

Are Canadian children worth the cost?

by FRANK STRONACH

When the federal government table the budget two weeks from now, one of the items that may end up in the mix is funding for a new national school food program.

Many Canadian parents would support a program to provide meals to Canadian school kids.

But if these school programs are simply going to be feeding our children fatty, sugary foods filled with industrial pesticides, fungicides and other chemicals, we're setting them up for numerous health problems later in life.

I believe it's the number one reason why we're seeing alarmingly high levels of chronic disease in children under the age of 18, including asthma, Type II diabetes and a range of other developmental disabilities.

That's why I started a nonprofit organization several years ago with the mission of lobbying governments to provide nutritious organic food to all Canadian children at school and educating young Canadians about the lifelong benefits that come with eating healthy, all-natural foods.

Study after study has shown that improved nutrition can influence student learning potential and educational outcomes. Learning and diet are inseparably linked.

The UN's World Food Programme conducted a large-scale, multinational cost-benefit analysis in conjunction with Boston Consulting Group a number of years ago and found that schools enrolled in school meal programs had better attendance, lower dropout rates, and better test results than schools that did not participate in food programs.

Most Canadians would agree that the health and welfare of our children is a top priority. The fact is, if children grow up healthy and happy, there is a greater chance they will reach their full potential. And one of the best ways of ensuring that is childhood nutrition.

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Providing breakfast and lunch meals consisting of natural organic food will not only improve the mental and physical well-being of our children, it will also boost their intellectual capacity. It's a win-win scenario.

Our children's health plays a critical role in building a sustainable and prosperous future. But if the next generation is sick and unhealthy, our future is on shaky ground.

Ultimately, the question is not: who's going to pay for organic meals in our schools?

The real question is: if we don't find funding to create an organic meal program, are we prepared to pay the heavy costs that will come in the form of increased health care spending and social assistance?

Governments invest in a lot of different programs, causes and initiatives. Very few of them are as important as the health and happiness of our children.

To learn more about how we can improve Canadian health and increase living standards, email me at info@economiccharter.ca.

Author Bio

Frank Stronach is the founder of Magna International Inc., one of Canada's largest global companies, and the Stronach Foundation for Economic Rights (www.economiccharter.ca).