



Keeping Beef On The Plate

As the 2015 Dietary Guidelines are being discussed, the beef industry is encouraged to speak up.

by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor

Every five years, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans are reviewed and updated by the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. The guidelines are then used as the basis for federal nutrition policy

and considered the “gold standard” used for school lunch programs.

The next updated set of guidelines is planned to be published in the fall of 2015 — but the 14-member Dietary Guidelines

Advisory Committee (DGAC), which was appointed May 31, 2013, has already begun meeting to discuss changes and updates. It appears major changes could be on the horizon. When the committee first met in June, Alice Lichtenstein, vice chair of the 2015 DGAC, was quoted as saying: “These won’t be your grandmother’s dietary guidelines.”

As the basis for their recommendations, the DGAC asks for and reviews public comments, as well as available science in the USDA Nutrition Evidence Library and the USDA Nutrient Database before publishing its final report.

To that end, members of the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) and the Beef Checkoff Program have been working diligently to submit public comments and provide updates to the USDA Library and Database related to beef nutrition and research information to be reviewed by the committee.

Beef industry must be involved

During the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in February in Nashville, Tenn., Kristina Butts, NCBA executive director of legislative affairs, provided a brief update

Who is on the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee?

Nominations for health and nutrition professionals and experts to serve on the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) were solicited by USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) with the 14-person committee appointed on May 31, 2013. National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) and Beef Checkoff Program leadership submitted names of eight individuals to be considered — and one of those individuals, Wayne Campbell, was appointed to the DGAC.

Campbell is a professor in the Department of Nutrition Science at Purdue University. He is also an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Health and Kinesiology at Purdue University. His expertise includes evaluating the effects of protein, carbohydrate and energy intakes and exercise training on macronutrient metabolism, body composition, and muscle strength and function. In addition, his research endeavors include studying the effects of food form, portion size, and dietary patterning on appetite and weight control with a special emphasis on the aging population.

Barbara Millen with the Department of Family Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine was selected to chair the DGAC. Millen is also founder and president of a start-up company that develops web-based platforms and mobile applications to encourage healthy preventive lifestyle behaviors for clinical settings and corporate, academic and community wellness initiatives.

Alice Lichtenstein, who is associated with Tufts University in Boston and who was a member of the 2000 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, was selected as vice chair of the 2015 DGAC.

For a listing of the other members of the DGAC visit www.hhs.gov/news/press/2013pres/05/20130531a.html.

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regarding the dietary guidelines review process. She emphasized that involvement from beef industry stakeholders is essential.

She pointed out that when the 2010 Dietary Guidelines were discussed, the recommendation for Americans to “shift” to a plant-based diet was strongly being considered. Because the beef industry and other protein groups made comments to USDA, they were able to maintain lean meats as one of the recommended protein foods in the guidelines.

Clara Lau, NCBA director of human nutrition research, has been very involved with efforts to share beef nutrition information with the DGAC to date. Six sets of written comments have been submitted on behalf of the beef checkoff, as well as the oral testimony by Lau at the second meeting of the DGAC back in January. The key points being emphasized to the committee include:

1) Responsiveness of the beef industry over the years to produce and supply lean beef. In 1980, when the first edition of the dietary guidelines was published, it was common to see one-half of an inch of fat trim on beef in the grocery store meatcase. Now, retail beef cuts are virtually void of external fat, averaging less than one-tenth of an inch, according to Lau.

“Farmers and ranchers have responded to dietary guidance by supporting research

and education to maximize the availability of lean beef,” Lau said in her testimony to the committee. “The industry has selected for leaner cattle, trimmed excessive fat, and encouraged people to choose appropriate portions of lean beef more often. We listened, we changed and we wanted you to know about it.”

She also addressed the lag in the USDA Nutrient Database to reflect lean beef changes, affecting the accuracy of data used in some observational studies.

“The broad category of red meat used in large observational studies, like the Nurses’ Health Study, does not reflect the leaner supply of beef,” Lau said. “So, the lean beef people are actually consuming is not used when comparing beef consumption with health outcomes. Therefore, these comparisons fall short in assessing lean beef as part of a healthful dietary pattern.”

2) Clarifications on how much beef is actually being consumed and sold in stores. In her testimony, Lau noted that while Americans’ waistlines are expanding, the consumption of calories and fat from beef has declined. Beef contributes only 5% of today’s calories, yet it supplies more than 5% of eight essential nutrients, like zinc, iron and protein.

She adds that fortunately there are numerous randomized controlled trials that consistently demonstrate 4-5.5 ounces (oz.)

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of lean beef daily can contribute to overall healthful dietary patterns and improve markers for health.

Also, to better monitor consumer beef-buying data during the past several years, the Beef Checkoff Program has invested in a nutrient-database-improvement project to update beef cut nutrition information in the USDA database because the information previously being used did not match what people were consuming and was being used in observational studies. Lau said it is important for the USDA Nutrient Database to accurately reflect what’s being sold in stores.

Lau notes that NCBA and beef checkoff leadership will continue to share beef’s nutrition and scientific information as the DGAC continues its deliberations over the next year. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the 2015 Dietary Guidelines include recommendations that include beef as part of a healthful and balanced diet, along with fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

However, the conversations ahead by the DGAC could include some surprises. Butts said early discussion by the committee has included talk about “sustainability.” To this she said, “We would think they’d focus on nutrition, but sustainability could become an issue.”

Additional questions about the nutritional difference between grass- and grain-fed beef have been discussed by the committee.

Butts added, “The beef industry needs to put this on our radar. We are going to ask you to get involved. We need strong representation and involvement; I know you care.”

She also pointed out, “Don’t think anti-meat groups are not submitting comments to the committee.”

To submit public comments related to the dietary guidelines visit www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2015/comments/default.aspx.

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Editor’s Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelance writer and cattlewoman from Whitewood, S.D.

Nutrition Facts label to get overhaul

The black-and-white Nutrition Facts label on most food and beverage products is going to get an overhaul — after staying the same for 20 years. The change is being prompted in an effort to simplify nutrition information and help consumers make healthier choices.

The proposed updates include making the total calorie count for a serving of food more prominent and listing more realistic serving sizes.

The proposed label will also require information about the amount of “added sugars” in a food product.

The rules also would update the list of nutrients that are required or permitted to be declared on food labels. Currently, four nutrients — Vitamin A, Vitamin C, calcium and iron — are required to be listed. The new labels will include listing potassium and Vitamin D.

Other changes include listing types of fats and updating minimum daily requirements for some nutrients and maximum daily intake for ingredients such as sodium.

Author’s Note: The proposed changes were published in the Federal Register on March 3, 2014. A 90-day public comment period is currently under way and will be followed by final rulemaking and implementation, possibly in 2015.

