

# Reducing Childhood Obesity and Hunger

**An Interview with Douglas R. Conant, President and Chief Executive Officer,  
and Denise Morrison, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Campbell Soup Company**

**EDITORS' NOTE** Douglas Conant was appointed to his current post in January 2001, at which time he was also elected a director of the company. Conant began his career in marketing at General Mills, then moved to Kraft and later became President of the Nabisco Foods Company. He is Chairman and Trustee of The Conference Board, a Trustee of the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, R.I., and incoming Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP). Conant will be stepping down as CEO in July.

Denise Morrison was appointed to her current post in October 2010 and was also elected a director of the company, in anticipation of her succeeding Conant. Morrison joined Campbell in April 2003. Prior to her current role, she was Senior Vice President and President-North America Soup, Sauces and Beverages. She began her career in sales at Procter & Gamble and went on to Pepsi-Cola, Nestle USA, Nabisco Inc., and Kraft Foods. She is a founding member and current board member of the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in 1869, Campbell Soup Company ([www.campbellsoup.com](http://www.campbellsoup.com)) is a global manufacturer and marketer of high-quality foods and simple meals, including soup and sauces, baked snacks, and healthy beverages. The company's portfolio of brands includes Campbell's, Pepperidge Farm, Arnott's, and V8. Campbell is a member of the Standard & Poor's 500 and the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes.

**Corporate philanthropy has been a part of the DNA of Campbell Soup for a long time. How critical is this and how do you drive it through the organization?**

*Conant:* It's critical and there are specific things you have to do to bring it to life. Our philosophy around corporate social responsibility is that, in today's environment, it's essential that people find ways to live their values through their work.

People want to feel they're part of a company that is making a difference 24/7 and are determined to build a better world while they develop their careers. The more flexibility we give them on this front, the more engaged they are



Douglas R. Conant and Denise Morrison

and the better we perform in the marketplace as well.

This is part of the fabric of Campbell now. We have declared a clear and unmistakable commitment to it by making CSR one of our seven core strategies.

We built a CSR plan in 2010 that spelled out the four pillars that we are working on and our goals. We now have teams organized to execute against these goals.

We have also established clear metrics, because we can't manage it if we can't measure it. And I have to lead by example on this front, so I try to model the kind of behavior we're asking for from others.

*Morrison:* In February, we had a kickoff event for our 10-year plan to reduce childhood obesity and hunger in Camden. We had our Campbell's chefs there with some 50 third- and fourth-grade students. They were making smoothies with the children and teaching them about fruit. It was amazing and inspiring to see the enthusiasm, both from the kids and from our own chefs.

**With regard to that initiative, what was the thinking behind that program and what are you focusing on?**

*Morrison:* We recognized the enormous need in Camden, because obesity rates in Camden's children significantly exceed the national average.

Hunger and obesity often live in the same neighborhood, if not the same house. Often, these children don't know where their next meal will come from, so when they do have access to food – and it's typically the wrong kind of food – they overindulge. So teaching kids about how to make smart food choices by increasing nutrition and health education is a big part of this program.

The program also looks to provide increasing access to affordable healthy food. Campbell has many products that fall into that category.

Another critical link is expanding availability and participation in physical education and working with the school systems to make sure that happens.

**This is a substantial commitment both in resources and funds. How do you measure success and make sure that value is being created?**

*Morrison:* One of the metrics that we're going to look at is the change in body mass index (BMI).

I recently visited a school system in Kansas City that had put in a program similar to what we just launched in Camden combining nutrition education and physical fitness in the schools. The principal has reported that BMI is down, attendance is up, grades are up, and even fights in the hallway are down.

So even though we're centered on BMI, there are other things that we can look at in terms of measuring success.

**Are you partnering with other organizations within Camden or within the state?**

*Morrison:* Yes, we are partnering with local institutions – Cooper University Hospital, the Y, Rutgers University, the City of Camden, the United Way, and the Camden Children's Garden.

We have other partnerships that are both national and regional. The Food Trust, which is based in Philadelphia, is a very important partner. We're working with the Food Bank of South Jersey on a national program from Share our Strength called Cooking Matters. That's all about nutrition education both for children and families. So the partnerships are critical.

**We're coming out of two years of economic crisis. How critical is it to continue these programs in challenging times?**

*Morrison:* When you make a commitment, it has to be in both good and bad times. Campbell has been in Camden for 140 years – it's our world headquarters and we're very committed to supporting progress in this community. In fact, we have invested \$93 million in a new employee center at our Camden site. I'm proud of that.

**How challenging is it for the food industry to get its arms around health and wellness?**

*Conant:* In the past four years, the food industry has launched 20,000 new products targeting the health and wellness space. Our industry has galvanized around this issue.

When there were concerns about grains, we migrated to whole grains; when there were concerns about cholesterol and fat, we went to low and no levels of each; when there were concerns about sodium, we went to lower sodium foods; there is now a desire for more fresh and wholesome foods, and more are now available.

The food industry is built to evolve and it responds to consumer interest. Like anything else, we can do more, better, faster. But I feel good about the responsiveness on that front. ●