

**Statement by
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Secretary of Agriculture
Committee on Agriculture, U.S. 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 with you. I know it is important to all of us that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) deliver on our Congressional mandate.

The Dietary Guidelines are focused on promoting health and preventing disease by providing food-based recommendations on diet and nutrition. The Guidelines form the cornerstone for all Federal nutrition programs. Over the years, they have also become an important resource for policy makers, nutrition educators, health professionals, and industry. What unites us all is the shared appreciation for the importance of nutrition in helping to prevent chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, diet-related cancers, and obesity – and the knowledge that too many Americans suffer from these preventable diet-related diseases.

It is important to note that the Dietary Guidelines are intended to prevent these diet-related conditions, not to treat them. The recommendations apply to individuals 2 years of age and older who are healthy or at increased risk of chronic disease, not those with medical conditions or special dietary needs. Dietary recommendations for specific populations that suffer from various conditions are likely to differ from those recommended by the Dietary Guidelines.

HHS and USDA currently are working together to develop the eighth edition of the Dietary Guidelines, which is scheduled to be released by the end of this calendar year.

Background

HHS and USDA have jointly published the Dietary Guidelines every five years since 1980, even before it was required by statute. The 1990 National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act now directs HHS and USDA to publish the Dietary Guidelines at least every five years. The Congressional mandate states that the Dietary Guidelines “shall contain nutritional and dietary information and guidelines for the general public, and shall be promoted by each Federal agency in carrying out any Federal food, nutrition, or health program.” The law also requires that each edition of the Dietary Guidelines “shall be based on the preponderance of the scientific and medical knowledge which is current at the time the report is prepared.”

Since the 1985 edition of the Dietary Guidelines, the Secretaries of HHS and USDA have appointed an external, independent group of experts and practitioners in the fields of nutrition and medicine to provide independent, science-based advice and recommendations to the Departments as we develop the Dietary Guidelines. Each Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee is compliant with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, serves in a voluntary and advisory role only, and submits a report of scientific recommendations to the Federal government. The Advisory Committee does not develop the Dietary Guidelines; that is the role of HHS and USDA, and the recommendations we receive from the Advisory Committee inform our work.

External Scientific Evidence Review Prior to HHS-USDA Dietary Guidelines Development

The 2015 Advisory Committee was charged with reviewing the 2010 Dietary Guidelines and reviewing the current state of scientific evidence on nutrition and health to develop food-based recommendations of public health importance for Americans ages 2 years and older. Their

recommendations were outlined in the Scientific Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, submitted to HHS and USDA in February 2015.

The Advisory Committee conducted comprehensive and rigorous systematic reviews of scientific evidence on food, nutrition, and health using state-of-the-art standards to develop its Scientific Advisory Report. The Committee formulated and addressed more than 80 scientific questions using: (1) original systematic reviews conducted through USDA's Nutrition Evidence Library (NEL); (2) existing high-quality systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and reports from the scientific community; (3) data analyses; and (4) food pattern modeling analyses. These four approaches contribute to a comprehensive body of scientific evidence upon which the Federal government can develop policy.

It is worth noting that systematic reviews were used to examine the majority of the scientific evidence in diet and health. Considered the gold standard and standard practice for more than 25 years in the medical field, systematic reviews are relied upon to inform the development of national guidelines for use by research and health professionals. The NEL, developed in consultation with leaders in the systematic review community such as the highly respected Cochrane Collaboration, involves a structured, protocol-driven approach to identify, evaluate, summarize, and synthesize peer-reviewed scientific literature as a means to answer the scientific questions specifically focused on diet and public health. Use of the NEL involves thorough searches of all peer-reviewed scientific literature contained in multiple electronic databases, and putting the results through pre-determined inclusion/exclusion criteria to focus on those that answer the scientific questions. Because the Dietary Guidelines focus on disease prevention, and not treatment, these reviews excluded studies that involved treating disease, such as those in which patients with an existing condition followed a therapeutic diet. Of

approximately 4,000 manuscripts screened for inclusion, the 2015 Advisory Committee reviewed nearly 300 studies that met the criteria for the systematic review questions.

In addition, the Advisory Committee used existing systematic reviews from the NEL and external national and international scientific organizations to prevent duplication of efforts and to conserve Federal resources and time. All existing systematic reviews were screened by Federal staff and underwent assessment to ensure the proper quality and objectivity.

Public Participation in the Process

Public participation in the Dietary Guidelines scientific review process has been important and extremely valuable. HHS and USDA issued a public call for nominations of candidates for 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee members in the fall of 2012. Following a careful and diligent process, members were appointed to the Advisory Committee by Secretary Sebelius and me. The Advisory Committee proceeded to hold seven public meetings spanning 19 months, which included an opportunity for the public to provide oral testimony. After each public meeting, the Committee's slides and videos were posted for public access on DietaryGuidelines.gov, along with a list of all the scientific studies discussed during the meetings and the inclusion-exclusion criteria the Committee used. Throughout this time, the public was encouraged to submit comments to the Advisory Committee on DietaryGuidelines.gov. These comments ensured that the Committee considered all relevant topics in preparation of the Scientific Advisory Report.

Once the Advisory Committee submitted its Scientific Advisory Report to Secretary Burwell and me in February 2015, the report was posted on DietaryGuidelines.gov for public review and comment. HHS and USDA extended the public comment period from 45 days to 75 days; for comparison, the public comment period to review the 2010 Advisory Report was 30

days. In addition, the public was invited to provide oral testimony to the Federal government on the Scientific Advisory Report in March 2015.

Public comments serve as a vital resource to our Departments in drafting the Dietary Guidelines. In addition to the March public meeting for oral testimony, we received more than 29,000 written comments during the 75-day public comment period. Staff from both Departments have reviewed all comments submitted and posted them online at DietaryGuidelines.gov. To ensure the Dietary Guidelines are based on the totality of sound science, the Departments' focus is primarily on public comments with scientific justification.

HHS-USDA Development of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

In addition to the Advisory Committee's report and public comments, HHS and USDA look to Federal agencies with expertise in nutrition to review both the Scientific Advisory Report and the draft of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This ensures that the Dietary Guidelines are grounded in the current scientific knowledge and are compliant with existing Federal policies before Secretary Burwell and I review and approve it for release and implementation across Federal nutrition programs.

As a result of this multi-faceted process, the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans will be informed by thousands of scientific papers, decades of nutrition and medical research, public comments, and reviews by Federal experts. We will conduct several layers of review prior to preparing a draft for final approval, which has not yet occurred. However, I can assure you that the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans will be grounded in the preponderance of the best available scientific evidence, represent our current understanding of the connections between food and health, and integrate the science into succinct, food-based guidance that Americans can rely on for choosing a healthy diet.

The Dietary Guidelines has been referred to as the nutrition backbone of our nation. We take this responsibility very seriously. Again, thank you, Chairman Conaway, Ranking Member Peterson, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to discuss the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

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