

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the First Lady

For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY,
THE U.S. DELEGATION TO THE MILAN EXPO 2015
AND CHEF JOHN BESH AT A LET'S MOVE! COOKING EVENT

James Beard Restaurant
Milan, Italy

3:33 P.M. CET

MRS. OBAMA: How are you?

CHILDREN: Good.

MRS. OBAMA: Are you guys ready to cook with us?

CHILDREN: Yes.

MRS. OBAMA: I'm not really an executive chef, I just hang out with them. (Laughter.) I'm so excited to be here. Just before we get started, I just want to just talk a bit about why we're here.

Excited to be in Milan at the World Expo talking about food, because really, the global conversation about our food and our food systems is really exciting. Because whether it's food security, or hunger, or health and nutrition, the issues around the globe are really complex for all of us. So we really kind of need to talk about these issues.

This is certainly true for an issue that's very close to me, and that's health and nutrition. I started a wonderful initiative called Let's Move because we're really trying to fight the issue of childhood obesity in the United States. And I want you to -- excuse me. I've got -- just got off the plane and my throat is a little dry. But I want to give you some statistics globally, because this is an issue that's affecting everyone around the world.

(Chef Batali hands the First Lady a glass of water.)

MRS. OBAMA: Thank you, Mario. I've been flying a lot. But here are some of the statistics that they told me about.

Globally, obesity has doubled around the world since 1980 -- can you imagine that? And right now, diabetes has increased by [45] percent all over the world -- did you guys know that? That's pretty amazing. It's pretty shocking. And right now, they say that 42 million kids are on track to be overweight before preschool -- can you imagine that? Forty-two million kids all over the world.

And right now, there's really no country that's doing enough to

reverse the trends right now. They're not finding ways to make any long-lasting impacts. And that's one of the reasons why, in the United States, I started Let's Move -- because we really want to target childhood obesity and try and eliminate it in a generation, and to really find ways to help families cook healthier foods for their kids and help their kids get more exercise. Because if we don't get a handle on this issue, we're going to see these numbers continue to go up. And that's something that's just acceptable.

So we started to make some progress in the United States, and we're really excited. And these amazing people here, our U.S. delegation, they partner with me on so many different levels, and it's been a lot of fun working with them. Because we've been doing a lot of great things like cooking all over the place. We're doing exercises and jumping jacks, and we're trying to get kids to eat vegetables, and we planted a garden at the White House. And we're doing a lot of terrific things all across the country.

And we're starting to see some changes. We're starting to see obesity rates stop rising in our country. And we're also starting to see young kids, the really smallest kids getting healthier outcomes. So we're kind of excited.

And that's why we're here -- because we want our delegation to share some of the lessons learned. We want to listen to what's going on around the world, to learn from other leaders so that we can keep making progress and hopefully help other countries do the same thing.

But one of the things that we learned in the United States is that it takes everybody coming onboard to help with this issue. So we've gotten schools involved so we're eating better lunches in our schools in the United States, thank goodness. We've got non-profits involved. We've got foundations -- you're going to hear about foundation investment. They're putting millions of dollars into helping out with this issue. We've got our celebrities and our athletes and our chefs involved all over the country.

And it takes everybody stepping up. We all have to do our part. And kids like you, you guys have to do your part. You've got to eat your vegetables -- yes, sorry about that. (Laughter.) Got to have some vegetables. And it helps if you know where your food comes from and you help out cooking, because one of the things we've found out is that if you cook more, you tend to have more control over what you eat. You can control the portion sizes, you know what's in your food, right? You know about calories. And it's just more fun when people cook together.

So that's one of the reasons why we're going to have a good time here cooking today. And we're cooking something healthy -- I see chicken, I see lentils, I see tomatoes. What are we doing, John? What do we have?

CHEF BESH: I'm really looking forward to this, because this is almost as if Mario Batali and the First Lady get to cook together and show us maybe how Mario might be inspired to use some of these great ingredients -- everything from vegetables on this end, to the legumes, to some of the grains like quinoa. So much to choose from.

And so this is all about us kind of cooking together and throwing it all into the common pot and bringing each other together at the table.

MRS. OBAMA: So I want the members here from the delegation to introduce themselves so that everybody here knows why they're here, what they're interested in. Because everybody up here has a passion in some way, like me, about this issue. And hopefully, we get you guys excited about this issue too, if you're not already.

