



BACKGROUND

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Revision of the Food Guidance System

Overview:

USDA's current food guidance system that includes the Food Guide Pyramid is being reassessed. The overall purpose of the reassessment is to ensure that the food guidance system reflects the latest nutritional science and to improve the educational tools that assist consumers in making healthier food choices. USDA expects to release the new food guidance system in early 2005.

Rationale:

The original Food Guide Pyramid graphic was not designed as a stand-alone tool to provide consumers with all the information needed to follow a healthy diet. Most consumers think they know what to eat because they are familiar with the Pyramid, but, in fact, there is much more nutrition guidance contained in the 32-page Food Guide Pyramid booklet that could greatly improve the average American diet.

With the original 1992 Food Guide Pyramid graphic, it was not possible to incorporate all nutrition guidance in one graphic, so several key messages were selected for illustration. Now, many nutrition educators, consumers, health advocates and industry groups, are advocating the addition of more concepts to be included in an updated graphic. Therefore, USDA is proposing a systems approach and is seeking public comment to help inform and direct this revision process.

Process:

The reassessment of the Food Guidance System parallels the revision of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans currently underway. Development of the new food guidance system has been conducted in three phases. In the first phase USDA concentrated on gathering information through technical research, professional and public input, and consumer research. The second phase included updating the guidance system's daily food intake patterns to meet the latest nutritional standards. This third and final phase includes developing a new graphic image and educational materials that communicate in ways that consumers can more easily understand and put into practice.

The second phase, technical reassessment, is nearly complete. During this phase, the current food guidance underwent a rigorous scientific review. Recommendations for what and how much we eat, the daily food intake patterns, were updated to meet current nutritional standards. In a September 2003 Federal Register Notice, the general public reviewed and provided comment to USDA. These food intake patterns will form the basis of the new food guidance system that will be released in early 2005. To ensure USDA's food guidance system is in harmony with the recommendation of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), the food intake patterns will be finalized when the DGAC completes its work in late summer of 2004. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans represents federal nutrition policy and USDA's food guidance system provides the educational tools that assist consumers in making healthier food choices.

The third phase of the process, now underway, involves the development of the motivational and educational tools that will form the core of the new food guidance system. Proposed tools include a new graphic and slogan, clear and concise nutrition messages as well as interactive tools to assist consumers in personalizing the proposed new patterns. Our goals for the new food guidance system include:

- Development of a graphic that serves as a visual representation of the overall food guidance system;
- Development and dissemination of clear, concise nutrition messages that teaches consumers how to make healthier choices;
- Development of tools that assists consumers in establishing healthier eating patterns and improves overall health; and,
- Development of interactive tools that allow consumers to personalize the guidance for their specific needs.

Our July 13, 2004 Federal Register notice asks the public to comment on the graphic image along with the motivational and educational messages for a new Food Guidance System. The Federal Register notice calls for a 45-day comment period. In addition, a public meeting will be held on August 19, 2004, for additional stakeholder input. Following the comment period, USDA will consider all input received in developing the new Food Guidance System. Final release of the new Food Guidance System and related consumer materials is scheduled for early 2005, following the release of the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans.