The recent obesity epidemic has shone a bright light on the eating behaviors of Americans and people globally. Diet is now recognized as highly significant in the development of disease and for the maintenance of health. Candy and confections are among foods often targeted as dietary negatives. However, some traditional candies and confections are made with nutrient-rich plant-based ingredients which fit strong trends toward natural, organic and real foods. It is further possible to increase the nutritional profile of many confections by using ingredients with naturally occurring nutrients that have associated health benefits.

This paper will review selected confections and their common inclusions which can provide important nutrients and potential health benefits. Fat, sugar and calorie content still dominate the nutritional landscape of confections and efforts to reduce these elements may strengthen the nutritional profile.

Most of us have seen the alarming statistics that roughly 67 percent of adult Americans are overweight or obese. So it is no surprise that obesity, and all of its related health problems, have become the backdrop to all things nutritional today. The obesity issue has, unfortunately, made nutrition somewhat synonymous with weight loss. Nutrition is much more than weight loss. In my view, nutrition is both an art and a science — the science of assuring that all human essential nutrients are consumed in the right proportion and the art of doing so through consuming enjoyable, varied and tasty food sources.

With obesity looming over everything nutritional today, numerous policies, legislation and lawsuits have been levied regarding certain types of food ingredients, processed foods and food providers. For example, schools have been federally mandated to implement wellness policies, lawsuits have been filed against fast food restaurants and cities such as New York and Chicago have passed or pending legislation to ban trans fat in their cities’ restaurants.

Snacks and candy have always been a target of the nutritional pundits, but seldom directly in the bull’s-eye. However, recent food-restrictive policies in schools (such as a national effort to remove or restrict vending machines and other offerings and a pending federal bill attempting to implement nutritional standards for snacks sold in schools) are moving candy and snacks right into the bull’s-eye.

So how can the snack and confectionery industries approach the looming black cloud of policy makers, lawyers and legislators?