

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

Statement of Angela Tagtow, Executive Director

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

**Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide this testimony as part of the Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2017 Budget request for USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS). I am honored to address the work of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (Center), one of two agencies in USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services mission area. As Executive Director, I am committed to ensuring that the Center administers a cost-effective and efficient, integrated approach to everything we do.

The Center's mission is to improve the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers. Specifically, the Center links nutrition science to dietary guidance to consumer education through work that spans systematic evidence-based nutrition research reviews, population-based nutrition and economic analyses, dietary guidance recommendations, nutrition education resources, digital tools and outreach. Our work is designed to support the Secretary's goals for improving the health and well-being of Americans through the use of innovative multi-media outreach programs that help reach consumers where they make food decisions. And we work closely with our sister agency, USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), as it integrates dietary guidance into its various nutrition assistance programs.

The Center is the home of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and MyPlate – which includes a vast network of thousands of partners both nationally and in various communities across the country – as well as the USDA Food Patterns, Nutrition Evidence Library (NEL), Healthy Eating Index, and the USDA-U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Birth to 24 Months and Pregnancy (B-24/P) Project. As outlined in the 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act, the Center has engaged the Institute of Medicine to conduct a comprehensive third-party study of the *Dietary Guidelines* development process for the 2020-2025 edition. This review is timely given the Congressional mandate in the Agricultural Act of 2014 stating that the 2020-2025 edition must be expanded to include the entire lifespan, including infants and toddlers from birth to 24 months and women who are pregnant. It is also consistent with the Center’s commitment to continuous quality advancement to ensure that the process for developing each new edition of the *Dietary Guidelines* is rigorous, retains scientific integrity, and optimizes innovative strategies and tools to achieve efficiency.

It’s important to note that the Center houses far more than the major initiatives discussed above. We also are responsible for the Nutrient Content of the U.S. Food Supply, USDA Food Plans, Expenditures on Children by Families and Cost of Raising a Child Calculator, SuperTracker and its five digital tools (Food-A-Pedia, Food Tracker, Physical Activity Tracker, My Weight Manager and My Recipes), Healthy Eating on a Budget initiatives, and the What’s Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl online tool in partnership with FNS.

All of the Center’s initiatives are grounded in delivering on our mission-driven focus on the health and well-being of Americans. And these initiatives are needed, now more than ever. About half of all American adults—117 million individuals—have one or more preventable chronic diseases, many of which are related to poor quality eating patterns and physical inactivity. These include cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and poor bone health.

Monitoring Food, Nutrition and Economic Trends

The Center’s food, nutrition and economic data monitoring and analyses serve as the underpinning to many Federal agencies as well as select State programs. The Healthy Eating

Index (HEI) is designed to assess diet quality in terms of how diets of the U.S. population and subpopulations align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The Center updates the HEI every five years following the release of the *Dietary Guidelines*. The HEI is used annually for two specific reports, the *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* and *Older Americans: Key Indicators of Well-Being*. The HEI is also used by the Office of Management and Budget to inform the White House's My Brother's Keeper initiative. Additionally, the HEI is used by nutrition scientists and researchers resulting in nearly 90 peer-reviewed scientific articles published in 2015 alone.

The Center oversees updates to the Nutrient Content of the U.S. Food Supply. This is an historical data series beginning in 1909, on the amounts of nutrients available in the food supply for consumption—not nutrients consumed—on a per capita, per day basis, as well as percentage contributions of nutrients by major food groups. The series provides data for food calories and calorie-yielding nutrients that are closely linked to nutrition monitoring research, *Dietary Guidelines*, food marketing, and food and nutrition policies. Federal agencies, as well as agriculture, industries, and nutrition research institutions around the world, use the extensive historical data to monitor nutrient trends in the food supply.

