

TOP 10 NUTRITION TRENDS FOR 2011

1. Skyrocketing diabetes rates will impact the health of Americans and the health care system

Due to the rise in obesity, the United States has an increasing incidence of type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Public health experts predict diabetes rates to double or triple by 2050—affecting one out of every three Americans—greatly impacting our health and making healthcare costs soar.

Public-health campaigns will increase in the coming years, with a focus on preventing overweight at younger ages. Compulsory food labels highlighting calories and “negative” nutrients, meal-board labeling in restaurants, education in grocery stores, and limiting advertising of unhealthy foods to children will promote a more “healthigenic” environment. Some decision makers will have a myopic focus to reduce calories, added sugar and sodium in order to combat disease, without regard for the overall quality of the diet.

Schools, a primary target, are feeling pressure to eliminate or limit chocolate milk in cafeterias due to its added sugar and perceived culpability in the childhood obesity epidemic.

2. Early lifestyle habits are seen as critical to disease prevention

Research is accumulating that early diet and lifestyle habits are linked to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis and other chronic diseases. Experts believe that environmental, diet and lifestyle factors during a woman’s pregnancy and a child’s infancy influence genetic impact on health. For example, nutrient deficiencies during pregnancy can permanently harm a baby’s absorption and metabolism of that nutrient, which could lead to health problems later in life.

This will be an increasing focus for public-health efforts. Childhood is seen as the time to learn and reinforce healthy behaviors, the time when food choices can influence health outcomes for years to come. This presents opportunities for the dairy industry, as good milk-drinking habits are generally linked to better nutrient intakes in childhood, as well as later in life.

3. Nutritional milk components continue to gain positive research attention

The list of positive nutritional health benefits in milk is long and is growing. Research supports disease prevention and health promotion from vitamin D, calcium, protein, probiotics, whey and the overall package of nutrients that milk provides. One example is the research on the health benefits of probiotics, which has matured enough that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) now recommends probiotics for diarrheal diseases in children. Longterm, these benefits may extend to other areas, such as asthma, allergies, infections and generally boosting the immune system. Yogurt is still the traditional and preferred delivery vehicle for probiotics. New research is showing promise that ice cream and other frozen dairy products can be formulated to be effective in delivering probiotics as well. However, the industry must be cautious about making advertising claims, since the Federal Trade Commission has recently been holding food companies to higher standards, similar to those needed for a food label.

4. Government calcium and vitamin D recommendations are seen as conservative by some nutrition experts

The release of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines and recent revision of the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) calcium and vitamin D recommendations suggest

levels lower than expected by many experts. Some health professionals believe that recent research was not adequately considered in the development of these new conservative recommendations, which could lead to groups developing their own recommendations based on emerging consensus research.

Recommended milk and milk-product servings remained the same for most age groups and increased by one-half cup for children age four to eight. Recommended vitamin D levels doubled or tripled for almost all age groups, but were below what was expected. The recommendations encourage getting these nutrients from foods rather than supplements and suggest consuming milk and milk products for the variety of nutrients they provide that are difficult to attain from dairy-free diets. With support from these recent and highly visible federal guidelines, Dairy Council will continue to educate children and adults about the value milk and milk products provide in the diet.

5. Sustainability is increasingly a factor in consumer food decisions

The sustainability movement, in part driven by environmental concerns such as carbon footprint, is picking up steam. Carbon calculators are emerging that suggest consumers select foods to decrease their carbon footprint. These calculators, sometimes based on outdated data, often support a vegetarian-based diet as well as local, organic and natural foods. Most sustainability discussions do not include nutrition as an important part of food decisions. Food waste is also left out of sustainability indexes. This is an area where consumers have considerable control—e.g., how much food is thrown away in food preparation, from the table or as uneaten leftovers.

Including nutritional density and food-waste reduction in future sustainability-index systems will be important. Informing consumers about the ongoing dairy-research efforts to reduce greenhouse emissions—which have resulted in a 63 percent reduction in carbon footprint since 1944—will also be key. Dairy Council’s educational efforts in this area promote balanced nutrition, considering sustainability as but one factor in overall food choices.

