

Statement by
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on
The Dietary Guidelines for Americans

before
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

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Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (Dietary Guidelines). I want to begin by thanking Members of this Committee for your interest in the Dietary Guidelines and, more broadly, for your work to support Americans and a healthy agricultural sector. The Dietary Guidelines are a critical science-based initiative drafted by experts at the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services that gives Americans advice on building healthy eating patterns that can help prevent chronic diseases and promote the health and wellbeing of our Nation. I want to emphasize that the focus of the Dietary Guidelines is on preventing diet-related health conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, rather than treating these and other diseases. The Dietary Guidelines are one part of a larger effort to help lower disease rates in the United States and give every American the tools they need to live healthy and productive lives.

History

The Dietary Guidelines are required under the 1990 National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act, which directs the Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Agriculture (USDA) to publish a report entitled “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” at least

every five years. By law, each edition of the Dietary Guidelines includes “nutritional and dietary information and guidelines for the general public...” The law also states that the Dietary Guidelines should “be promoted by each Federal agency in carrying out any Federal food, nutrition, or health program.” In our development of these Guidelines, we follow this statute to guide the scope of our work.

Historically, the Key Recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines have not changed substantially from one edition to the next. Elements of healthy eating patterns continue to include fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein-rich foods such as lean meats and seafood, and limit components like saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium. The guidelines provide a science-based framework for policy makers, nutrition educators, and healthcare providers to include nutrition as part of an overall prevention strategy for lowering rate of disease. The guidelines also help Americans make healthy food choices, enjoy food, and celebrate personal culture through food, all of which are important to Americans.

Development

HHS and USDA strive to develop Dietary Guidelines recommendations that are based on the strongest available scientific evidence and represent our current understanding of the connections between food and health. One of the ways that we achieve this goal is by appointing a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). The Advisory Committee is an independent group of experts and practitioners in the fields of nutrition and medicine that is voluntary and solely advisory, and although their work informs the government's work, they are not directly involved in the Departments' development of the Dietary Guidelines. It develops a scientific report and recommendations to inform each edition of the Dietary Guidelines. The use of an Advisory Committee is a best practice to ensure that the federal government is obtaining

sound, external scientific advice to inform policy decisions. Advisory Committees have been used to inform the development of the Dietary Guidelines since the 1985 edition.

The 2015 Advisory Committee used state-of-the-art standards to develop its scientific recommendations to the federal government, which were delivered to HHS and USDA in its Advisory Report in February 2015. In addition to drawing on the expertise of the Committee members, the Advisory Committee also received both written and oral public comments over the course of its work. These comments helped ensure that the Committee discussed topics and issues of interest to the public and received evidence to consider in the scientific process.

The work of the Advisory Committee informs HHS and USDA's development of the Dietary Guidelines; however, the Advisory Report is only one component that the Departments consider when developing each edition of the guidelines. The Guidelines themselves are written and reviewed by the experts at our Departments and ultimately by Secretary Vilsack and me. In addition to the Advisory Committee's report, HHS and USDA consider public comments on the Advisory Report and look to federal agencies with expertise in nutrition to review both the Advisory Report and the draft policy before Secretary Vilsack and I approve it.

We recognize that the Advisory Report addressed many issues about which nutrition and agricultural stakeholders care deeply. We received over 29,000 written comments during the 75-day public comment period on the Advisory Report, as well as 73 oral comments during a March 2015 public meeting. This demonstrates public interest and concern about information in the Dietary Guidelines. In response to the high level of interest and Congressional requests, HHS and USDA extended the public comment period by 30 days to accommodate a high volume of public comment submissions and ensure we were able to take the public's input into account. These comments have been fully reviewed by staff within our Departments and are being

considered in the development of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines. While all public comments are reviewed, in order to ensure the Dietary Guidelines are based on sound science, the Departments focus heavily on public comments that include scientific justification.

As a result, the 2015 Dietary Guidelines will be informed by a review of thousands of scientific papers and decades of nutrition and medical research, as well as significant input from the public. The Guidelines will translate this science into succinct, food-based guidance that Americans can rely on for choosing a healthy diet.

Impact

The 2015 edition of the Dietary Guidelines will build on this strong scientific foundation to continue to provide guidance to help encourage more healthy food choices across our nation. As members of this Committee know, this issue is of critical importance. We must strive, together, to prevent nutrition-related disease and improve the health of American families and communities.

The Dietary Guidelines are one of numerous important federal policy initiatives that aim to help Americans reach their highest standard of health. For more than 25 years, over half of our adult population has been overweight or obese. Today, about half of all American adults have one or more preventable chronic diseases, which are attributable to several causes, including poor-quality diet and physical activity behaviors. All sectors of society play an integral part in contributing to a culture in the United States that champions wellness and empowers all people to achieve their highest standard of health. The Dietary Guidelines provide the framework for not only the federal government but also for other sectors of influence, including other policymakers, health professionals, etc. who can apply the Guidelines in a multitude of ways with the potential to lower nutrition-related disease rates.

At HHS, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans provide a roadmap for the nutrition advice and services that we deliver to the public through chronic disease prevention efforts, food assistance programs, and educational initiatives. Examples include the Older Americans Act Nutrition Services Programs and Head Start. The Guidelines are also used to inform national disease prevention and health promotion objectives related to nutrition and weight status, primarily through Healthy People 2020. CDC's prevention campaigns, NIH's lifestyle guidance, and FDA's Nutrition Facts Label regulations consider the nutrition information in the Dietary Guidelines. As in the past, the 2015 edition of the Dietary Guidelines will help focus our resources on efforts that have the greatest positive impact on health outcomes.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015

HHS and USDA are working together to finalize the 2015 Dietary Guidelines, which are expected to be completed in December of this year. We will conduct several layers of scientific review prior to preparing a draft for final approval, which has not yet occurred. As such, I am unable to comment on the final content of the forthcoming edition of the Dietary Guidelines at this time. However, I expect the new Dietary Guidelines will continue to focus on food-based recommendations that emphasize the importance of consuming a total "healthy eating pattern" over time while recognizing the importance of individual choices.

Closing

Again, thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to discuss the Dietary Guidelines and for your interest in this important topic. I am looking forward to continuing our partnership so that together we can ensure that every American has access to the building blocks of healthy and productive lives. I am happy to answer your questions.