For more than 20 years, the Center has overseen the monthly updates of the Cost of Food report and the annual updates of the USDA Food Plans (Thrifty, Low-Cost, Moderate-Cost, and Liberal), which serve as national standards for nutritious diets at various cost levels. Each plan represents a set of market baskets containing a selection of foods in quantities that reflect the guidance in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and are applicable to one of 15 age-gender groups. The Thrifty Plan is used as the basis for FNS's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) allotments and the Moderate and Liberal Plans are used by the Department of Defense to determine the Basic Allowance for Subsistence Rate (food allowance) for more than 1.34 million U.S. Service members.

Since 1960, CNPP has issued the Expenditures on Children by Families report. This report examines current child-rearing expenses from birth to age 17 for the major household budgetary components: housing, food, transportation, clothing, health care, childcare, education, and miscellaneous expenses. These expense estimates are used by States to set child support guidelines and foster care payments. The Center provides the Cost of Raising a Child Calculator to families across the country to estimate costs through an interactive web interface. We

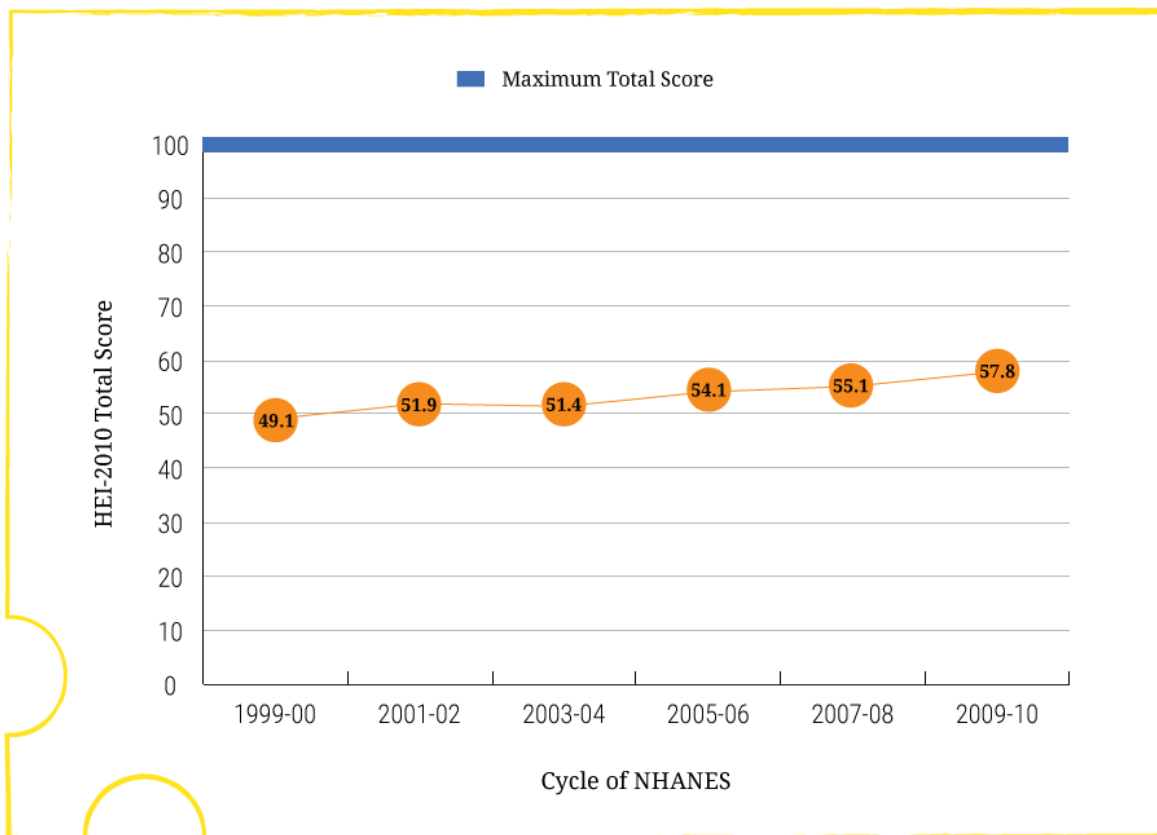
anticipate releasing the next *Cost of Raising a Child* report in the late spring/early summer of this year with an increased focus on rural issues.

