

Australian Food and Grocery Council  
**FOOD AND BEVERAGE  
ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN**

**ACTIVITY REPORT**

**MAY 2012**

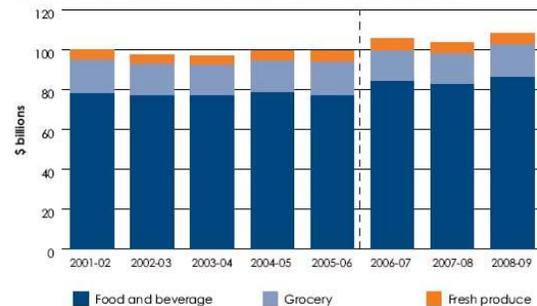


The Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC) is the leading national organisation representing Australia's food, drink and grocery manufacturing industry.

The membership of AFGC comprises more than 150 companies, subsidiaries and associates which constitutes in the order of 80 per cent of the gross dollar value of the processed food, beverage and grocery products sectors.

With an annual turnover of \$108 billion, Australia's food and grocery manufacturing industry makes a substantial contribution to the Australian economy and is vital to the nation's future prosperity. The industry is similar in size to the mining sector.

Figure 4.1: Composition of the industry's turnover (\$2008-09)



Source: ABS, catalogue number 8221.0 and 8159.0

Manufacturing of food, beverages and groceries in the fast moving consumer goods sector<sup>1</sup> is Australia's largest and most important manufacturing industry. Representing 26 per cent of total manufacturing turnover, the sector the second largest industry behind the Australian mining sector and accounts for over one quarter of the total manufacturing industry in Australia.

The growing and sustainable industry is made up of over 30,100 businesses and accounts for \$46 billion of the nation's international trade. The industry spends \$368 million a year on research and development.

The food and grocery manufacturing sector employs more than 312,000 Australians, representing about three per cent of all employed people in Australia, paying around \$13 billion a year in salaries and wages.

Many food manufacturing plants are located outside the metropolitan regions. The industry makes a large contribution to rural and regional Australia economies, with almost half of the total persons employed being in rural and regional Australia<sup>2</sup>. It is essential for the economic and social development of Australia, and particularly rural and regional Australia, that the magnitude, significance and contribution of this industry is recognised and factored into the Government's economic, industrial and trade policies.

Australians and our political leaders overwhelmingly want a local, value-adding food and grocery manufacturing sector.

<sup>1</sup> Fast moving consumer goods includes all products bought almost daily by Australians through retail outlets including food, beverages, toiletries, cosmetics, household cleaning items etc.

<sup>2</sup> About Australia: [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au)

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The levels of overweight and obesity in Australian children is a growing concern and the food industry is facing increasing pressure in relation to food and beverage advertising and the impact this is having on children’s body weight. Despite there being no evidence linking food and beverage advertising and overweight and obesity, the Australian food and beverage industry has responded to community concerns and introduced two self-regulatory initiatives that aim to reduce children’s exposure to advertisements for food and beverages high in fat, sugar and salt (non-core foods).

To contribute to the monitoring work that is being undertaken in this area, this research sought to measure the extent of non-core food and beverage advertising to children on Australian television. The definition of ‘advertising to children’ was taken from the industry self-regulatory initiatives, that is, food and beverage advertisements in children-specific programs.

Two weeks of food and beverage television advertising data from 2011 were obtained and advertised foods were classified as core, non-core or miscellaneous. Children’s programs throughout the period were identified to determine the proportion of all food and beverage advertisements that were shown during these programs. Using data purchased covering 2010, an assessment was made of changes in food and beverage advertising to children over the two time periods.

This research found that:

- Advertisements for non-core foods screened during children-specific programs (which captures more than just P and C-classified programs) represented just 1.6 per cent of all food and beverage advertisements shown across eight channels and 0.7 per cent across three channels (Seven, Nine, Ten).
- Compared to 2010, advertisements for non-core foods screened during children’s programs decreased significantly from 3.0 per cent to 1.6 per cent across eight channels (a 1.4 percentage point decrease); and from 2.4 per cent to 0.7 per cent across three channels (a 1.7 percentage point decrease).

Food category	2010	2011
<b>Eight channels</b>		
All foods	7.6	3.0*
Non-core foods	3.0	1.6*
<b>Three channels</b>		
All foods	4.2	1.2*
Non-core foods	2.4	0.7*

\* p = < 0.05 (2011 compared to 2010).