6. Social networking and mobile apps are enabling more consumer-direct communications

Reports estimate that 61 percent of adults and 73 percent of teens use social networks. Mobile applications are changing the way people shop and buy, allowing them to tailor their habits to their individual and family’s needs. Success in the business world counts on building and maintaining relationships, whether face-to-face or electronically. Transparency and personalized attention are critical factors in building trust, especially as social media continues to change how consumers access information and communicate with each other.

Smartphones, blogs, Twitter and mobile apps make it increasingly important for industries to provide a trusted source of filtered information so that a moderate voice for sound, research-based nutrition advice is available online. This opens up opportunities for marketing and education for Dairy Council as a representative of the dairy industry.

7. Demographic changes sub-segment audiences and the approaches to reach them

There are some significant demographic changes that will greatly impact food choices and health trends over the next few years. For example, the increasing Mexican-American population in California will present challenges to the dairy industry, as these individuals typically consume far less milk with acculturation. Our aging baby-boomer population also presents challenges and opportunities. As they age, their health concerns become more acute and can impact their food choices. This group also can have significant influence over family members, particularly if they are caregivers to children and grandchildren. It will be critical to target educational and marketing efforts to these specific groups to optimize behavior change, which leads to healthy food choices that enhance milk and milk-product selections.

8. A variety of other “gatekeepers” are expanding our traditional health care practices

The dearth left by the anticipated 50,000-person reduction in medical doctors over the next decade will quickly be filled by other healthcare providers, such as alternative/integrative medicine practitioners and other allied health professionals, like nurse practitioners and physician’s assistants. At the same time, nutrition education may shift from registered dietitians to certified nutritionists and others who call themselves experts. This shift will be further supported by changes in healthcare laws allowing for expanded insurance coverage for alternative providers and a focus on prevention.

It is unclear whether these new gatekeepers will be dairy-friendly. This movement may present competition to Dairy Council and other organizations that pride themselves on their research-based, application-ready programs and materials developed by highly trained staff.

9. The food industry is under increasing pressure to reformulate products

The food industry continues to reformulate food products to lower the amount of ‘bad’ ingredients in their products, meeting new recommendations and consumer demand for healthier products. Focus has been on reducing calories, sugar, sodium and fat—particularly saturated and trans fats—and adding whole grains. Since 2002, more than 20,000 healthier food products have been introduced by manufacturers trying to keep up with demand.

These reformulation efforts will pick up steam with the new sodium recommendations, which were further reduced in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines. This will have implications for the dairy industry, particularly for cheese. Some manufacturers have already made significant progress toward reducing sodium in certain cheeses by up to 25 percent without sacrificing flavor.

10. Convenience, economics and health are influencing our food choices

Convenience, economics and health are among top priorities as consumers try to balance increasing factors influencing their food choices. Parents are faced with economic constraints and preparing more meals at home, with the added benefit of family togetherness. Milk intake is generally higher at home versus at meals eaten out.

People still struggle with making healthful choices and look to their grocery store to help them find tasty, convenient, inexpensive and healthy products. The focus is on buying pre-prepared foods and meals that are “assembled” at home, rather than prepared from scratch. The mom is still the gatekeeper of the family when it comes to planning, shopping and preparing meals. The search for convenient, healthy and inexpensive snack foods presents opportunities for dairy as yogurt tubes, cheese strings and other healthy dairy snacks meet all these criteria.

Through our ongoing trends-identification process, Dairy Council of California paints a picture of the environment in which we operate and identifies issues we must address in order to be effective and influential. The trends identified form our annual and long-range operational plans geared at educating the health professional, educator and consumer audiences about the health benefits of dairy products, including the advantages 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. Analysis is done biannually on the issues. For more information or to receive a hard copy of the TRENDS newsletter, please contact Kendall House at khouse@dairycouncilofca.org.