**Advancing Science-Based Dietary Guidance for the Nation,
Promoting Healthful Eating Patterns**

On January 7, HHS and USDA released the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. A primary emphasis of the eighth edition is eating patterns, which consist of all foods and drinks that a person consumes over time. The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* reflects for the first time a robust body of scientific evidence on the connection between overall eating patterns and diet-related chronic disease. Thus, the emphasis of this new edition is on the importance of the totality of what you eat – your eating pattern as a whole package. The science shows that healthy eating patterns are linked to lower diet-related chronic diseases, such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Importantly, the *Dietary Guidelines* also emphasizes that healthy eating patterns are not one-size-fits-all, and they are not a rigid prescription, but rather an adaptable framework that individuals can use while enjoying foods that meet their personal, cultural, and traditional preferences and fitting within their budget.

As the data show, and as is included in the 2015-2020 edition, far too few of us are following the *Dietary Guidelines* recommendations – a trend line that has not improved dramatically over the years (Figure 1 from the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*). Using the Healthy Eating Index (HEI)-2010, which measures how closely Americans eat according to the Guidelines, America’s score is 58 out of 100 possible points. Moving the U.S. population to more closely align with the *Dietary Guidelines* is critical to our nation’s health.

Figure 1. Adherence of the U.S. Population Ages 2 Years and Older to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, as Measured by Average Total Healthy Eating Index-2010 (HEI-2010) Scores