This research has found that the extent of non-core food advertising during children’s programs is low and below that of the previous year, which may be a reflection of the positive impact of the industry self-regulatory initiatives in relation to food and beverage advertising to children. AFGC has committed to on-going monitoring in this area and will continue to report on the findings.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Current estimates show that approximately one quarter of Australian children aged 5-17 years are overweight or obese (ABS 2009). While there is evidence to suggest that this level has plateaued (Olds, et al. 2010), Australian health professionals continue to be concerned by this statistic (Gill, et al. 2009; Roberts, et al. 2009).

There are many risk factors associated with childhood overweight and obesity, including both internal and external influences, such as lifestyle factors, influences on food access and availability (e.g. socioeconomic status) and the influences of family, parents and peers (Cairns, et al. 2009). Also implicated is food and beverage advertising through the influence on food preferences and eating behaviours (Cairns, et al. 2009; McGinnis, et al. 2006); however, the actual effect of food advertising on overweight and obesity has not been proven (Cairns, et al. 2009; Crowle and Turner 2010).

A report by the Australian Communications and Media Authority highlighted that there is currently limited evidence to support the banning of food and beverage advertising to reduce the prevalence of obesity (ACMA 2009) and this finding is supported in an Australian Productivity Commission report (Crowle and Turner 2010).

The food industry continues to come under pressure in relation to the nature and extent of food and beverage advertising to children (Handsley, et al. 2009; Kelly, et al. 2007; King, et al. 2010). There have been calls for government to impose a ban on 'junk-food' advertising that is directed to children as a mechanism to halt and reverse the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity. Recommendations from some advocacy groups have included prohibiting 'unhealthy' food advertising on free-to-air television during times when 'significant' numbers of children are likely to be watching. Despite there being no agreement on these time periods, one proposal includes bans from 6am to 9am and 4pm and 9pm on weekdays and 6am to 12pm and 4pm to 9pm on weekends and school holidays (MacKay, et al. 2011).

The Australian food and beverage industry has introduced two self-regulatory initiatives that aim to reduce children's exposure to advertisements for food and beverages high in fat, sugar and salt (non-core foods). The AFGC Responsible Children's Marketing Initiative (RCMI) covers products sold in retail outlets, while the Australian Quick Service Restaurant Industry Initiative for Responsible Advertising and Marketing to Children (QSR initiative) covers foods sold in quick service restaurants. There are currently 17 signatories to the RCMI, with these companies owning some of the major food and beverage brands in Australia. There are seven signatories to the QSR initiative who hold a large share of the QSR market in Australia. AFGC manages the operation of these initiatives.

The industry initiatives do not cover specified time periods, such as those proposed by advocacy groups, as these capture programs that are intended for adults; even though they may be watched by children. AFGC does, however, recognise that times when children are watching television alone and advertisements that are designed to particularly target children are a different matter and industry must act responsibly in these areas. The initiatives, therefore, are not intended to prevent children from ever viewing an advertisement for non-core foods; rather, their intent is to restrict advertisements for non-core foods that are directed to children through the nature of the advertisement and/or the medium.

AFGC publishes an annual compliance report that covers the activities of signatories to the two industry initiatives. To further contribute to the monitoring that is being undertaken with regards to food and beverage advertising to children, this study sought to measure the extent of food and beverage

advertising to children on Australian television by all advertisers. This was performed using the definition of advertising to children as outlined in the industry initiatives.

## 3. METHODS

Food and beverage television advertising data was purchased from Commercial Monitors, an independent Australian advertising information service provider. The data covers advertising of food and beverage products on free-to-air television (including digital TV) from the five major capital cities: Adelaide; Brisbane; Melbourne; Perth; and Sydney. Commercial Monitors collects the information as the advertisements are screened, providing a complete record of the levels and type of television advertising. The data provided by Commercial Monitor includes the product being advertised, a copy of the advertisement and the date, time, channel and program in which it was screened.

Fourteen days were included in the analysis: Sunday 6 March to Saturday 19 March 2011, which included 10 weekdays and four weekend days. This time-period was selected to align with a study undertaken the previous year, to enable an assessment of change over time (Sunday 7 March to Saturday 20 March 2010) (AFGC 2012).

