

TRENDS



FOOD AND NUTRITION ISSUES LIKELY TO IMPACT THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN THE NEXT 1 TO 3 YEARS

Health care structure and gatekeepers are rapidly changing.

Changes in our health care system will soon result in an enormous increase in consumers seeking health care services in California and across the nation. Preventative services that were not covered in the past—including nutrition services—may be covered under the new system, as health care organizations realize that a few dollars spent on staying healthy will dramatically reduce the cost of treating disease later.

The gatekeepers in this evolving system will also change. Experts predict a shortage of primary care medical doctors; instead this void will be met by allied health professionals such as physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, health educators and peer educators. Health care delivery locations will also expand, with consumers able to go to retail health clinics such as Rite Aid and Walgreens rather than their traditional doctors for prevention services and chronic disease management.

Social media through mobile devices is one avenue being explored to deliver health education to consumers. The use of social media has increased 21 percent in the health care arena over the past two years, and some local health departments are already using this method to deliver their public health messages. Technological innovations such as virtual clinics are also being developed to help people with weight management and other issues.

Dairy Council of California is actively staying abreast of these changes in the health care arena to be in a strong position to place nutrition education resources within this new structure and continue to be seen as the nutrition expert. The focus on prevention will open up opportunities for nutrition education and health promotion that place milk as an irreplaceable part of a healthy diet. The emergence of non-traditional gatekeepers will present opportunities and challenges for reaching consumers.

Protein's list of health benefits grows; dairy not always recognized as a good source.

Consumers are increasingly interested in protein for its long list of health benefits—from muscle building and exercise recovery to weight loss, satiety and healthy aging. Sixty-three percent of consumers reportedly consider protein when they purchase packaged foods and beverages. The benefits of protein extend from babies all the way to seniors, creating opportunities to target specific subgroups—teenage athletes, for example—with messages around protein's health benefits.

Food manufacturers and commodity groups are piggybacking on this trend, with many companies adding extra protein to their products, hoping for higher sales. Protein substitutes and novel plant protein such as pea protein are also emerging. Some tout the benefits of plant protein, challenging the traditional wisdom that animal protein is superior. Whey protein is considered one of the highest-quality protein sources and is currently being investigated for its effect on satiety and weight management and its ability to mitigate pre-diabetes.

The protein trend is thought to be here to stay, with its preventative power against the burgeoning rates of obesity and diabetes. Consumers generally do not associate protein with dairy products, rather turning to meat, beans and eggs for their protein sources. Dairy Council of California has efforts aimed at educating health professional and consumer audiences about milk and dairy foods as a high-quality protein source. There are opportunities for the dairy industry to aggressively market products as being "good" or "excellent" sources of protein.

Yogurt sales stronger than ever, driven by Greek yogurt and probiotics trends.

Yogurt consumption has reportedly increased by 113 percent since 2001, with Greek yogurt now comprising about one-third of sales. Young adults—those between 18 and 34 years of age—have largely driven this increase, seeking yogurt for its overall health benefits and as a breakfast food. In turn, young adults are feeding it to their children, fostering another generation of yogurt-eaters.

Yogurt drinks containing probiotics are a rapid growth area, particularly popular among children. Added sugars will be an issue with yogurt, as some public health professionals are labeling sugar “the new tobacco” and linking it to the obesity crisis. Keeping sugar levels to a minimum while preserving taste will help yogurt maintain its current health halo.

Many are seeking the benefits of probiotics in yogurt, which now extend beyond traditional immune-system and intestinal benefits to effects such as decreasing obesity, reducing blood pressure, helping with satiety, minimizing anxiety and depression, enhancing brain function and even reducing breast cancer risk. While these benefits have not been proven beyond a doubt, some researchers are encouraging the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Committee to include probiotics in general recommendations for a healthy diet for overall—rather than specific—health benefits.

There is new compelling research on the gut “microbiome”—the collection of bacteria in the intestinal tract believed to have an impact on the entire body. Everyone’s microbiota is unique depending on diet, lifestyle, genetic makeup and other factors, but new research is showing the “healthy bugs” in the intestinal tract may be responsible for vitamin and amino acid production; fighting off diabetes, obesity and cancer; stimulating the immune system; destroying toxins; and boosting overall health. The microbiota is, in effect, a functional barrier between the outside world/what is ingested and the internal body. While this research is still in its infancy, it provides support for the habitual consumption of probiotics, currently found mostly in fermented dairy products such as yogurt and kefir.

Yogurt is part of the milk and milk products group and is highlighted as a healthy choice in planning diets in Dairy Council of California resources. In addition, information on yogurt and probiotics is available on the HealthyEating.org website.

Obesity and metabolic syndrome rates stabilize but remain high, with focus on prevention.

While obesity rates have stabilized for both adults and children, the incidence remains high. One-third of adults and 17 percent of children are classified as obese, and concerted public health efforts are aimed at reducing rates. The American Medical Association now officially recognizes obesity as a disease. Although recognition does not have legal implications, experts think it may open the door to reimbursement for prevention and treatment of overweight.

Concurrently, incidence of metabolic syndrome—the cluster of risk factors for heart disease that includes high blood pressure, overweight and unhealthy blood glucose and lipid levels—is dropping due to better control of symptoms such as blood pressure and cholesterol. However, incidence is still high at 23 percent, and efforts will continue to focus on prevention.

A number of observational studies continue to link higher milk and yogurt consumption to lower rates of metabolic syndrome, with components such as calcium, vitamin D, protein, dairy fat and trans-palmitoleic acid possibly acting as protective agents. Clinical trials and mechanistic studies are needed to support these findings; however, this could bear out to be very positive for the dairy industry.

Dairy Council of California continues to position milk and milk products as an irreplaceable part of a healthy diet that helps maintain body weight. Plans are in place to educate health professionals about dairy’s emerging benefits to metabolic syndrome.

Through an ongoing trends-identification process, Dairy Council of California paints a picture of the environment in which the dairy industry operates and identifies issues that must be addressed in order to be effective and influential. The identified trends shape Dairy Council of California’s strategic plans geared at educating health and wellness professionals, educators and consumers 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.



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