ATIP Foundation Announces Successful Beta Test for a Partnership for Public Health: Branded Food Products Database

ARLINGTON, Texas, Nov. 12, 2015 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The ATIP Foundation (Agricultural Technology Innovation Partnership) today announces the successful completion of a beta test with food manufacturers and USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to augment the USDA National Nutrient Database with nutrient composition information from branded food items. The intent of the enhanced database is to foster public health --which is significantly dependent on diet--by delivering comprehensive and publicly available information on the composition of foods that are widely available through food retailers.

According to USDA's Dr. Catherine Woteki, Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics where ARS is housed, "The composition of the food supply and consumer dietary choices are key inputs for agricultural and food policy decisions. Comprehensive data can inform these decisions, but the volume and fluidity of branded food products in the U.S. marketplace are key challenges." Woteki continued, "USDA has concluded that this is best pursued through a public-private partnership that is transparent and inclusive of all facets of the diverse food system in North America."

In late 2013, a three partner public-private partnership was established for obtaining voluntary comprehensive food composition data from the food manufacturers and making it available to government, industry, the scientific community and the general public through an enhanced National Nutrient Database, developed and maintained by the USDA-ARS Nutrient Data Laboratory in Beltsville, MD. This database is widely recognized as the gold standard for food compositional data. The partnership included the ATIP Foundation, the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) North America, and ARS.

"The ATIP Foundation recognized the complexity of this challenge to obtain voluntary nutrient data from the food manufacturers and retailers, on the multitude of products available to the consumer on the grocery shelves, and provide it to USDA," according to Dr. Richard Brenner, Director of the ATIP Foundation. In 2013, Listening Sessions and webinars were held in Ohio and Washington, DC, with
the National Academy of Sciences, Government-University-Industry-Research Roundtable (GUIRR) co-sponsoring the Washington event. "The purpose of the listening sessions," continued Brenner, "was to communicate about the Partnership, gather input regarding current and potential usage, and opinions on the addition of products and proposed nutrient data to the USDA National Nutrient Database, specifically from existing user groups and food manufacturers." Participants included major food manufacturers, major food retailers, and federal and state nutrition research communities. Comments from these sessions were published to the ATIP Foundation website, and were reviewed and incorporated into the data criteria plan of the partnership. Subsequently, ILSI North America served to coordinate with the food industry and five companies volunteered to submit a limited number of product nutrition information for the beta test using GS1 standard attributes.

Since July 2014, the Partnership has enlisted key stakeholders from the food industry, research community, nutrition and food safety societies, proprietary database developers, retail grocers and healthcare and patient advocacy groups as "inaugural participants" in this public-private partnership. Participants include the Health and Human Services agencies (National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration); the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; the American Society for Nutrition; the Harvard/Willet Questionnaires; and the American Heart Association.

In late 2014, five food manufacturers participated in a beta-test by providing product label data and nutrition information on 245 products through the ATIP Foundation's contract with a GS1 certified data pool provider, FSEnet. These participants were Campbell Soup Company; Cargill, Incorporated; ConAgra Foods, Inc.; General Mills Inc.; and Red Gold Inc. These data were passed to USDA ARS in January 2015 for incorporation into the National Nutrient Database. In March, ARS declared the beta test a success.

Now, with the completion of the beta test, USDA is exploring ways to move forward on a national scope with food manufacturers and the research community toward full production with a goal of adding over 100,000 products. For more information on this initiative, contact USDA ARS Office of National Programs.

About ATIP Foundation
The ATIP Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity with offices in Arlington, Texas and member offices in eight states. For more information on the ATIP Foundation and its members, and detailed information on "A Partnership for Public Health: Branded Food Products Database," including a Frequently Asked Questions document, Listening Session notes, and other postings, please visit the ATIP Foundation website at www.atipfoundation.com (http://www.atipfoundation.com/).

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