

## **Revision of the Food Guidance System July 12, 2004**

### **1. What is the Food Guide Pyramid?**

USDA has had historic responsibility for guiding consumer food choices for the last 100 years. The Pyramid as it currently exists is the latest version of food guidance developed to help consumers interpret the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the cornerstone of federal nutrition policy.

The Pyramid was developed as an educational tool to help Americans select healthful diets. Based on the best science available at the time it was released in 1992. The Pyramid translates nutrition recommendations—the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI)—into the kinds and amounts of food to eat each day.

### **2. What is the relationship between the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid/Food Guidance System?**

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans represent federal nutrition policy, and the Food Guide Pyramid/Food Guidance System is an educational tool to help consumers make food choices for a healthy diet. The Pyramid/Food Guidance System translates the principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and other nutritional standards and interprets them into healthy food choices. The new Food Guidance System will be consistent with the 2005 revision of the Dietary Guidelines.

### **3. What is the “Food Guidance System” the notice discusses?**

The Food Guidance System is the working name for all the elements of USDA’s proposed dietary guidance. These elements include the graphic image, core messages, and educational materials.

### **4. What are the reasons for developing a new Food Guidance System?**

Just as the original Food Guide Pyramid graphic was not designed as a stand-alone tool, the new graphic image will not provide consumers with all the information needed to follow a healthy diet. The new food guidance system will reflect the most current nutritional science and provide consumers with an array of tools to help them choose a healthier diet.

### **5. What is the scientific basis for the new Food Guidance System?**

USDA uses current, authoritative scientific information from a variety of data sources including information on the U.S. nutritional status, nutritional standards, food

consumption practices, food availability and food composition. The overall project to develop a new Food Guidance System is a comprehensive effort that is designed to help Americans make healthful daily food choices, based on the consensus of scientific experts from scientific panels and committees including the Committee on the Scientific Evaluation of the Dietary Reference Intakes (the DRI Committee) of the Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine and the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

**6. What is the difference between the current Federal Register notice and the notice released last September?**

The current notice is asking for public input on the communication and educational plan for the new Food Guidance System, which includes developing a new graphic symbol and consumer education materials. Last September's notice was asked for public input on the underlying food guidance recommendations (the types and amounts of food to eat for health) based on scientific review and technical revisions.

**7. Is USDA proposing a specific shape for the new graphic image?**

No, we are asking for public input on whether to retain a pyramid shape or to develop a new shape for the graphic image to represent the system.

**8. Why are you considering a new shape for the graphic?**

We want to be open to all ideas and not prejudice what image or shape will best identify and symbolize our food guidance messages.

**9. What is the difference between “individualized guidance” and “generalized messages”?**

With the rapid increase in overweight and obesity, “one-size fits all” guidance no longer works. To improve their food choices, individuals need to have access to information specific to their own energy and nutrient needs, based on their age, sex, and physical activity level. Generalized messages provide less specific information—intended for all individuals—such as the range of 6 to 11 daily servings from the grains group. This information was misunderstood by some to mean they could choose anywhere within that range. Individualized guidance will identify that individuals of a certain age, sex, and activity level could have, for example, 6 ounce equivalents of grains (e.g. 6 slices of bread or ounces of cereal) per day, while younger, more active individuals might have 8 ounce equivalents.

**10. Why is USDA proposing individualized guidance?**

Many consumers do not see that generalized messages apply to them. We intend to reach individuals with messages that they see are for their specific needs and lifestyles. By providing guidance that takes into account individual needs, lifestyles, and preferences, we will be able to connect with each person, motivating them to follow the advice and make healthier food choices. Note, however, that we are not intending to develop therapeutic diets or provide clinical recommendations for specific chronic diseases.

**11. Will there be some messages that are for the general population?**

Yes, some food guidance applies to everyone and we will use these messages in addition to the more specific messages for individuals with differing needs.

**12. Why is USDA planning to develop “core messages”?**

We want to provide educators and other professionals with a complete set of the key messages that will be used as a basis for developing the various educational materials.

The core messages may also help professionals identify and select appropriate messages for their materials, and may give them consumer-tested ways to express these messages. The core messages will show the scope of the food guidance and clearly establish what topics and recommendations are included.

**13. Is USDA proposing to use only interactive tools for education?**

No, we plan to develop traditional print materials as well. The interactive materials are highlighted in the notice because they are a new addition for USDA to the types of materials we already publish.

**14. How is USDA proposing to deliver these education materials?**

We currently envision using a variety of delivery channels but are asking for additional ideas from the public.

**15. What is the timeline for the release of the new Food Guidance System?**

The release of the new Food Guidance System is expected to follow the release of the revised Dietary Guidelines for Americans in early 2005.

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