

Defending Meat's Role

American Meat Institute urges Dietary Guidelines Committee to consider important nutrition benefits of meat and poultry.

Meat and poultry products are important and rich sources of highly bioavailable micronutrients, and inclusion of meat and poultry products in the diet can prevent well-documented vitamin deficiencies, according to American Meat Institute (AMI) comments submitted March 3 to the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines Committee. The committee requested comments on sodium reduction and food safety, as well as sustainability, an issue that AMI said is clearly outside the committee's charge and beyond its expertise.

The Institute detailed the extensive contributions that meat and poultry make to the nation's nutrition status. "In addition to high-quality protein, meat and poultry also are important and rich sources of micronutrients such as iron, zinc, selenium, and vitamins B₁₂, B₆, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and potassium. Up to 16% of U.S. adults and more than 20% over 60 years old are marginally depleted in vitamin B₁₂," AMI wrote. "Deficiency increases with age, with about 6% of those more than 70 years old being deficient in vitamin B₁₂. Recent research also has demonstrated the role that meat and poultry can play in ensuring adequate vitamin and mineral intake. ... These nutrients are either not present in plant foods or have low bioavailability."

In particular, AMI stressed the importance of meat and poultry iron content for the 1.2 million children in America with anemia or pregnant women who are particularly at risk of anemia.

"The reduction of iron in the diet could lead to deficiencies that have long-term health effects if not addressed," AMI said. "The heme iron in meat is the most absorbable form of iron known."

AMI also stressed the high protein content in meat and poultry and noted that per serving, meat, poultry and fish provide more protein than dairy, eggs, legumes, cereals, vegetables or nuts. Protein is critical for developing, maintaining and repairing strong muscles, and it is vital for reducing the muscle loss that often occurs with aging.

The safety profiles of meat and meat products also are excellent, according to AMI, and show a documented and sustained improvement during the last two decades.

The institute highlighted:

- ▶ an 81% reduction of *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat (RTE) meat and poultry products between 2000 and 2011;
- ▶ an 85% decline of *E. coli* O157:H7 in raw ground beef between 2000 and 2013;
- ▶ a 79% decline in salmonella in young chickens from the original performance standard and a 43% reduction from the new standard in 2012; and
- ▶ an 89% decline of salmonella in turkey from the original performance standard.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data have shown a corresponding decline in foodborne illness historically associated with meat and poultry products, AMI said.

Salt and food safety

Regarding sodium, AMI told the committee that sodium is essential for human health and development, particularly in regulating the body's electrolyte balance, preventing dehydration, and maintaining many of the body's cellular functions. Salt or sodium chloride also plays a critical role in the production of meat products — whether used by large commercial processors, local butchers, or even within the consumer's home — to improve the flavor, texture and safety of those products.

"As an ingredient in meat products, salt is

used as a preservative, which is one aspect of a multi-hurdle approach toward maintaining product safety," AMI said. "In the last 20 years, the meat-and-poultry industry has also learned, in more quantitative fashion, the importance of sodium chloride in managing pathogenic bacterial risks presented by *L. monocytogenes*, salmonella, and pathogenic *E. coli* in processed meat and poultry items."

Still, sodium reduction reformulation is occurring in the meat and poultry industry with more than 50% of the processed meat and poultry market undergoing recent sodium reduction reformulation. AMI cited a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) Internal Medicine, in which study authors analyzed sodium levels in 480 packaged and restaurant foods from 2005-2011. While the researchers did not find dramatic across-the-board reductions in sodium, they did note that some of the most significant reductions occurred in meat products, including pork (-27%) and sliced deli turkey breast (-21%).

Sustainability

Finally, AMI told the committee that sustainability is outside the scope of the committee's charge and that there is insufficient expertise on the committee and insufficient data in published literature to make science-based decisions in this area.

"The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee is [composed] of experts in nutrition and epidemiology. To address the variety of issues attendant to sustainability is outside the committee's expertise and could dilute the importance of the committee's recommendations," AMI said. "Sustainability is a complex issue that is being addressed by various experts in a number of other forums. Until those expert panels have drawn more concrete conclusions, it would be premature for the committee to incorporate such considerations into its dietary guidance recommendations."

AMI's complete comments are available here: www.meatami.com/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/98086.

Editor's Note: This release is from the American Meat Institute.



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▶ In its letter to the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines Committee, the American Meat Institute stressed the high protein content in meat and poultry and noted that per serving, meat, poultry and fish provide more protein than dairy, eggs, legumes, cereals, vegetables or nuts.