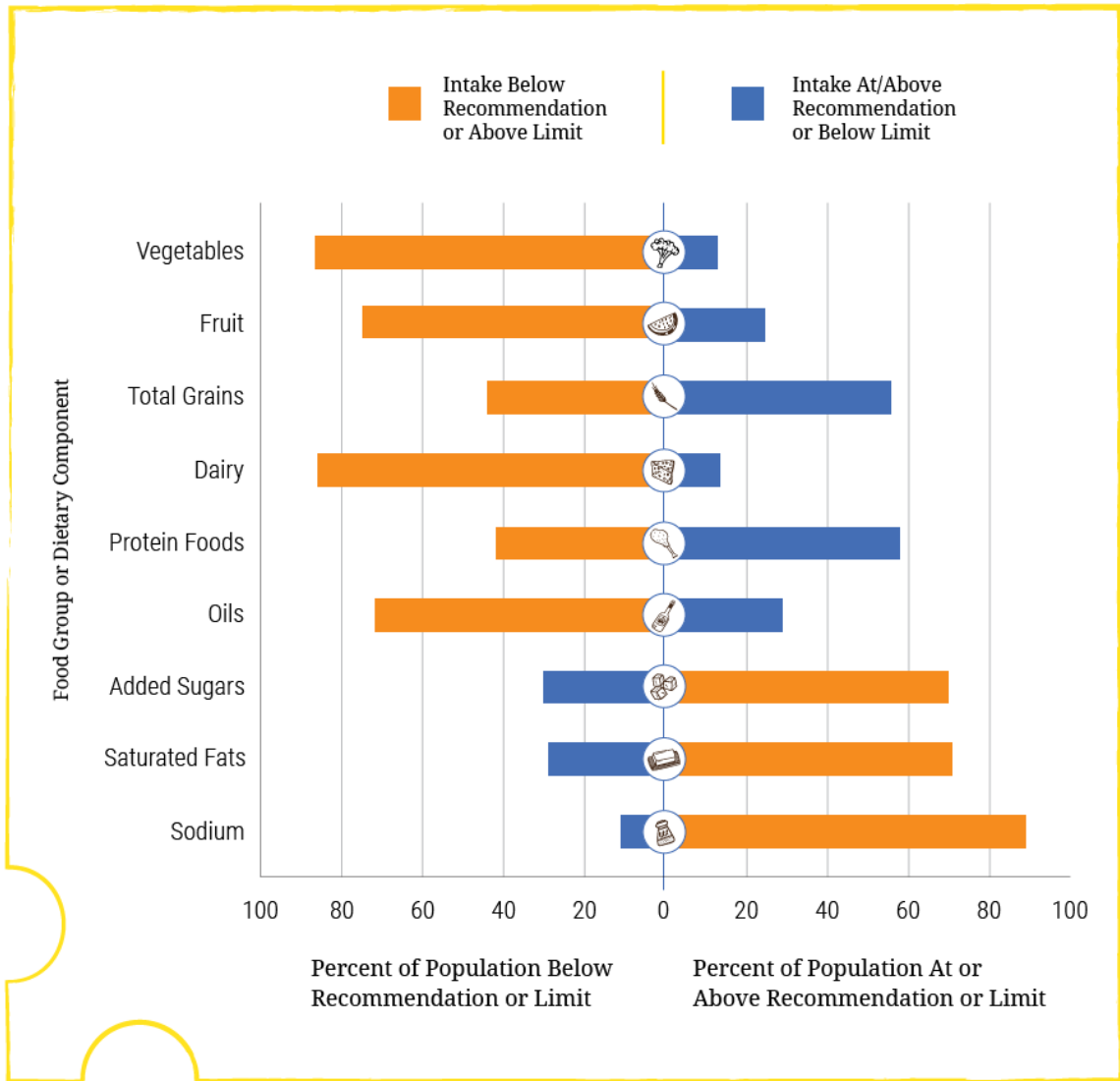


DATA SOURCE: Analyses of What We Eat in America, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data from 1999-2000 through 2009-2010.

NOTE: HEI-2010 total scores are out of 100 possible points. A score of 100 indicates that recommendations on average were met or exceeded. A higher total score indicates a higher quality diet.

The typical eating patterns currently consumed by many in the United States do not align with the *Dietary Guidelines*, as shown in Figure 2 (from the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*) when compared to the Healthy U.S.-Style Pattern. Current eating patterns can be moved toward healthier eating patterns by making shifts in food choices over time. Research shows that healthy eating patterns consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines*, when compared to poor eating patterns, are associated with a decrease in the risk of total mortality, cancer mortality, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Figure 2. Dietary Intakes Compared to Recommendations. Percent of the U.S. Population Ages 1 Year and Older Who are Below, At, or Above Each Dietary Goal or Limit



NOTE: The center (0) line is the goal or limit. For most, those represented by the orange sections of the bars, shifting toward the center line will improve their eating pattern.

DATA SOURCES: What We Eat in America, NHANES 2007-2010 for average intakes by age-sex group. Healthy U.S.-Style Food Patterns, which vary based on age, sex, and activity level, for recommended intakes and limits.

The *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* looks at healthy eating patterns from three vantage points: (1) What they are, with examples adaptable to personal tastes, traditions and budgets; (2) Shifts needed to more closely align with healthy eating patterns, based on current consumption; and (3) A call to action across sectors to support healthy eating patterns in the U.S.

While neither the Center nor USDA alone can possibly move the public closer to an HEI score of 100 single-handedly, we know that we have an important role in developing the *Dietary Guidelines* with HHS and providing implementation resources and technical assistance to our partners both in and out of the Federal government. As Under Secretary Concannon addressed in his testimony, the main purpose of the *Dietary Guidelines* is to inform the development of Federal food, nutrition and health policies and programs. These programs, such as the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children impact millions of people each day. Furthermore, the Center has executed a comprehensive nutrition communications plan that empowers consumers to make healthier choices. In addition, these innovative tools are used across many of the FNS programs. We also work with other USDA agencies such as the Agricultural Marketing Service, Economic Research Service, Agricultural Research Service and the National Agriculture Library, and the National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Indeed, now that the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* has been released, the Center is forging ahead with MyPlate consumer education. Originally launched in 2011, MyPlate consumer education is a comprehensive approach that puts the *Dietary Guidelines* into action for consumers using dynamic and interactive ways to support their healthy eating goals. In January, we launched the multi-year “*MyPlate, MyWins*” campaign to help inspire and empower Americans to create healthy eating styles that work for them and their families. This integrated campaign helps translate the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines* for consumers and incorporates education, marketing, communication, technology and strategic partnership strategies to maximize our reach to consumers. As part of this campaign, the Center will be launching “MyPlate, MyState,” an initiative that honors and celebrates hometown pride and reinforces that foods and flavors from every state in this nation can have an important place in helping us achieve healthy eating patterns. We will be working with our sister agencies and our external network of thousands of public and private sector partners in communities nationwide to promote “MyPlate, MyState” through our channels collectively.

