

TRENDS



FOOD AND NUTRITION ISSUES LIKELY TO IMPACT THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN THE NEXT 1 TO 3 YEARS

TOP 10 NUTRITION TRENDS FOR 2015

1. Transparency is critical as food landscape becomes increasingly complex.

A healthy diet used to mean one that provided all the nutrients and food groups in the correct amounts. Now it encompasses many other factors such as environmental and agricultural considerations. As a result, consumers are increasingly confused over their food choices. Should they choose organic milk? Should GMO-produced foods be avoided? What about hormones, antibiotics and water usage?

Advances and innovations in food production and processing are concerns for some people. In general, consumers are more willing to accept new technologies when there is transparency and when they see a benefit—for example, when technologies reduce the amount of pesticides needed, minimize water usage, result in greater production on less land or improve nutrition.

To maintain trust and integrity, it will be important for the food industry to continue to practice transparency and communicate with consumers on issues such as where and how food is produced. This can be done through product labels, websites or point-of-purchase print materials. Dairy Council of California helps educate consumers about the benefits of these technologies so that they can make educated decisions about the food they purchase and consume.

2. Public policy advocates for plant-based diets due to environmental concerns.

As sustainability becomes a key aspect of food production practices, public policy is on the verge of incorporating environmental measures into dietary recommendations. As an example, the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) included sustainability in its meeting discussions for the first time.

Many health agencies are advising plant-based diets not only for health reasons but also out of concern for the environment, citing research that greenhouse gas

emissions are higher for animal-based versus plant-based foods. These recommendations often discourage consumption of dairy foods, resulting in an increased demand for alternatives such as almond, rice and coconut beverages. Many organizations also advocate for locally produced, natural and unprocessed foods to reduce environmental footprint.

Nutrient density is an important concept to include in discussions of sustainability, as ultimately it is nutrition that sustains consumer health. The dairy industry—and its animal-agriculture counterparts in other areas—must ensure that food choices are based first and foremost on health and nutritional attributes to avoid unintended consequences such as nutrient deficiencies and chronic disease. Dairy Council of California is monitoring this issue closely and advocating for consumer health through messages about nutrient density.

3. Community health is seen as instrumental to disease prevention and management.

Significant changes are affecting the structure, staffing and availability of health care. Community clinics are appearing in drug, warehouse and grocery stores for everything from prescription refills to flu shots and are staffed by paraprofessionals. Peer health workers conduct in-home consultations that assess both consumer health and living situations, including community, family, socioeconomic status and other factors that impact health and disease risk.

With the increase in incidence of obesity and related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, health care gatekeepers are focusing on disease prevention and self-management in addition to wellness. Groups that are often remiss in preventative health, such as low-income groups and specific ethnic groups such as Hispanics, may particularly benefit from greater access to health care with a focus on disease prevention.

Schools are another venue for health care delivery, with school-based nutrition education and health centers on the rise. It is well-accepted that disease prevention starts in early childhood with healthy diet and lifestyle habits. Therefore, children can benefit from nutrition and health messages, and families are reached through take-home materials. Dairy Council of California is embracing these changes in community health by reaching children and caregivers through widespread connections in schools and by exploring venues through community health workers.

4. Dairy's list of health benefits grows increasingly diverse but skeptics abound.

Research on milk and dairy foods continues to expand beyond calcium and bone health to preventative effects against high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, sarcopenia and obesity. Milk, chocolate milk and whey protein are also top-of-mind for many athletes for muscle-building, hydration and muscle-recovery benefits. All in all, dairy research—both on whole dairy foods and on their individual nutrients—continues to be very positive for preventing a number of chronic diseases and optimizing lifelong health.

Skeptics, however, may question the reliability of research funded by the dairy industry. It is critical to conduct research at credible universities with highly respected scientists and to publish in peer-reviewed journals. Third-party spokespeople can also help disseminate positive dairy messages when the research warrants it. Dairy Council of California engages in credible dairy research and uses researchers, public health experts and credible stakeholders to present at key meetings and conferences.

5. The face of nutrition education is changing.

Factors such as improved technology and consumer eating patterns are changing how nutrition education is being delivered. Technology plays a significant role in health and nutrition as consumers become more adept at accessing personalized information from websites and mobile applications. At the same time, the 24/7 availability of snacks and convenience foods is changing the way consumers eat. When they do eat at home, they often “assemble” meals rather than cook from scratch.

All of this means that nutrition messages need to be more creative, reaching consumers where they are—whether at the workplace, at school, at the store or elsewhere—with mobile device applications, videos, websites and social media. Successful messages need to be tailored

to individuals and be motivational and feasible. Dairy Council of California programs are based on strategies that promote positive changes in behavior using multiple concise touch points with emotional connections that resonate with today's consumers.

