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World's Largest Nutritionists Group Accepted Millions From Food, Pharma and Big Ag in Exchange for Favors

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics accepted millions of dollars from food, pharmaceutical and agribusiness companies, had policies to provide favors in return, and invested in ultra-processed food company stocks, according to a study published Monday in Public Health Nutrition.

By [U.S. Right to Know](#)

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The [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) (AND) accepted millions of dollars from food, pharmaceutical and agribusiness companies, had policies to provide favors in return, and invested in ultra-processed food company stocks, according to a [study](#) published Oct. 24 in Public Health Nutrition.

AND says it is “the world’s largest organization of nutrition and dietetics practitioners” representing “more than 112,000 credentialed practitioners” including registered dietitian nutritionists and other food and nutrition professionals.

The study was produced by public health scholars and U.S. Right to Know, a nonprofit investigative public health group that obtained tens of thousands of pages of internal AND documents through state public records requests.

The study describes a “symbiotic relationship” between the AND and corporations, and found the AND acts as a “pro-industry voice” with policy positions that sometimes clash with its mission to improve health globally.

“The documents reveal a depressing chapter of corruption at this influential nutrition group,” said Gary Ruskin, executive director of U.S. Right to Know and one of the study’s co-authors.

“If we’re going to get healthier, live longer and lower our astounding rates of obesity and diabetes, we’ve got to clean out the corruption at health groups like the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.”

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The study reveals that the AND accepted more than \$15 million from corporate and organizational contributors in the years 2011 and 2013-2017, according to its draft IRS forms 990.

The top contributors to the AND in 2011 and 2013-2017 were:

- National Dairy Council \$1,496,912
- Conagra Inc. \$1,414,058
- Abbott Nutrition \$1,246,389
- Abbott Laboratories \$824,110

- AND Foundation \$801,261
- PepsiCo Inc. \$486,335
- Coca-Cola Co. \$477,577
- Hershey Co. \$368,032
- General Mills Inc. \$309,733
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \$296,495
- Aramark Co. \$293,051
- Unilever Best Foods \$276,791
- Kellogg USA \$273,272

Here are the AND draft IRS 990s (with donor data) for [6/11-5/12](#), [6/13-5/14](#), [6/14-5/15](#), [6/15-5/16](#) and [6/16-5/17](#), as well as for its foundation for [6/12-5/13](#) and [6/13-5/14](#).

The documents show that the AND and its foundation invested funds in [ultra-processed food](#) companies.

The AND's [investment portfolio](#) in January 2015 included \$244,036 in stock holdings in Nestle S.A. and \$139,545 in PepsiCo.

The AND [foundation's investment portfolio](#) in June 2013 included \$209,472 in stock holdings in Nestle S.A and \$125,682 in PepsiCo.

"Nutrition groups should not buy ultra-processed food stocks. They are a blaring conflict of interest," Ruskin said. "Public health groups should not invest in companies that make products that detract from our health or directly conflict with their mission."

The AND appears to have allowed quid pro quo purchases of "[rights and benefits](#)" by corporate sponsors. Internal communications show that the AND "distinguishes its 'sponsors' from its 'supporters'. Corporate sponsors 'pay a fee, and in return the AND provides a right or a benefit'...Corporate 'supporters' provide 'a charitable contribution with no (explicit) expectation of a commercial return.'"

The study found "striking similarities" between the AND and "other cases of institutions captured by corporations, such as [ILSI](#) and the [Global Energy Balance Network](#), orchestrated by the soft drink industry to promote its commercial agenda in scientific institutions."

The study notes that "Although AND has changed some of its internal policies to manage corporate interference and funding, it continues to advance corporate interests in several ways, and serves as a voice for its corporate sponsors."

"The current AND/ANDF policies and public statements are not sufficient to explain why the AND continues to accept financial contributions of corporations whose products (such as [ultra-processed foods](#) and [formula milks](#)) are associated with ill-health."

Today's study in Public Health Nutrition is titled "[The corporate capture of the nutrition profession in the United States: The case of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.](#)"

The study was co-authored by Angela Carriedo, research fellow at the University of Bath and policy secretary of the World Public Health Nutrition Association; Ilana Pinsky, consultant to the Pan American Health Organization; Eric Crosbie, associate professor of public health at the University of Nevada, Reno; Gary Ruskin, executive director of U.S. Right to Know; and Mélissa Mialon, research assistant professor at Trinity College Dublin.

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