

## Greek Yogurt Contains Twice The Protein As Regular Yogurt – Still Not Considered as Protein For Federal School Lunch Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. - **U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and **U.S. Representative Richard Hanna** today renewed their call to officially reclassify Greek yogurt as a source of protein under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) MyPlate nutrition guides. Currently, Greek yogurt is not differentiated from traditional yogurt, despite having twice the amount of protein.

"Greek yogurt is packed with healthy protein and should be available to our children in schools," **Senator Gillibrand** said. "New York State is home to a strong and growing Greek yogurt industry. And when we connect these businesses to lunchrooms across the country, we can give our children better access to healthy, nutritious food, while strengthening New York's own dairy industry. It's time to make this commonsense change in our lunchrooms so our students can thrive in the classroom, and help grow our economy."

"With a burgeoning Greek yogurt industry in our backyard, New York schools are an ideal place to begin offering Greek yogurt as a protein in school lunch programs," **Rep. Hanna** said. "By launching a pilot program in New York, schools could offer a high-protein, healthy lunch option for students at a considerably lower cost. The trial period would allow us to see the many benefits that could be gained by school districts, taxpayers, agriculture businesses and –most importantly – in the health of our children."

In their letter to the USDA, Senator Gillibrand and Rep. Hanna urged the Secretary of Agriculture to update the MyPlate nutrition guides to reflect the health benefits of Greek yogurt. They assert that Greek yogurt should be permitted as an affordable, high protein option under the National School Lunch Program, which is responsible for feeding 31 million students daily. The inclusion of Greek yogurt in the National School Lunch Program would save school systems money while purchasing wholesome meals for students.

This thriving industry in New York produces about 70 percent of the nation's \$6 billion Greek yogurt market. An estimated 1,500 New Yorkers are directly employed by the Greek yogurt operations in New York, with 800 more jobs expected to be created as additional Greek yogurt plants begin operation. Opening up an additional market opportunity by getting more Greek yogurt into our schools will not only provide our children a healthy, nutritious food but also further encourage growth of this booming industry in New York.

Senator Gillibrand and Rep. Hanna's effort has bipartisan support from Senators James Risch (R-ID) and Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID). Their complete letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is pasted below:

*January 17, 2013*

*The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250*

*Dear Mr. Secretary,*

*We write for your support in urging the department to more clearly recognize Greek yogurt under the MyPlate nutrition guides. Currently, Greek yogurt is not differentiated from regular yogurt, despite the fact that it has twice the protein, more calcium and is low fat.*

*Greek yogurt is a nutrient dense food that provides an excellent source of protein and a good source of calcium per serving, making it an ideal option within the Dairy and Protein Food Groups. In fact, a standard serving of Greek yogurt has more protein than an equivalent portion of beans, yet it is not included in the list of protein sources in current USDA nutrition materials, nor is it recognized as a type of yogurt on the dairy page.*

*Greek yogurt being one of this country's fastest growing food industries, accounting for almost 30% or \$1.956 billion of the national yogurt market, it has become a popular, nutritious snack for adults and children, alike. We respectfully request that the USDA update its nutrition guidelines and education materials so as to include Greek yogurt as a nutritious offering and reflect its positive health attributes.*

*In addition, we urge that the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs allow schools and administrators to appropriately account for high-protein Greek yogurt as an affordable protein option. These programs served more than 31 million student meals daily in 2011. This policy improvement will give our nation's school-aged children another tasty way to get the protein they need to grow and thrive. Accordingly, we believe that our states are ideal locations to demonstrate the many benefits that can be gained by crediting Greek yogurt in Children Nutrition programs in a fashion that reflects its protein content. We believe that a pilot program along these lines will demonstrate that these many nutritional and related benefits for our students may be achieved at a lower cost to both the Federal government and our schools. Offering the option for the crediting of Greek yogurt on a protein content basis will free the creativity of school nutrition professionals to deliver enhanced nutrition at lower cost.*

*For all of these reasons, we respectfully urge that you authorize a pilot program that allows—does not require—schools and other institutions participating in USDA Child Nutrition programs to be credited for reimbursement for Greek yogurt on a basis that reflects the protein content for Greek yogurt.*

*If our children are going to have the opportunity to reach their potential, they need a healthy start. And the best way to achieve this is to give students options that are both good for them and taste good while pricing them appropriately so that schools can afford them.*

*We look forward to working with the USDA to include Greek yogurt as a healthy, locally produced, choice for all Americans.*

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