6. Public health recommendations focus on dietary patterns.

With the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans to be released later this year, considerable discussion has centered on healthy dietary patterns. The DGAC draft recommendations for a healthy diet include low-fat or fat-free dairy, vegetables, fruits, whole grains, seafood, legumes and nuts. Reduced consumption of red and processed meat, sugar-sweetened food and beverages and refined grains is also recommended. These dietary patterns include two to three servings of dairy per day.

The focus on dietary patterns rather than on specific nutrients is positive for milk and dairy products. For America's children, milk continues to be the number one source of nine essential nutrients, including three of the four nutrients deemed under-consumed—calcium, vitamin D and potassium. Dairy's irreplaceable nutrient package continues to position it in the Dietary Guidelines as an important food group. Dairy Council of California provides nutrition education to children and adults focused on all five food groups, with milk as a cornerstone of a healthy diet.

7. Snacking is more prevalent among all demographic groups.

Trends show that snacking now provides about one-quarter of calories and a substantial proportion of daily fat, sugar and salt intake. Snacks can be an opportunity to fill nutrient gaps from meals that may be lacking in food groups or nutrients. However, consumers tend to indulge rather than consider nutrition when snacking. The message that snacks can taste good and be nutritious is important.

Consumers benefit from learning to plan healthy, appealing, convenient snacks throughout the day. Milk and dairy foods are a perfect match for these messages as cheese sticks, single-serve yogurt containers and individual plain and flavored milks are healthy, transportable and tasty snacks at any time of the day. Dairy Council of California is implementing strategies to teach parents and children how to plan and prepare healthy snacks, with a focus on nutrient-dense, convenient and tasty options.

8. Sugar continues to be demonized as the culprit in many diseases.

Sugar continues to take the blame for many health ailments from obesity to diabetes. As a result, various strategies seek to lower the sugar content of foods, educate consumers and discourage consumption of products high in added sugar. One example is the taxing of sweetened foods and beverages. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines may follow the World Health Organization's recommendation that sugar comprise less than 10 percent of calorie intake.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is proposing changes to Nutrition Facts labels to include a separate line for added sugar, making it easier for consumers to distinguish between natural and added sugar. Much of the sugar in dairy is natural in the form of lactose; however, increased attention on sugar could demonize both added and natural sugar. In addition, flavored milk and sweetened yogurt will need to declare how many grams of added sugar they contain.

Consumers and health professionals alike will need to be reminded that some products contain sugar but also provide significant nutrients—in other words, that nutrient density is a better measure of a product's nutritional contributions. All foods consumed in moderation, even those that contain sweeteners, can be part of a healthy, balanced diet. Dairy Council of California provides education around nutrient density and highlights the difference between natural and added sugar.

9. Research on probiotics and the gut microbiome gains steam in the health arena.

Probiotics, known for their benefits to intestinal health and the immune system, are now being investigated for their preventative effects against chronic diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. Recent studies have even made a connection between probiotics and mental health—an area of interest given our aging population.

The microbiome—the collection of trillions of microbes living in the gut—is recognized as playing a role in many basic life processes, greatly impacting health and disease. Scientists believe that the microbiome may be responsible for a broad range of metabolic and developmental processes from food digestion to vitamin synthesis to brain function.

However, probiotics and the microbiome are not yet top-of-mind for most consumers. While there was some mention of the topic in recent DGAC discussions, the 2015 dietary recommendations are not expected to address probiotics. Consumers will likely drive the market based on word of mouth, the media and product manufacturers. Dairy Council of California will continue to educate health professionals and consumers on the substantiated effects and good sources of probiotics such as yogurt, kefir and fermented milks and the growing research around the microbiome.

10. Protein continues to carry a health halo.

Protein-containing products are riding the wave of popularity, driven by research showing that protein is beneficial for many areas beyond muscle building, including weight management, blood sugar control, bone health and sarcopenia prevention. Consumers are seeking high-protein foods, and in turn, manufacturers are adding protein to earn product labels stating, “good source of protein” and “excellent source of protein.”

Animal protein from meat and dairy is the highest quality protein. However, a lack of understanding of protein quality has plant sources often lumped together with animal sources. Protein consumption that is evenly distributed throughout the day is thought to provide the most benefit, which means that for many Americans, more protein is needed at breakfast and lunch to even out the daily distribution. Dairy Council of California is informing consumers about the expanded health benefits of protein, quality protein sources and ways to plan diets with evenly distributed protein content.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Produced twice annually by Dairy Council of California, the TRENDS newsletter updates industry leaders on emerging nutrition issues likely to have a positive or negative effect upon the dairy industry. The trends tracking system, monitored by a team of Dairy Council of California staff, is designed to identify issues early and track their development through multiple communication channels. Analysis is done semiannually on the issues. For more information or to receive a hard copy of the TRENDS newsletter, please contact Kendall House at KHouse@DairyCouncilofCA.org.



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