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## Gerber Aims to Increase Number of Healthier Preschoolers by 50 Percent by 2010

Partnership with Governor Mike Huckabee & Wal-Mart launches state and national programs

*Little Rock, AR* (September 20, 2005) – *Start Healthy, Stay Healthy*<sup>®</sup>, Gerber Products Company's campaign to help parents raise healthy babies and reduce the growth of childhood obesity, today unveiled two new initiatives – the *Promise* and an Arkansas state educational partnership. These programs aim to provide parents with resources and information to help their infants and toddlers establish healthy eating habits early.

"Our scientific research revealed that one in four American toddlers eat *french fries* everyday. With shocking findings such as this, I am recommitting our company and challenging parents across the country to reduce the number of overweight children ages 2-5 by 50% in the next five years," said Kurt Schmidt, President & CEO, Gerber Products Company. "This would ultimately mean 400,000 healthier children by 2010."

To meet this ambitious goal, Gerber is reaching out to arm parents with preventative educational materials and programs in their communities through both national and state-based programs. The program enhancements announced today include:

- The *Promise*, a national inspirational program to help parents give their baby the very best start by providing tools and updates at key intervals in their child's development
- A pilot educational partnership with Governor Mike Huckabee, Wal-Mart and the state of Arkansas; and the release of a comprehensive health resource called the *Healthy Arkansas: Better State of Health Guidebook*

"While many have focused on nutrition issues for older children, we must address the first two years when children's eating habits are established," said Governor Mike Huckabee. "I'm committed to building healthy future generations. It's a pleasure to partner with Gerber and Wal-Mart to provide people the tools they need to combat preventable diseases such as obesity."

The *Promise* is a national inspirational program empowering parents to instill healthful eating habits for a new generation. The program encourages parents across the country to *promise* to give their babies a healthy start and Gerber will support them through science-based feeding information and advice. Among many resources, parents will receive nutrition tools and a special *Promise* pin to remind them and motivate them to keep their commitment. Parents across the nation can sign up by visiting [www.gerber.com/promise](http://www.gerber.com/promise) or by calling 1-800-4-GERBER.

The Arkansas initiative, a pilot program that Gerber hopes to replicate in other states, is being led by Governor Huckabee, himself a former sufferer of adult obesity. It is an extension of Governor Huckabee's Healthy Arkansas program. Highlights of the program include:

- The *Healthy Arkansas: Better State of Health Guidebook*, will be available free of charge to citizens of Arkansas. The book is a comprehensive resource which highlights healthy living including a section on childhood nutrition developed by Gerber.
- Two days of nutrition counseling will be hosted at all Wal-Mart Supercenters throughout the state. These nutrition days will give parents the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a nutrition counselor and ask questions relevant to their child.

Gerber focused on Arkansas for this pilot educational partnership because it is one of the nation's more obesity-challenged states. Under Governor Huckabee's leadership Arkansas became the first state in the nation to require body mass index (BMI) measurement for all of its school age children.

#### **About Start Healthy, Stay Healthy™:**

Gerber launched Start Healthy, Stay Healthy™ in 2002 to educate consumers and professionals on the importance of starting good eating habits early. Founded in 1928, Gerber has conducted extensive research to understand and improve infant and toddler nutrition and feeding for over 75 years, and with Start Healthy, Stay Healthy™ has provided new resources in the fight against childhood obesity and related trends. Gerber encourages parents to lay a foundation of good nutrition for their children. By establishing good eating behaviors early, parents can help their children prevent later life disease like obesity and related diseases. Over the last three years, Gerber's Start Healthy, Stay Healthy™, initiative has delivered groundbreaking research, science-based advice and practical feeding guidelines for parents to adopt.

#### **About Healthy Arkansas:**

Governor Mike Huckabee launched Healthy Arkansas in May 2004, after successfully losing 100 lbs and realizing how unhealthy the state of Arkansas was compared to other states. Healthy Arkansas is a program aimed at improving the health of Arkansans through lifestyle changes. The program focuses on three primary areas: physical activity, nutrition and tobacco use.

#### **About Gerber Products Company:**

Gerber Products Company is part of the Consumer Health Division of Novartis AG (NYSE: NVS), a world leader in pharmaceuticals and consumer health. In 2004, the Group's businesses achieved sales of USD 28.2 billion and a pro forma net income of USD 5.6 billion. The Group invested approximately USD 4.2 billion in R&D. Headquartered in Basel, Switzerland, Novartis Group companies employ approximately 83,700 people and operate in over 140 countries around the world. For further information, please consult <http://www.novartis.com>.

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