### 3.1. IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Children's programs were identified by the lead author based on the classification, the audience share and/or the content, as per the criteria specified in the industry initiatives. All programs classified as P (preschool) and C (children) were automatically included. The remaining programs, including family movies, where the audience was predominantly children (greater than 50 per cent of the audience was children aged less than 12 years) or are directed to children aged less than 12 years (assessed through the themes, visuals and language) were determined through a review of each program and audience numbers. Audience numbers were obtained from OzTam<sup>3</sup> and represented average viewing numbers.

### 3.2. FOOD CLASSIFICATION

The nutritional composition of the product being advertised was assessed according to the Nutrition Information Panel on the product (where this information was required). Advertised foods were classified by the lead author (a Registered Nutritionist) as being core, non-core or miscellaneous based on criteria utilised in previous studies (Kelly, et al. 2007; King, et al. 2010), which are summarised in Table 1. These criteria were reported to be based on the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGHE) (Smith, et al. 1998). Excluded from the analysis were advertisements for infant formula and nutritional supplements as these do not feature in the AGHE.

The criteria used to classify foods may be viewed as quite 'stringent' in that many potential core foods are classified as non-core. For example, very few breakfast cereals meet the criteria, and all fruit juice, diet drinks and foods from quick service restaurants are excluded regardless of their nutritional composition. This strict criterion was selected to align with that used by external researchers in order to limit the criticism that may result from alternative criteria being used.

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<sup>3</sup> OzTam is Australia's official source of television audience measurement.

**Table 1: Criteria used to classify foods as core, non-core and miscellaneous**

Category	Foods
Core	Breads (all types), rice, pasta, noodles Low sugar and high fibre breakfast cereals (<20 g/100 g sugar and ≥ 5 g/100 g fibre) Fruit and vegetable products without added sugar Dairy (all) Meat and meat alternatives (not crumbed or battered) Combined core foods (including frozen meals with < 10 g/serve fat)
Non core	High sugar and/or low fibre breakfast cereals (> 20 g/100 g or <5 g/100 g fibre) Crumbed or battered meat and meat alternatives and high fat frozen meals (> 10 g/serve fat) Cakes, muffins, sweet biscuits, pies, pastries Snack foods Fruit juice and fruit drink Frozen/fried potato products Ice cream and iced confection Chocolate and confectionary Fast food restaurants/meals Sugar sweetened drinks including soft drinks, cordials, milo – including diet varieties High fat/sugar/salt spreads Alcohol
Miscellaneous	Savoury sauces Tea Coffee Supermarkets

### 3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The food and beverage advertising data were stored in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive analysis was undertaken to measure the proportion of all food and beverage advertising that was screened during children’s programs.

The analysis was undertaken for each of the five capital cities separately as well as for the five cities combined to represent ‘Australia’. To determine the impact of the growing number of digital channels on advertising frequencies and proportions, two analyses were undertaken: one that included eight commercial free-to-air channels (Nine, Seven, Ten, One, Seven Two, Go, SBS, SBS Two); and another that included the three main commercial free-to-air channels (Seven, Nine, Ten).

Significance of advertising proportions between the three and eight channels was calculated using a one-sample difference of proportions Z-test, with the eight channels representing the ‘population proportion’ and the three channels representing the ‘sample proportion’.

Significance of advertising proportions from 2010 to 2011 was calculated using a difference of proportions test at the p=0.05 level.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. ADVERTISING IN CHILDREN’S PROGRAMS

Of all food and beverage advertisements shown across the eight channels, 3.0 per cent were screened during children’s programs, ranging from 1.7 per cent in Brisbane to 4.3 per cent in Perth (Table 2). Advertisements for non-core foods screened during children’s programs represented 1.6 per cent of all food and beverage advertisements.

Of all food and beverage advertisements shown across the three main channels, 1.2 per cent were screened during children’s programs, ranging from 0.7 per cent in Adelaide and Brisbane to 1.6 per cent in Melbourne and Perth (Table 2). Advertisements for non-core foods screened during children’s programs represented 0.7 per cent of all food and beverage advertisements, which was significantly lower than the 1.6 per cent over eight channels.

Of the non-core foods shown in children’s programs, the majority were from the quick service restaurant (QSR) industry: 62 per cent of the 1.6 per cent over eight channels; and 68 per cent of the 0.7 per cent over three channels. The next largest group was oven-baked potato chips (17 per cent over eight channels; 9 per cent over three channels).

