

GUEST COLUMNIST



CMN Exclusive!

Perspective: Ingredient Technology

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The new dietary guidelines — The shape of nutrition to come

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans — those very influential and periodic missives from USDA and FDA — recently had their splash in the headlines again. As usual, the process of updating them is rife with controversy, which is to be expected when you're dealing with something that everyone does three times or more each day: eat. Think of the market implications! After all, food isn't an ancillary product like a spa in Palm Springs; it is a need, not just a want, and it's essential for life. Not only does a person require around 2,000 calories each day, this food also needs to include a great variety of components in order to promote health.

In the United States, food is big business as well. Any part of the food industry that doesn't feel its marketing position is improved by the recent recommendations of the guidelines committee will likely do what it can to minimize the effectiveness of those recommendations.

With this said, how would you like to be on the guidelines committee? No matter what the result, some element of the food industry is going to viciously

attack you — not only professionally but personally as well. With this in mind, committee members were carefully selected for both scientific expertise and objectiveness. It would be hard to criticize the quality and integrity of the committee that emerged. They may not be infallible, but they are the cream of the scientific crop and our society's best shot at establishing good nutritional guidelines. They took up the charge of evaluating the reams of nutritional data to create general guidelines we all can use. We owe these people our profound gratitude.

The dietary guidelines are intended to contribute to the nutritional health of the country (as well as other countries that look to the United States for this guidance). As our nutrition knowledge and the scientific database grows, each rendition of the guidelines changes somewhat to support new information. The American public today faces a growing incidence of diseases like obesity and diabetes. It's hard to ignore the increased consumption of soft drinks, fried snacks and other nutritionally

bankrupt sources of calories and the corresponding rise in diet-related health problems.

In looking to address these problems and provide an ideal framework for health, the dietary guidelines committee examined a number of new medical reports and research findings related to food and health. A lot has been written over the past several years about lowfat dairy and its role in health promotion and weight management, so it's only natural that a recommendation to include lowfat dairy products would be included in this next round. In other words — three doses of dairy are much better than three cans of bellywash and a basket of fries. While this may seem perfectly clear, there are those who have carved out a living selling nutrient deficient foods or books that profess dairy as a poor source of nutrition that would beg to differ. These people have an agenda and a business that will be influenced by the final dietary guidelines. If the guidelines do not support their product then *Katie bar the door*. The first volley will be to undermine the integrity of committee members.

Just about every nutritional scientist in the country has a connection to the food industry in some way. This relationship contributes to the relevancy of their scientific work. To anyone who suggests that the guidelines committee members somehow compromised their integrity by painfully and carefully completing a document they believe supports the best interests of the American public, I say produce the evidence in court. These cheap shot artists make innuendos and are careful to avoid specific accusations because they know that such an attempt would only lead to slander/libel charges. The objective simply is to cloud the matter for the public in order to minimize the economic impact on his or her own business, regardless of how it affects the consumer. If you don't believe me, just

follow the money. Who is selling hooks, collecting honoraria and getting interviews? It is the very people who need this type of activity to promote their business. Committee members don't get financial squat for their work. They get two things — a lot of grief and a lot of satisfaction in knowing they have contributed to the nutritional health of the country. Fortunately the latter outweighs the former or we would never get anywhere.

Yes, the draft of the new guidelines recognizes the value of dairy to a sound diet, but it doesn't say anything that we haven't been talking about for years. The 3-A-Day messaging is consistent with our own recommendations based on solid science. Now let's commit to making it easy for consumers to make 3-A-Day part of their life by getting the products on the supermarket shelves and in vending machines.

Where do we go from here? With a recommended consumption of three times per day, consumers will be looking for dairy products that deliver nutrition and taste as well as convenience and functionality. Just pumping mature products like fluid milk isn't going to cut it. We need to follow the example of the soft drink industry and give consumers more choices. Not only does dairy need new product ideas, we also need shelf-stable products if we want to gain distribution approaching that of the soft drinks or even water. We have data banks and infrastructure to do the nutrition and product research. All we need now is the enlightenment to take full advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to improve the nutritional status of the American population. **CMN**

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