

# CAUTION:

## Food Guide Pyramid Under Construction

Face-lift should keep beef in the balance.

by Barb Baylor Anderson

The food guide pyramid will undergo renovations in 2005. But even after reconstruction and a few minor adjustments to the pyramid's accompanying dietary guidelines, beef is poised to remain in the balance of good nutrition recommendations.

"The attention is not on beef this time around; it is on empty calories from sugars. In fact, I've really heard nothing about beef in the discussions," notes Jeanne Goldberg, nutrition professor at the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Tufts University, Boston, Mass., and member of the Council for Women's Nutrition Solutions (CWNS). "The good news is there's no news. There is nothing in the proposed dietary guidelines that should negatively affect beef."

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are

revised every five years. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee — a 13-member group appointed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) — are suggesting only minor changes be made in the new guidelines due out in early 2005. Among those revisions are eating more fruits and vegetables and adding more exercise. The panel recommends Americans better control caloric intake, select foods from all of the basic food groups and eat more whole-grain food products while limiting trans fats and salt intake.

In revising the dietary recommendations, the committee first had to complete a review of the latest nutritional science. Findings were used to update daily food intake patterns to meet the latest nutritional standards, followed by a period for public

comment in 2003. The committee met during 2004 for further refinements before delivering its final report to HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson and USDA Secretary Ann Veneman in August 2004.

"The committee has concluded that a person needs to eat from all five food groups to meet all their nutrient needs," emphasizes Mary Young, registered dietitian and executive director of nutrition for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), Denver, Colo., who has followed the process. "Each food group offers different essential nutrients that are critical to promoting good health and preventing chronic disease."

### Going graphic

Once the final dietary guideline changes are approved, presumably later this year, they will be incorporated into a new food guidance system graphic and consumer campaign. The HHS and USDA have already sought public comment on how the new food guidance system graphic should appear — even whether it should change from the 12-year-old familiar food guide pyramid — and what types of consumer education and messaging should go along with the graphic.

According to USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP), new messages and the graphic are intended to "result in behavioral changes that will keep caloric intake balanced with energy expenditure to prevent weight gain, promote weight loss and/or maintain a healthy weight; promote nutrient-dense food choices to increase the intake of vitamins, minerals, fiber and other key nutrients, especially those that are often low in typical diets; and lower chronic disease risks by lowering intake of saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and other food components that are often consumed in excess."

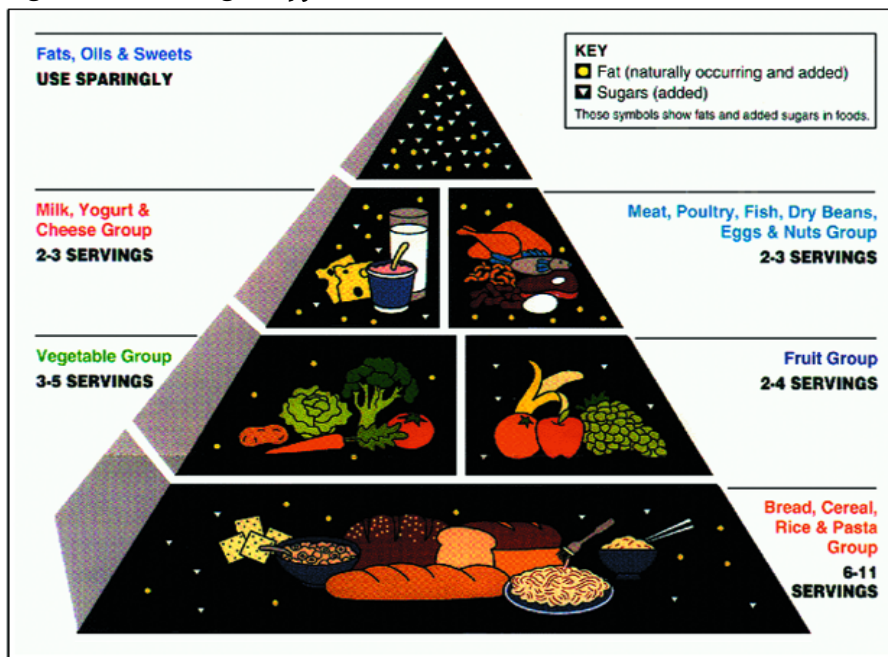
### Industry input

"USDA, health professionals and the food industry need to take this opportunity to clearly communicate what individuals and families can do to create healthy diets and lifestyles," says Alison Kretser, director of scientific and nutrition policy, Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA), Washington, D.C. "For example, we need to help consumers better understand the importance of reducing their total consumption of saturated and trans fats, eating more foods rich in whole grains and folic acid and maintaining the balance between calories consumed and calories burned."

GMA calls the revision of the pyramid an

CONTINUED ON PAGE 308

Fig. 1: Current food guide pyramid



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## Caution: Food Pyramid Under Construction CONTINUED FROM PAGE 307

“unprecedented opportunity to explain how Americans can take simple, but effective, steps to improve their diets and health.”

