

TRENDS



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

Dietary Guidelines' acceptance challenged by changing scientific and social norms.

The 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, slated to be released in late 2015 or early 2016, are more contentious than in the past. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) report, which becomes the basis for the actual guidelines, focuses on dietary patterns that are associated with lower risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, overweight and obesity. The report also covers hot topics such as how much sodium, saturated fat and added sugars people should be eating, as well as sustainability issues.

A number of factors made the discussion more controversial. First, research is not clear-cut on some of the topics. For example, while many experts believe adding sustainability to recommendations is warranted, others say the research isn't conclusive. Second, scientific research is not as respected as it once was, with many consumer and advocacy groups skeptical of methods used, funding agencies and study conclusions. Third, social media has given groups who call into question the credibility of the DGAC a platform to express their non-traditional views quickly and broadly.

Milk and dairy foods fare well in the Dietary Guidelines as they are included in all three recommended dietary patterns. Dairy Council of California's position will be to balance the public policy—a starting point to health—with individual needs through nutrition education using a positive and personalized approach. In addition, the diversity of products and the industry's commitment to producing specialized milk-based products that meet niche markets strengthen dairy's position in healthy diets for everyone.

Locally-produced natural foods top consumers' desirable list.

Consumers are increasingly vocal about wanting to know where their food comes from. Nutrition and health are not always top of mind as other factors are being considered such as where and how food is produced, how fresh it is and whether sustainable methods of processing and packaging are used. Consumers are skeptical of big food industry practices with regard to animal welfare, genetically modified organisms and use of pesticides and antibiotics. As personal beliefs and subjective feelings come into play, decision-making becomes more complex than simply buying a carton of milk for breakfast or a loaf of bread for lunch.

There is a small but growing movement back to whole foods as a way to eat more natural and fewer processed foods. For dairy, this means a growing acceptance of whole milk, butter and full-fat yogurt as dairy fats are perceived more favorably. Consumers are driving this movement; public policy and health professionals have not yet widely embraced it.

For the food industry, it is critical to provide accurate information on production and processing methods in a transparent manner to keep increasingly skeptical consumers informed. The dairy industry has an opportunity to expound on dairy foods as fresh, local, healthy and minimally processed—and to tout ongoing efforts to reduce the carbon footprint. Through website resources, presentations and other efforts Dairy Council of California is educating health professionals and consumers on the natural healthfulness of dairy products and their relevance in a global sustainable food system.

The link between nutrition and mental and cognitive health gains steam.

Many experts consider foods to assist mental and cognitive health as the next “big thing” in nutrition. As the U.S. population continues to age, there is growing interest in the ability of foods and dietary components to optimize cognitive health and prevent dementia in later years. Brain development in babies and children is also a focus in nutrition research. Some components being examined are choline, protein, probiotics, healthy fats (such as omega-3 fatty acids), selenium, zinc and other select vitamins and minerals. Studies show that stress, sleep habits and social relationships are also critical to optimize mental health.

Dairy plays a role as part of a healthy diet throughout life. Consumption of milk and milk products has been linked to improved cognitive function in children and older people in preliminary studies; however, more research is needed to confirm this connection. Dairy Council of California takes a broad view of healthy lifestyles to include other aspects of health and well-being beyond diet. The research is being closely followed, and the link between cognition and nutrition will be communicated when there is sufficient evidence.

Cheese’s image buoyed by its taste and health attributes.

Cheese—once shunned for its high content of saturated fat and sodium—is cautiously coming back into favor for its high protein and calcium levels and low sugar and lactose levels. With only a few ingredients, cheeses such as Cheddar, colby, Monterey Jack, mozzarella and Swiss are seen as natural and fresh. Research showing that saturated fat is not associated with heart disease as once believed, and that sodium may not be harmful in many people, is also slowly taking the stigma off cheese. The Dietary Guidelines still recommend low-fat cheeses as better-for-you, yet cheese contributes 16 percent of the saturated fat and only 8 percent of the sodium in American diets. Its association with satiety, longevity and improved

dental health is also positive. Finally, dietary patterns such as the Mediterranean, DASH and some vegetarian diets include cheese, making it acceptable for health professionals to advise in moderate amounts.

The dairy industry can continue to tout the natural, healthful and tasty attributes of cheese, as well as the remarkable variety, to consumers of all ages and ethnicities. Dairy Council of California recently developed Cheese! Secrets, Stories + Statistics of America’s Edible Obsession, a brochure for use in retail and community venues to educate people on the history, nutritional attributes, fun facts around cheese-making and ways to add cheese to any meal or snack.

Through an ongoing trends-identification process, Dairy Council of California paints a picture of the environment in which the dairy industry operates, and identifies issues that must be addressed in order to be effective and influential. The identified trends shape Dairy Council of California’s strategic plans geared at educating health and wellness professionals, educators and consumers about the health benefits of dairy products, including the topics covered in this trends report.

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 staffers, is designed to identify issues early and track their development through multiple communication channels. 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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