**Table 2: Proportion of food and beverage advertisements shown in children’s television programs (per cent) across eight and three channels, all foods and non-core foods**

Food category	City					
	Adelaide	Brisbane	Melbourne	Perth	Sydney	Aus
	<b>Eight channels</b>					
All foods	2.5	1.7	3.0	4.3	3.3	3.0
Non-core foods	1.5	0.6	1.7	2.7	1.5	1.6
	<b>Three channels</b>					
All foods	0.7	0.7	1.6	1.6	1.1	1.2
Non-core foods	0.6	0.4	0.7	1.4	0.5	0.7

### 4.2. COMPARISON WITH 2010

Of all food and beverage advertisements shown across the eight channels, from 2010 to 2011 there was a significant 4.6 percentage point decrease in the proportion of advertisements screened in children’s programs (Table 3). In relation to non-core food and beverages, there was a significant 1.4 percentage point decrease from 2010 to 2011. These decreases came despite a 64 per cent increase in the total number of food and beverage advertisements screened (data not shown).

Of all food and beverage advertisements shown across the three channels, from 2010 to 2011 there was a significant 3.0 percentage point decrease in the proportion of advertisements screened in children’s programs (Table 3). In relation to non-core food and beverages, there was a significant 1.7 percentage point decrease from 2010 to 2011. These decreases came despite a 100 per cent increase in the total number of food and beverage advertisements screened (data not shown).

**Table 3: Proportion of food and beverage advertisements shown in children’s television programs (per cent) across eight and three channels, Australia, 2010 and 2011**

Food category	2010	2011
<b>Eight channels</b>		
All foods	7.6	3.0*
Non-core foods	3.0	1.6*
<b>Three channels</b>		
All foods	4.2	1.2*
Non-core foods	2.4	0.7*

\* p = < 0.05 (2011 compared to 2010).

## 5. DISCUSSION

This paper presents details on the proportion of all food and beverage advertisements that are for non-core foods during children’s programs, which aligns with the scope of the RCMI. The results from this study indicate that a very small proportion of all food and beverage advertisements were for non-core foods in children’s programs (1.6 per cent across Australia over eight channels; 0.7 per cent across Australia over three channels). The significantly higher proportion over eight channels indicates that the newer digital channels continue to offer additional scope for advertisements to run in children’s programs.

This is the second year that AFGC has purchased food and beverage advertising data; therefore, this analysis offers the first opportunity to assess change over time. While from 2010 to 2011 there was a substantial increase in all food and beverage advertising (64 per cent across eight channels and 100 per cent across three channels), there was a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of non-core food and beverage advertisements screened in children’s programs. This finding indicates that the RCMI and QSR initiatives may be having an effect on reducing children’s exposure to non-core food and beverage advertisements.

Advertisements from the QSR industry were the most prevalent in children’s programs; however, the majority of these were for ‘better for you’ products such as McDonald’s Happy Meals, that meet the criteria specified in the QSR initiative, but not the criteria set by other researchers (Kelly, et al. 2007; King, et al. 2010). In addition, the oven-baked potato chips may also be categorised as a core food in the AGHE, rather than a non-core food as in this study. Removing these foods from the analysis would further decrease the proportion of non-core food and beverage advertisements that were screened in children’s programs.

Strengths of this study include the length of the monitoring period (14 days), which included 10 weekdays and four weekend days (24 hours for each day) to ensure a representative indication of advertising practices over a two week period. The study also covered eight free-to-air channels. Another strength is the strict nutrition criteria that was used, which indicates that, if anything, advertising proportions likely to be an overestimate.

A limitation is that the monitoring period did not include school holidays or special events, which may have resulted in a higher number of non-core foods being advertised (e.g. Easter, Christmas). In addition, just one researcher performed the product classification and program coding; therefore, no inter-rater reliability could be determined.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Overall, this study has found that Australian children are exposed to very low levels of non-core food and beverage advertising on television; measured through an assessment of advertisements shown in children-specific programs. The levels found in this study represent a significant decrease from 2010 and may be a reflection of the positive impact of the industry self-regulatory initiatives in relation to food and beverage advertising to children.

AFGC acknowledges that it is important for monitoring to continue to determine the extent of the current situation, changes over time, and identify any improvements required to the current self-regulatory initiatives. AFGC has committed to on-going monitoring in this area and will continue to report on the findings.

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