

FAST FOOD FOCUSES ON CHILDREN

Aggressive promotions trigger calls for bans and lawsuits⁽¹⁾.

Big foodmakers want to be everywhere that children are. They are finding every imaginable way to put their names in front of children and spending more and more money doing so - \$15 billion last year.

So, besides operating thousands of restaurants around the world, McDonald's has plastered its red arches⁽²⁾ on Barbie doll packagings, video games, book covers, theme parks and of course has teamed up with Disney Channel on movies and product tie-ins.

Coke signed a multimillion-dollar global marketing deal tied to the Harry Potter character in 2001.

Schools are also a major marketing site. With many U.S. school districts facing budget squeezes, a quick solution has come from offering more profitable fast food from outlets like McDonald's, KFC and Pizza Hut.

But some marketing deals have come under pressure. Last week the BBC said it would no longer allow its children's television characters to be used in fast-food sponsorships with companies like McDonald's after consumer groups criticized the public broadcaster for helping promote junk food and lawyers threatened a wave of obesity-related lawsuits.

The increase in food marketing to children has closely tracked their increase in weight. Since 1980, the proportion of obese children in the United States has more than doubled to 16% according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The problem of obesity is so out of control, that we have to do something," says Walter Willett, a professor of nutrition at Harvard University.

The New York Times. July 2003.

(1) lawsuit : problem brought before a court of lawsuit

(2) arch : curved structure. McDonald's sign and logo here.