

Feds oppose ban on food stamps for sodas in NYC

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(AP) -- A plan by New York City to combat obesity by restricting the purchase of sugary drinks with food stamps would be too large and complex, federal officials said Friday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture rejected a waiver request that would have allowed the city to implement the plan, which would have barred [food stamp](#) recipients from using their benefits to buy sodas, teas, [sports drinks](#) and other sugar-sweetened drinks.

The ban would have applied to any sweetened beverage that contains more than 10 calories per 8 ounces.

Mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#) and Gov. David Paterson announced in October that they would seek a waiver from the USDA to start up a temporary program that would be evaluated before becoming permanent.

In a statement released Friday, Bloomberg said his administration was disappointed by the USDA's decision.

"We think our innovative pilot would have done more to protect people from the crippling effects of preventable illnesses like diabetes and [obesity](#) than anything being proposed anywhere else in this country - and at little or no cost to taxpayers," he said.

While sharing the goal of reducing obesity, an official with the nation's

food stamp program said in a letter Friday addressed to the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance that the USDA had concerns about the plan's "potential viability and effectiveness."

Jessica Shahin, associate administrator of the program, wrote that the proposal lacked clear product eligibility guidelines, didn't take into account the burden that might be placed on city food retailers and failed to put forward a credible design for evaluating the effect on obesity and health.

The food stamp program was launched in the 1960s and serves more than 40 million Americans each month.

The city has been actively working to shape diet choices by New Yorkers, including with a public advertising campaign called "Pouring on the Pounds" that targets the excessive consumption of [sugary drinks](#) by linking it to obesity and diabetes.

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