



THREE QUESTIONS

How Now, Brown Cow?

Weighing in on the debate surrounding chocolate milk in schools.

Interview by Kathleen McGarvey

AS AMERICANS TRY TO TACKLE THE OBESITY RATE, CHOCOLATE milk has become a target, with some schools across the country opting to ban it. Stephen Cook, an assistant professor of pediatrics and an obesity researcher, is the leader of the Greater Rochester Obesity Collaborative, a group selected last summer to serve as a national model for obesity prevention and treatment.

Why is chocolate milk being targeted by schools?

It's not just chocolate milk that we need to get out of kids' meals—it's any sugar-added beverages. Kids don't consume enough milk as it is, and the trends in national data from the past 20 years show milk consumption in kids and adults going down, and juice and soda consumption in kids going up.

Isn't chocolate milk different from soda?

Chocolate milk or milk has vitamin D, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium—these are very important nutrients. It has protein, as opposed to just sugar. And it has some fat. It's a mixed nutrient food product, unlike a soda or juice, which has maybe a few vitamins, if any, and a carbohydrate: sugar. You have a healthier mix of nutrients in a milk product. But you don't need the added sugar, whether it's in the form of table sugar or high-fructose corn syrup. Metabolically, too much of either is bad—especially in liquid form because they're absorbed so fast that the liver can't handle them properly. Lowfat milk and water is all kids really need to drink.

What about media reports touting chocolate milk as a sports recovery drink?

For high performance athletes, that's fine. Recovery products are a mix of protein, minerals, and nutrients. They don't taste like milk, but essentially that's the concept. In a fatigued, highly trained athlete, getting protein right after exertion is important for muscle recovery, and some studies are finding that chocolate milk is a good source for that. But how many kids really are athletes to that degree? **R**