Young agrees. In comments made to USDA in August, she noted, “We commend USDA for focusing on nutrient density and energy balance in its considerations for the food guidance system. We believe these are the two most powerful concepts to address in today’s environment. Given the epidemic of overweight and obesity, we must help Americans watch calories and make their calories count more.”

Young prefers the system be communicated in a way that achieves sustainable behavior change, adding the graphic should be “evolutionary, not revolutionary.” She proposes a two-dimensional pyramid that promotes energy balance and nutrient density by showing physical activity on one side and naturally nutrient-rich foods on the other.

“The food side should show all five of the nutrient-bearing food groups and their recommended daily servings for a 2,000-calorie diet to make it compatible with the nutrition facts label,” she told USDA. “This simplified pyramid could then support core

messages for the general population to emphasize nutrient density and energy balance. For example, a core nutrient density message that has tested well with health professionals and consumers is to choose naturally nutrient-rich foods first, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean protein sources, and low and nonfat dairy.”

Young adds that the graphic must provide a “teachable moment” for consumers who may not seek or have access to individualized nutrition guidance. “It is imperative that the improved graphic be available, accessible and meaningful to all people, including low-income and low-literacy consumers who may not use the Internet to put together an individualized plan,” she says. “We must have a system flexible enough to allow people to individualize it based on age, lifestyle and culture so it motivates behavior change.”

This fall USDA will consider input from NCBA and other organizations regarding the

graphic and consumer education campaign. A revised graphic is expected to be field-tested with consumers in early 2005.

“The system must be rigorously tested to ensure that the graphic and messages are clear and realistic and that people are able to use them successfully,” Young says. “The current pyramid has high recognition and brand identity, but no one follows it. The new system must fill that gap.

Most groups that commented from the food and health industries want to keep the graphic simple and build on what is already recognized.”

### Beef in balance

Goldberg agrees. “Beef producers are in a position to continue to promote lean beef as an excellent source of nutrients, convenience and a good fit for a balanced diet, regardless of the final guidelines or look of the food guide system graphic,” she says.

With so much attention now on the changes, Young says beef producers have a timely opportunity to reach consumers.

“This is a good time to tell the lean story and focus on the nutrient-rich message. Producers can help change the misperception among the population and health professionals that beef is fat,” Young adds. “Two-thirds of the beef sold in the retail meatcase today meets the government’s guidelines for lean meat.”

Young tells beef producers that meat will continue to play an important role in health as a fundamental building block for the food guidance system. “In USDA’s published food patterns, the important nutrient contributions of meat within a calorically balanced diet are illustrated. Improved food guidance needs to communicate this important point,” she says. “Just one three-ounce serving of lean beef is an excellent source of five essential nutrients: protein, zinc, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, selenium and phosphorus; and a good source of four: niacin, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, iron and riboflavin. Consumers can easily manage saturated fat intake by choosing one of 19 cuts of beef that meet government standards for lean.”

To follow the changes and learn more about the proposed revisions in the dietary guidelines and food guide system, visit [www.cnpp.usda.gov](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov).

**“Producers can help change the misperception among the population and health professionals that beef is fat.”**

**—Mary Young**

### The lean 19 offer a variety of options to fit any lifestyle

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Nutrient Database shows that 19 cuts of beef meet government guidelines for lean or extra lean. Included are many of America’s favorites — tenderloin, T-bone steak and 95% lean ground beef. And, 12 of these beef cuts average only 1 more gram or less of saturated fat per 3-ounce (oz.) serving than a skinless chicken breast.

The nutrient database indicates that many cuts of beef are 20% leaner than they were 14 years ago. According to research reported by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), consumers are increasingly choosing leaner cuts of beef in the grocery aisle. In fact, 68% of all muscle cuts sold at retail and 17 of the top 20 most popular whole muscle cuts meet government guidelines for lean.

The 19 lean cuts, beginning with the leanest, include: eye round roast, top round steak, mock tender steak, bottom round roast, top sirloin steak, round tip roast, 95% lean ground beef, brisket (flat half), shank crosscuts, chuck shoulder roast, arm pot roast, shoulder steak, top loin (strip or New York) steak, flank steak, ribeye steak, rib steak, tri-tip roast, tenderloin steak and T-bone steak.

These 19 beef cuts meet government guidelines for “lean,” with less than 10 grams of total fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per serving.

Half the fatty acids in a 3-oz. serving of lean beef are monounsaturated fatty acids — the same heart-healthy kind found in olive oil that research shows may have cholesterol-lowering abilities. And, one-third of the saturated fat in beef is a unique fatty acid called stearic acid, which has been found to have a neutral or cholesterol-lowering effect.

Beyond lean beef’s favorable fat profile, beef is — and has always been — a nutrient-rich powerhouse. One 3-oz. serving of beef is an excellent source of five essential nutrients: protein, zinc, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, selenium and phosphorus, and a good source of four essential nutrients: niacin, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, iron and riboflavin.

For more information and recipes, including the 19 lean cuts of beef, visit [www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com](http://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com).

**Editor’s Note:** This sidebar was adapted from a news release distributed by NCBA.