MyPlate is an important unifier across sectors and a powerful symbol that opens the door to ChooseMyPlate.gov, an engaging web-based platform developed by the Center to translate the

Dietary Guidelines into food-based recommendations and applications for individuals and families. MyPlate is available in 20 languages. A national survey last year conducted by the Center shows that more than half of all Americans are familiar with MyPlate. When compared to other government nutrition programs, MyPlate has the greatest awareness. Additionally, MyPlate continues to play an important role in nutrition education for health professionals, with 73 percent of Registered Dietitian Nutritionists using MyPlate as a tool to help consumers eat healthfully.

ChooseMyPlate.gov is one of the most visited government websites and is extremely successful in reaching the public with scientifically grounded nutrition information. Since its launch in June 2011, the site has received more than 311 million page views and 139 million downloads of materials and information. In FY 2015 alone, the site had more than 88 million page views and more than 42 million downloads. SuperTracker, the award-winning suite of online tools that help people move closer to eating according to the *Dietary Guidelines* through tracking and inspirational tips, has more than 2,000 to 4,000 new, registered users per day and has received more than nearly 490 million page views, with nearly 7 million users since its launch in late 2011. SuperTracker helps individuals to plan, analyze and track diet and physical activity, and provides personalized goal setting, virtual coaching and journaling.

President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2017

The President's Budget requests just under \$10 million for the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. During 2017, the Center will continue to improve the health of Americans by implementing and promoting the revised *Dietary Guidelines* that links the strongest scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers. Specifically, the requested funds will allow the Center to:

- Continue, in partnership with HHS, to rigorously review the scientific evidence on nutrition and health for the Birth to 24 Months and Pregnancy Project, serving as a starting point for the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to include these populations as mandated by the Agricultural Act of 2014. This will be accomplished using the state-of-the art methodology of the NEL. Since development of guidance for this age group will be above and beyond the traditional update of the *Dietary Guidelines*,

CNPP requests this funding to conduct the foundational work. Without funds, CNPP will be unable to conduct this work to support development of dietary guidance for this important age group.

- Revise the HEI, Nutrient Content of the U.S. Food Supply, and USDA Food Plans following the release of the *2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.
- Develop and implement robust strategies for communicating the science-based nutrition messages of the *2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to the public. This includes reaching vulnerable populations (e.g., older Americans, young children), disseminating consumer-tested nutrition messages used by Federal and private sector partners, and distributing educational materials.
- Advance robust evaluation strategies to determine the effectiveness of national nutrition marketing, communication and education initiatives.
- Maintain, enhance and develop strategic and innovative web-based systems (www.ChooseMyPlate.gov, www.Supertracker.usda.gov, and www.WhatsCooking.fns.usda.gov) designed to empower individuals and families with the best science-based advice to foster behavior changes toward more positive dietary practices and active lifestyles. This requires: 1) efficient IT platform-based development and continual enhancements, and 2) multifaceted approaches that reflect the Department's goal of being responsive and transforming how the Center conducts business and improves processes.
- Support and strengthen cooperative initiatives with FNS.

With the support of the Subcommittee, the Center looks forward to advancing the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links the strongest scientific research to the nutrition needs of all consumers. With this support, the Center will build, maintain and strengthen the promotion of individualized nutrition guidance tools that reach millions of Americans. Evidence-based dietary guidance is one of the most critical tools at our disposal to improve the health and well-being of Americans, and your support of these initiatives is critical to addressing diet-related chronic disease such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and related healthcare costs facing Americans today.

I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present this written testimony.