I'm going to start out with Mario, my dear friend, who's going to talk a bit. And then we'll get to cooking, okay? How does that sound?

All right, Mario. Take it away.

CHEF BATALI: Hi, guys. I'm Mario Batali. I'm on "The Chew" every day at ABC. I own a restaurant group called B&B Hospitality Group. And I'm all about trying to figure out how to use food to make us all realize our maximum potential. (Applause.)

MR. MOURNING: Hey, guys. Happy to be here. My name is Alonzo Mourning. I'm one of the council members for the President's Council on Sports, Fitness and Nutrition. First time in Milan. Happy to be here with you all, and I'm happy to see this Expo. And I'm happy to be here to continue to enhance the efforts in the initiative of the First Lady as we continue to fight this epidemic around the globe. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR HICKEY: Buongiorno. My name is Doug Hickey. I'm the U.S. Ambassador to the Milan Expo. The reason I'm here and what gets me excited is we have a huge task ahead of us on how do we feed 9 billion people by 2050. And each one of us has a responsibility to do that. So the President of the United States, the First Lady is one of 9 billion -- all of you are one of 9 billion, and we have a responsibility to help our neighbors and friends as we do that. (Applause.)

AMBASSADOR PHILLIPS: Hello. My name is John Phillips. I have the privilege and the honor to be the United States Ambassador to Italy. And I get to represent the President and the First Lady, and all Americans, on matters that relate to the United States and Italy, including agriculture, which is a very big -- agriculture and food, which is a very big issue. (Applause.)

MS. LAVIZZO-MOUREY: Hello. I'm also thrilled to be here. My name is Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, and I'm the President and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. At our foundation, we want to make sure that every child grows up at a healthy weight, and that's why we committed a half a billion dollars in 2007 to that cause, and another half a billion dollars earlier this year. So we are thrilled to be here, and looking forward to helping all of you understand how we are trying to do that in the U.S. (Applause.)

MR. JAMMET: My name is Nicholas Jammet. I'm the founder and CEO of Sweetgreen restaurants, and -- which I started in school through my friends at university. And I'm very excited to be here today and learn more about the role that entrepreneurs and private companies have in

helping change our food system, and the power of really good marketing to help make the healthy choice the easy choice. (Applause.)

MR. ALLEN: Good afternoon. I'm Will Allen. I'm a farmer, and founder and CEO of Growing Power. Really happy to be here. I've been to Milan before, but it's great to be back. It's a wonderful city -- and to work with the First Lady. I helped initiate Let's Move. And I think Let's Move should become a worldwide initiative, because that's what we need worldwide.

I grow good food. And I want to get that good food to all people and all countries so everybody is able to eat good food, be able to distribute that food to all communities. I believe the only way for us to end worldwide hunger is to do it on a local level. So it's really important for everybody to get involved on a local level.

And it starts with even young people. This last year, we delivered 30,000 pounds of carrots to the Chicago public school system, which is 90 miles from Milwaukee, where I come from, to feed 409,000 students. But it was only for one day and one meal on that plate. So we have to grow more food and grow more farmers to make this happen. Thank you. (Applause.)

CHEF BESH: And I'm Chef John Besh. I'm Will's friend. (Laughter.) No, but honestly, I have to say, one thing about this man -- and he's very humble -- he is really using food in such a way that he's changing the way inner-city Americans are able to see food, grow food, eat food. And he's -- I come from a place called New Orleans, Louisiana. And we've been -- hit really hard by a hurricane 10 years ago, and it was -- some of Will's efforts and part of, like, creating great food ways and understanding where food comes from that's helped rebuild us.

And so I'm really happy to be here today with all of you and all these great initiatives.

(Cooking demonstration begins.)

CHEF BATALI: Just a quick couple of questions if you don't mind. Families coming together and eating -- how important is that? It's the single binder of the most important time of the day, whether it's breakfast, lunch, dinner, a snack or whatever -- if you can get together with your family, that's when you can actually share what happened to you during the day, which diminishes the losses, measures out the victories, and puts everything in a place where you're moving forward and having a good time and learning and being a part of a vital family unit, which is the crucial share.

MRS. OBAMA: And it's something that, even as busy as we are in the White House, we've preserved our family dinner time. No matter what the President is doing, between 6:30 and 7:00 he stops, we come up, we sit down, we have a meal. We do those same traditions -- how was your day, what were the triumphs, what were the failures. And you get so much. Because we don't have drive time with our kids. We're not in the cars with them. But at meal time, everybody slows down.

