

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2015: What It Could Mean to the Meat and Poultry Industry

Thomas Boileau, Betsy Booren and Molly Miller

OVERVIEW AND CHARTER

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) is the premiere federal nutritional policy. It is congressionally mandated under the *National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990*¹ and must be updated every five years. The law instructs that the DGA shall contain nutritional and dietary information and guidelines for the general public, shall be based on the preponderance of scientific and medical knowledge current at the time of publication, and shall be promoted by each federal agency in carrying out any federal food, nutrition, or health program.

Simply, the DGA intends to provide science-based nutrition guidance for Americans ages 2 and older, including those Americans with increased risk of chronic disease. The DGA encourages Americans to eat a healthful diet, which is one that focuses on foods and beverages that help achieve and maintain a healthy weight, promote health, and prevent disease. Recommendations of the DGA are the scientific basis for federal food and nutrition policy and education initiatives.

All federal dietary guidance for the public is required to be consistent with the DGA. The guidelines provide the scientific basis for the government to speak in a consistent and uniform manner. The DGA is used in the development of print and web-based educational materials, messages, tools, and programs to communicate healthy eating and physical activity information to the public. The DGA is also used as nutritional foundation for food assistance programs, school lunch and military purchasing, among others.

Tom Boileau, Ph.D.
Scientific, Nutrition and Regulatory Affairs
Kraft Foods Group, Inc.
thomas.boileau@kraftfoods.com

Betsy Booren, Ph.D.
Vice President, Scientific Affairs
American Meat Institute
bbooren@meatami.com

Molly Miller, M.S., R.D.
Project Leader - Regulatory Services - Tyson Foods, Inc.
molly.miller@tyson.com

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have jointly published the DGA every five years since 1980. HHS's Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and Agricultural Research Service coordinate the development of the DGA. Currently, HHS is the primary agency responsible for the development of the 2015 DGA.

The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC or the Committee) is the key scientific advisory group whose recommendations are considered during the development of the final policy document, *i.e.* DGA. The DGAC is made up of nationally recognized experts in the field of nutrition and health. The charge to the Committee is to review the scientific and medical knowledge current at the time. The Committee then prepares a report for the Secretaries of HHS and USDA that provides recommendations for the next edition of the DGA based on their review of current literature. The current DGAC has a two-year charter and their report is expected late 2014 or early 2015.

The 2015 DGAC is comprised of 14 members and from a procedural standpoint, provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) govern the DGAC. Enacted in 1972, FACA formalized the process for establishing, operating, and overseeing Federal Advisory Committees to ensure that advice formed by advisory committees are objective and accessible to the public.

The DGAC will hold at least five public meetings. The first meeting was held in June 2013 and outlined the initial vision and goals of the 2015 DGAC. The second public meeting was held in January 2014 and the third via webcast in March 2014. Recently, the fourth and fifth meetings were announced and will be webcast in July and September 2014.

The Committee is expected to use the Nutrition Evidence Library (NEL), which was established by the USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, to support its systematic review of the current science on nutrition and

¹ 1990 National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act (Public Law 101-445, Section 301[7 U.S.C. 5341], Title III.

health. The NEL uses a six-step approach designed to minimize bias and ensure transparency of the process:

1. develop research questions;
2. create and implement literature search and sort protocols;
3. develop evidence portfolios;
4. synthesize the bodies of evidence;
5. develop conclusion statements and grade the evidence; and
6. describe research recommendations.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Since the June 2013 meeting, DGAC have formed five subcommittees to evaluate the scientific evidence. A description of each subcommittee, including scope and current topics under review is provided below.² For the first time ever in the history of DGAC, certain subcommittees have asked for public comment on specific questions. The DGAC will consider these comments as they develop their recommendations.

Subcommittee 1: Food and Nutrient Intakes, and Health: Current Status and Trends

The scope of Subcommittee 1 is to identify and describe current consumption patterns and trends in nutrient, food and beverage, and food group intake by the public; and assess prevalent eating behaviors, prevalent dietary patterns, prevalence and trends in diet-related diseases, current consumption patterns and trends, chronic disease status and trends, and body weight status and trends. The current topics under review include the following.

