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doi:10.1542/peds.2006-2890

Further Efforts to Reduce the Incidence of Neural Tube Defects

To the Editor.—

We are pleased to inform the readership of *Pediatrics* that a recent press conference was given national coverage. The following statement was given to the news media in the United States¹:

"The Spina Bifida Association (SBA), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. and GRUMA S.A. de C.V., announced today during NCLR's 2006 Annual Conference their joint effort to help fight Spina Bifida. Through this joint effort, GRUMA, one of the world's largest producers of corn flour and tortillas, has begun researching and conducting product testing with the goal of enriching its corn products with folic acid in the U.S. by the end of 2006".

The announcement further stated,

"The joint initiative addresses a dietary staple that can help Latinas of childbearing age consume the daily recommended 400 micrograms of folic acid to help prevent Spina Bifida and other neural tube defects (NTDs). Research indicates that Hispanic women in the U.S. have from 1.5 to 2 times higher risk of delivering babies with NTDs than non-Hispanic Whites."

During the past 6 years the editorial staff of *Pediatrics* has asked one of the signers of this letter (Dr Brent) to review articles submitted to *Pediatrics* that deal with the subject of folic acid dietary supplementation for the prevention of neural tube defects. After the articles were reviewed and accepted, the journal requested commentaries pertaining to the articles and comments on the

issues pertaining to folic acid supplementation. A number of commentaries dealing with folic acid supplementation have been published.²⁻⁶

In 2005, the commentary entitled "The FDA Must Require the Addition of More Folic Acid in 'Enriched' Flour and Other Grains"³ was published in *Pediatrics* and contained the following material:

"[T]he rates for [neural tube defects for] Hispanic Americans continues to be high and are responsive to increasing consumption of folic acid. At least 1 major manufacturer of corn flour, Gruma, does not sell an enriched product in the United States [under the name of Maseca]. If Gruma were to sell only enriched Maseca (and it should do so quickly), it would prevent many children from having spina bifida and thereby make a positive contribution to the lives of the Hispanic families who use their products."

The effort to increase consumption of folic acid by the US population has been an effort of many individuals and organizations including the Spina Bifida Association, the Center for Disease Control, the March of Dimes, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Wal-Mart, Gruma, and *Pediatrics*.

We thank the editors of *Pediatrics* for bringing the folic acid issue to the attention of their readers. We need the assistance of everyone interested in the welfare of children to keep the folic acid issue on the front burner.

Robert L. Brent, MD, PhD

Departments of Pediatrics, Radiology, and Pathology
Thomas Jefferson University
A. I. duPont Hospital for Children
Wilmington, DE 19899

Department of Pediatrics
Jefferson Medical College
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Godfrey P. Oakley, Jr, MD, MSPM

Department of Epidemiology
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University
Atlanta, GA 30322

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