And you find that if you're talking over dinner, you're actually paying attention to how fast you're eating. So you're not just sitting

their gobbling your food down; you're actually tasting it. And you probably eat less because you're not just shoveling -- shoveling is probably not a good thing. We don't shovel. Well, the President shovels sometimes. (Laughter.)

CHEF BESH: The truth.

CHEF BATALI: I've seen him shovel a bit, but, I mean, it's not bad. It's good shoveling. (Laughter.)

CHEF BESH: But that was my biggest question, because I know for me, as a chef, I can only find breakfast with my family. So I'm the guy that wakes up, I'm the fast-order cook, early in the morning, making sure I get the family up. Because at night I'm normally working.

But I was thinking that the First Lady and the President don't often have that kind of time, but you do have time to make -- how often do you find time to cook?

MRS. OBAMA: Well, we don't -- I have to say, we don't cook at the White House. We have wonderful chefs, which is -- but I was telling the kids at my station that I was the primary cook before we got to the White House. And I found that -- because we dealt with health issues in our family when our kids were very early, and it was because I was like a typical mother -- we were rushing from sports to sports and -- to activity to activity. And I'd go through the drive-thru, we were doing too much fast food. And when my kids were very little, our pediatrician said, whoa, you've got to slow down.

So what I did was that I cooked more, even if it was just three meals a day. And a lot of times it was something simple like a baked chicken with some broccoli, with a couscous -- couscous was a big thing. My kids now tease me about that dinner because they got sick of it. But it was healthy for them.

And before long, we had turned our kids' health outcomes completely on their heads. And now, they're healthy, active kids with no health issues at all. And cooking was really at -- the key for our family to make that happen.

CHEF BATALI: I know that was a big issue in my family, where one day my wife is at the ballpark feeding the children fast food -- and I made the mistake of questioning my attorney wife, which I'll never do again --

MRS. OBAMA: Bad move.

CHEF BESH: -- why are you feeding them fast food? And she said, well, I married some highfalutin chef, and I thought maybe you would start cooking for the family as you cook for your customers and clients that come to the restaurant. And that really -- that gave me that pause that -- it made me really reflect on there is a way I can do better. And we found that way. And it's beautiful -- even if you don't have the time just to have home-cooked food for the children to eat.

MRS. OBAMA: Absolutely. And it doesn't take much. I mean,

that's the thing -- all families are busy. I know in the United States most -- in most households, both parents work, and in many households there's only one parent. There are many single parents out there. So it does get hard.

But what families should know is that -- try, first of all, one cooked meal a week, then maybe add another. And one meal a day is fine. I mean, the notion that, nowadays, that we can sit down for three meals a day, that's probably not realistic in this environment. But try having dinner. Because, as you guys saw, this meal is quick. It didn't take that long. It was fun to do. And imagine if you're at home with your mom or your dad on the other side and you guys say -- I learned so much about you all. I learned about your sports; we've got a skier, we've got an artist, we've got a mathematician, we've got a lot of activity -- and I found all that out because we were cutting chicken together. (Laughter.) Just imagine what would happen if we were together every night. (Laughter.)

CHEF BATALI: So here's the takeaway. How old are you guys? Twelve, thirteen, fifteen, twenty, eleven, twelve? All right. When my mom went back to work --

MRS. OBAMA: Fifty-one.

CHEF BATALI: Fifty-one, fifty-four -- as the elder spokesperson up here, I'd like to say thank you very much. Here's what happened, and here's what you should do.

My mom went back to work when I was 12. She had stopped working and went full time back to work when I was 12. My brother was 11, my sister was 9. Each week, we were in charge of creating a shopping list that we were going to make for dinner. Mom would help us get the groceries, but when we came home from school, our job was to put one dinner on the table.

Choose simple stuff. Get recipes from the Internet or from books that you recognize, or stuff that you really love, and take accountability and responsibility for your own nutrition while you're helping your family. That will put you in the coolest spot. That will make you the hero of the day. That will make your brothers and sisters the heroes. Your moms and dads will suddenly love you even more. And everyone is going to Disney World. (Laughter.) Joking about the Disney World.

The point is that the upside of you guys taking charge of a little bit of it is being a part of the team and really owning it. And when you do that, you'll suddenly realize how much cooler it is. And believe me, when you get to college, everyone wants to date the people that know how to cook. (Laughter.)

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4:07 P.M. CET

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