- Current consumption patterns – Are there nutrients that are over- or under-consumed and if so are there reasons for public health concern?
- Current intake and trends of food groups
- Eating behaviors (eating frequency, timing, location, etc.)
- Food categories (foods and beverages as consumed)
- Dietary patterns
- Contribution of specific foods to intake of added sugars, solid fats, and sodium
- Potential overconsumption of nutrients, including caffeine
- Prevalence of weight status indicators and trends over time
- Prevalence of diet-related chronic disease and indicators
- Adequacy of 2010 USDA food patterns in meeting the RDAs, AIs or AMDRs
- Influence of various proposed changes in USDA food patterns on nutrient adequacy, changes in proteins, fats and oils, and grain products

Subcommittee 2: Dietary Patterns, Foods and Nutrients, and Health Outcomes

The scope of Subcommittee 2 is to evaluate foods, beverages and nutrients in the context of dietary patterns and preventable health outcomes. The current topics under review include the following.

- Dietary patterns and risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, cancer, neurological and psychological illnesses
- Dietary patterns on bone health
- Food and nutrients under review – alcohol, sodium and cholesterol (using existing reports and updating as necessary)
- Dietary patterns and other cancer outcomes – total cancer mortality; dietary patterns during prenatal period and infant birth weight and risk of pre-term births
- Seafood intake and health outcomes

In January 2014, Subcommittee 2 requested public comment on the steps the food industry is taking or has taken to reduce sodium, added sugars, and fats (*i.e.* total fats, saturated fats, *trans* fats and other individual fatty acids) in the food supply, including what nutrients have been increased as a consequence of reductions where applicable. The American Meat Institute (AMI) shared with the DGAC the efforts the meat and poultry industry has made in sodium reduction reformulation while maintaining the highest food safety and quality standards.³ AMI estimated more than 70 percent of its members are actively involved in effort to reduce sodium.

Further, AMI stated the reformulation efforts can take upwards of two years. Reformulation requires undertaking extensive food safety challenge studies and these tests take a minimum of four months per product variation. Additional scientific protocols follow for quality, shelf-life, and sensory acceptability. New formulations generally also necessitate allergen control, approval of new ingredients, and label revisions, which for meat and poultry products must receive regulatory approval from the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) after reformulation and all safety testing is complete. This regulatory approval process can add weeks, sometimes months, to the reformulation process.

Subcommittee 3: Diet and Physical Activity Behavior Change

The scope of Subcommittee 3 is to address individual dietary/physical activity behaviors and identify facilitators/barriers; and identifying modes of delivery and behavioral change strategies at work. The current topics under review include the following.

² As of April 30, 2014.

³ American Meat Institute. March 3, 2014. Public Comment: Subcommittee Request for Public Comments.

- Household food insecurity
- Acculturation
- Home environment
- Food/menu label use
- Sleep duration and quality
- Sedentary behavior including screen time (for children and sedentary behavior for adults)
- Mobile health (mHealth)

Subcommittee 4: Food and Physical Activity Environments

Subcommittee 4 is reviewing the evidence on the effects of food and physical environments, diet and physical activity behaviors and health outcomes (e.g., weight status). Subcommittee 4 is also trying to understand and assess the role of food and physical activity environments in promoting or hindering healthy eating and physical activity in various settings and subpopulations; and to identify the most effective evidence-based diet- and physical activity-related environmental and policy approaches to improve health and reduce disparities. The current topics under review by Subcommittee 4 include the following.

- Food Access (population of interest: children and adults) – low food access areas; availability of healthy, affordable foods and exposure to low diet quality foods in all settings that sell foods/ beverages and in restaurants; most effective strategies to increase healthy, affordable food access, especially in communities with the greatest health disparities
- Early child care and education settings (population of interest: children ages 2-5)
- Schools
- Workplace settings
- Physical activity (population of interest: children and adults)

Other topics under consideration by Subcommittee 4 include afterschool settings, food marketing, federal nutrition assistance programs, post-secondary education settings, and multi-component community-based interventions.

Subcommittee 5: Food Sustainability and Safety

The scope of Subcommittee 5 is to understand the link between how food is grown, caught, produced, processed, and transported on the health of humans and the environment. Subcommittee 5 will also review the evidence for targeted food safety concerns at the individual and population levels.

Food Safety

In regards to food safety, Subcommittee 5 is considering the DGA 2010 policy and updating as needed, specifically as it relates to hand sanitation, cleaning the refrigerator,

separating foods to decrease cross- contamination, cooking and chilling, avoiding risky foods, and overall avoiding risky food safety behavior. In addition, other current topics under review by Subcommittee 5 include: food ingredients, additives, and health; and caffeine at usual and high doses.

