**Michelle Obama: The Business Case for Healthier Food Options**

*Ed. note: This op-ed by First Lady Michelle Obama was first published by the* [*Wall Street Journal*](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323884304578328682206937380.html)

For years, America's childhood obesity crisis was viewed as an insurmountable problem, one that was too complicated and too entrenched to ever really solve. According to the conventional wisdom, healthy food simply didn't sell—the demand wasn't there and higher profits were found elsewhere—so it just wasn't worth the investment.

But thanks to businesses across the country, today we are proving the conventional wisdom wrong. Every day, great American companies are achieving greater and greater success by creating and selling healthy products. In doing so, they are showing that what's good for kids and good for family budgets can also be good for business.

Take the example of Wal-Mart. In just the past two years, the company reports that it has cut the costs to its consumers of fruits and vegetables by $2.3 billion and reduced the amount of sugar in its products by 10%. Wal-Mart has also opened 86 new stores in underserved communities and launched a labeling program that helps customers spot healthy items on the shelf. And today, the company is not only seeing increased sales of fresh produce, but also building better relationships with its customers and stronger connections to the communities it serves.

Wal-Mart isn't alone in discovering that healthier products sell. Disney is eliminating ads for junk foods from its children's programming and improving the food served in Disney theme parks. Walgreens is adding fresh fruits and vegetables to its stores in underserved communities. And restaurants around the country are cutting calories, fat and sodium from menus and offering healthier kids' meals.

These companies and so many others are responding to clear trends in consumer demand. Today, 82 percent of consumers feel that it's important for companies to offer healthy products that fit family budgets, according to the Edelman public relations firm. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Nielsen revealed that even when many families are operating on tight budgets, sales of fresh produce actually increased by 6 percent in 2012. And in 2011, the Hudson Institute reported that in recent years, healthier foods have generated more than 70 percent of the growth in sales for consumer packaged-goods companies—and when these companies sell a high percentage of healthier foods, they deliver significantly higher returns to their shareholders.

These trends don't just matter for businesses that produce and sell food. They matter for every business in America. We spend $190 billion a year treating obesity-related health conditions like diabetes and heart disease, and a significant portion of those costs are borne by America's businesses. That's on top of other health-related costs like higher absenteeism and lower worker productivity, costs that will continue to rise and threaten the vitality of American businesses until this problem is solved once and for all.

That's why American businesses are stepping up to invest in building a healthier future for our kids. In doing so, they are joining leaders from every sector across the country. Over the past few years, through Let's Move!—our nationwide campaign to help kids grow up healthy—we've seen teachers bringing physical education back into schools. We've seen mayors building safe spaces where children can play, faith leaders educating their congregations about healthy eating, and parents preparing healthier meals and snacks for their kids. And we've seen Republicans and Democrats working together in Congress to pass groundbreaking legislation to improve school lunches.

And we're starting to see real results. In Mississippi, obesity rates have dropped by 13 percent for elementary school-aged kids. States like California, and cities like New York and Philadelphia, have also seen measurable declines in childhood obesity.

So it's clear that we are moving in the right direction. But we also know that the problem is nowhere near being solved. We need more leaders from all across the country to step up, and I stand ready to work with business leaders who are serious about taking meaningful steps to forge a healthier future. We need every business in America to dig deeper, get more creative, and find new ways to generate revenue by giving American families better information and healthier choices. We know this can be done in a way that's good for our kids and good for businesses.

That's why, even though we still have a long way to go, I have never been more optimistic about our prospects for solving this problem. And I am confident that, with leadership from America's business community, we can give all our children the bright, healthy futures they so richly deserve.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2013/02/28/michelle-obama-business-case-healthier-food-options>

In the course reader, *Food Matters,* there are other questions for you to consider, but for our class discussion, consider these (and be prepared for a quiz).

1. The **original audience** for this essay Wall Street Journal readers, generally considered to be more conservative and more business-oriented than, say, the New York Times, another paper with a national and international audience. How does Mrs. Obama tailor her **logos appeal** for this group? Is it a strong logos appeal? Why or why not?
2. How does Mrs. Obama build her credibility to speak on this topic? What else might she have brought in to bolster her **ethos**? (Hint: the text reports that she grew up on the South Side of Chicago, a tough inner city region, and that she earned degrees at Princeton and Harvard, including a law degree at Harvard. As first lady, she started the Let’s Move program to get kids better PE and food education, and she had an organic garden planted on White House grounds and wrote a book about that. She’s also raising two daughters.)
3. Considering that she is addressing an audience likely to not share her political orientation, how does she try to establish common ground, as **Rogerian argument** methods dictate?
4. This argument has a very clear **structure**. Look for its well-articulated “backbone” (usually conveyed by topic sentences and transition statements) and identify the parts of the argument (e.g. problem, solutions, proposal parts, plus “hook,” intro, conclusion.)