors. Kids Eat Right started in 2010 with funding from the National Dairy Council. Additional sponsors include Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and General Mills.

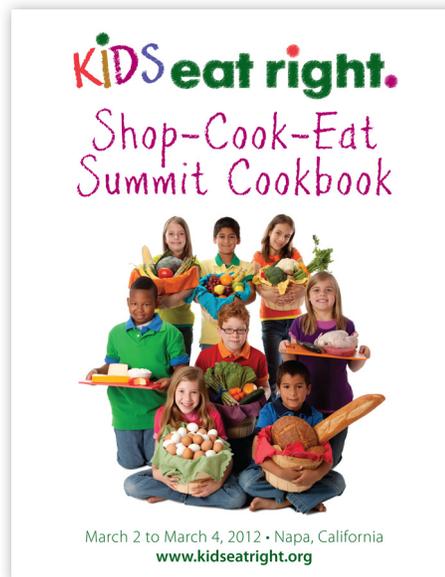
The program relies on RDs to volunteer to implement “tool kits” and other educational programs in schools and communities. RDs are encouraged to

sign up to volunteer to participate. General Mills sponsored the development of a toolkit for cooking workshops with parents, hardly an innovative approach. AND announced these small grants: “Congratulations to the 30 RDs selected to receive a Kids Eat Right Family Champions, One Change at a Time RD

mini-grant! Each RD will receive \$250 to lead one parent cooking workshop from the Family Champions toolkit in their communities.”

A cookbook was created as a part of the “Kids Eat Right Shop-Cook-Eat Summit” held in Napa, California in March 2012, which raised \$350,000. The “cookbook” features 17 recipes, each one industry sponsored: the page features the corporate logo while

the recipe contains a processed food product. Sponsors include: National Dairy Council, Kellogg’s, The Coca-Cola Company, ConAgra Foods, and PepsiCo. For example, Coca-Cola’s page is a pork recipe with Minute Maid orange juice and the PepsiCo pages require Quaker Oats in recipes that would never otherwise call for them, like pasta and meatball soup.



APPENDIX 4

Monsanto Biotechnology Quiz

At the 2012 AND annual meeting, RDs could take this quiz at the Monsanto booth to enter a sweepstakes for a Coach handbag. (Sampling of questions.)

Which tools or techniques does Monsanto use to develop innovative products to help the farmer feed, fuel and clothe the world?

- a. Plant breeding
- b. Biotechnology
- c. Chemistries and equipment improvements to develop agronomic solutions
- d. All of the above

Answer: All of the above. Biotechnology is only part of what we do. We also use tools such as plant breeding and agronomics solutions including crop protection chemistries and equipment technologies.

Reality Check: “Feeding the world” is a familiar refrain of biotech companies; however we don’t need more technology to feed people; we have enough food.

Is there a difference in the nutritional value of organic crops compared to conventionally grown crops?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Answer: No. The evidence shows no significant differences among organic, conventional or biotech crops in terms of nutrition and safety.

Reality Check: There is research on both sides of this debate; also the question ignores the safety concerns of consuming pesticides, described euphemistically as “conventionally-grown.”

Foods and crops derived from plant biotechnology are thoroughly tested for safety.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer: True. Biotech crops have been reviewed by FDA, USDA and EPA; are tested more than any other crops in the history of agriculture; and have been shown to be as safe as their conventional counterparts.

Reality Check: Extremely deceptive. No federal agency requires biotech crops undergo human safety testing prior to approval. We have no long-term safety testing of these crops.

What are some benefits of modern plant science techniques, such as biotechnology?

- a. Improved yields
- b. Decreased tillage to protect soil and water resources
- c. Decreased use of fossil fuels resulting from fewer pesticides
- d. Improved nutrition
- e. All of the above

Answer: All of the above. Modern plant science contributes to sustainable agriculture by helping farmers increase yields, decrease pesticide use and improve on-farm management, while also improving nutrition with healthful oils or vegetables with increase phytonutrients.

Reality Check: Much research exists to dispute each of these claims. For example, studies have shown increased herbicide use as a result of weed resistance to Monsanto’s Roundup product.

APPENDIX 5

Annual Meeting Food Industry Giveaways,
Raffles, Prizes promoted via Twitter**Lindsey Toth, MS, RD @NutritionTalk
[PepsiCo]**

There's still time to win a \$100 gift card today! Stop by @PepsiCo's Social Showcase of Innovation, booth #901, for the chance to win!

**Bell Institute @GenMillsBellIns
[General Mills]**

Before the expo ends, be sure to stop by our booth (618) for the #FNCE Foodie Challenge. Test your food knowledge & enter to win an e-reader!

Laura's Lean Beef @laurasleanbeef

Stop by booth 557 and visit the team @laurasleanbeef during #FNCE... Scan your badge to win an iPad!

Pork @allaboutpork [National Pork Board]

Congrats @theguidedbite & Courtney L. for winning today's Pork prize packs at #FNCE! Stop by our booth/DM us to claim prizes. #LeanerThanEver

National Honey Board @NationalHoney

Only 24 hrs left to visit booth 670 and let us know at what age honey can be given to children. You might win something!

CA Cling Peaches @CalClingPeach

Fill out our short survey and be entered to win an anthropologie apron!

SherryColemanCollins @PeanutRD

Visit booth 119! 'Like' us & draw to win. MT @LeanGrnBeanBlog: I need one!! MT @steph_esp: Thx 4 t-shirts!!

Del Monte @DelMontebrand

Play #FlavorBoom at our booth for a chance to win a knife set! It's fun you won't want to miss!

Kristen Carlucci, RD @simplysavor

Stop by #unileverfnce at 1130, 1215 or 1pm 2day for risotto, bfast pizza, spaghetti/meatballs + chance to win \$100 !

**FoodInsight.org @FoodInsight
[IFIC - industry group]**

We would love to meet our twitter follower in person! Pls visit us @ booth 325 to say hi and enter to win an AMX gift card!

California Walnuts @CaWalnuts

#FNCE begins this weekend! Don't forget to stop by our booth #852 to learn about heart-healthy @CaWalnuts and a chance to win an iPad 3!

HealthEd On Demand @HEOnDemand

We're almost ready to pack up for #FNCE. Stop by our booth for a chance to win an iPad.

Walmart Healthy @WalmartHealthy

ATTENTION #FNCE attendees: Stop by our #GreatForYou Booth, #107, & enter our raffle for a new iPad!

Frito-Lay N. America @Fritolay

#FNCE attendees - Look 4 #ChipMyth quiz @ #Fritobooth1011 4chance2win KitchenAid® Stand Mixer or t-shirts!

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