In January 2014, Subcommittee 5 requested public comment on food safety. AMI shared with the DGAC the efforts the meat and poultry industry have undertaken, which have significantly improved the safety profile of its products over the past 15 years. These improvements are reflected in federal FSIS data, specifically:

- an 81 percent reduction of *Listeria monocytogenes* on RTE meat and poultry products between 2000 and 2011;
- an 85 percent decline of *Escherichia coli* O157:H7 in raw ground beef between 2000 and 2013;
- a 79 percent decline in *Salmonella* in young chickens from the original performance standard and a 43 percent reduction from the new standard in 2012;
- an 89 percent decline of *Salmonella* in turkey from the original performance standard and a 29 percent increase from the new standard in 2012; and
- in terms of *Salmonella*, the downward trend continues with an 85 percent reduction of *Salmonella* in market hogs, 100 percent reduction in cows and bulls, and a 75 percent reduction in ground beef, 37 percent reduction in ground chicken and a 78 percent reduction in ground turkey, all from the performance standard. Only steers and heifers saw a 12 percent *Salmonella* increase from the performance standard.⁴

Food Sustainability

Within food sustainability, Subcommittee 5 is currently reviewing the status of U.S. food sustainability. This review will examine the

- principle challenges related to natural resources and human resources in meeting current and future demand to produce food;
- changing demand of various foods and the influence of sustainability over time; and
- proportional environmental impacts (i.e., greenhouse gas, water pollution) of current growing and processing practices for the overall food system

Subcommittee 5 will also determine which outcomes should be considered and measured as well as review the practices of addressing sustainability with dietary guidance from other countries.

⁴ *Id.*

In January 2014, Subcommittee 5 requested public comment on food system sustainability, including comments from both the private and public sectors and addressing local, regional, national, or international scales. Specifically Subcommittee 5 sought approaches and current examples of sustainability in the food system, which include elements of a whole food system, information on specific food groups or commodities, and sustainability metrics that have been implemented or are in development.

In response to this solicitation, AMI commented the DGAC is comprised of nutrition and epidemiology experts and for the DGAC to address sustainability and the variety of issues attendant to it is outside the Committee's expertise and could dilute the importance of the DGAC's recommendations. AMI stated sustainability is a complex issue that is being addressed by various experts in a number of other forums. Until those expert panels have drawn more concrete conclusions it would be premature for the DGAC to incorporate such considerations into its dietary guidance recommendations. To do so runs the risk the DGAC will act on incomplete data. Finally, AMI in responding to DGAC's interest in specific comments on industry activities addressing sustainability, the meat and poultry industry is in the forefront with respect to ensuring future viability and availability of resources to sustain its businesses.⁵

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEAT AND POULTRY INDUSTRY

The 2015 DGAC has made it very clear that it intends to develop an *"optimal dietary pattern for the health of humans and the environment,"* even if that pattern is substantially different from current consumption patterns. Many experts believe the 2015 DGAC is highly likely to recommend dietary patterns that specifically exclude certain foods and beverages that it believes contributes to adverse health outcomes. In particular, given the review approach outlined at recent DGAC meetings, it is clear that a draft report may include a list of foods and beverages that Americans will likely be advised to stop eating or significantly limit intake.

While the public does not typically change its dietary practices as a result of the DGAC report, the 2015 DGAC

is determined to establish an "evidenced-based" case to support policy formulation. Thus, a food or beverage on a list to avoid potentially faces future policy restrictions to reduce demand for the food or beverage. These policies could include taxes, access restrictions (on government property), and restrictions on marketing and advertising.

The meat and poultry industry is anticipating a "limit or avoid" consumption recommendation for red and processed meats. Again, while most Americans do not change their dietary patterns based on DGA, it is important to note the "avoid" recommendation is historically the only recommendation Americans will follow.

NEXT STEPS

Consumer health is the driving force in the production of meat and poultry products, which not only includes offering nutrient dense protein food products, but also improving and maintaining the safety of the food the meat and poultry industry produces. Meat and poultry products are an important component of a healthy human diet because they provide essential amino acids, minerals such as iron, vitamins, and other dietary requirements. It is important to note animal proteins are the only single sources of all the essential amino acids. Animal proteins are very difficult to replace on a macronutrient quality basis.

The meat and poultry industry is committed to offering diverse nutritional products to consumers so they can make educated decisions in choosing the food that best fits their personal lifestyle and family needs. Meat and poultry products in the marketplace today, including processed and enhanced meat products, are available to consumers in an abundant variety of formulations at the most affordable prices found anywhere in the world.

The meat and poultry industry is aligned in its support that a healthy eating pattern is one where eating a balanced diet from all food groups and engaging in moderate exercise are key to a healthy lifestyle for Americans. This common sense "back-to-balance" approach reaffirms the traditional core tenets of dietary guidance of balance, variety and moderation. A recommended dietary guidance that can be implemented, regardless of socioeconomic status and where you live, should be practical, achievable and affordable federal nutritional policy.

⁵ *Id.*