

## **Dairy has potential to play a big role in diabetes prevention**

There is increasing concern about Type 2 diabetes, as rates of overweight and obesity continue to soar. National data show that incidence of diabetes in youth has skyrocketed from 9 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2008, and it is expected to continue rising. Metabolic syndrome—the cluster of risk factors including excess abdominal weight, high blood pressure, abnormal lipid levels and insulin resistance—is similarly increasing, putting many people at high risk for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

Diet and lifestyle are seen as key ways to reduce these risk factors and prevent and/or mitigate the effects of diabetes. Dairy has potential for playing a big role here, with new research showing that those who consume the most milk and milk products—regardless of fat content—have the lowest rates of diabetes. Currently, the evidence is not product-specific—milk, yogurt and cheese as part of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) dietary pattern are associated with reduced risk. Components in dairy products thought to be beneficial include vitamin D, calcium, magnesium, potassium, whey proteins and even milk fat. More research, including clinical trials, is needed to further explore these effects. If it is borne out, Dairy Council of California is ready to promote these health benefits, and the dairy industry stands to receive big gains.

In the meantime, Dairy Council's programs and messages on adopting long-term, healthy lifestyles for optimal health and disease prevention are right on track. Focusing on health—including diet and activity—rather than on weight is seen as benefitting everyone young to old, trim to overweight.

## **Saturated fat—not as bad as once thought**

More research accumulates that we need to reexamine our long-standing paradigm on the role saturated fat plays in heart disease. Just as research has differentiated total fat into “good” and “bad” fats, saturated fat—once

considered the worst kind—is now being separated into “harmful” and “neutral/beneficial.” Saturated fat from dairy, in fact, is being placed in this latter group. Research from a variety of studies is showing that dairy consumption does not seem to be associated with heart disease or stroke after all, with some studies even showing a lowering of risk with consumption of dairy products. Analysis of the research has led to reports stating that dietary advice on fats in the United States and Europe does not reflect the available scientific literature, and recommendations on dietary fat need to be liberalized.

Unfortunately, with the years of “avoid saturated fat at all costs” messages of the 1970s, '80s and '90s, this will be a difficult paradigm to change and will require cohesive strategies. Dairy Council of California is implementing initiatives to reeducate around the health effects of dietary fat and saturated fat, starting with the health-professional stakeholder and moving to the consumer. If the efforts of the egg industry are any indication, this kind of paradigm shift does not happen overnight, but will take years and years of concerted effort.

## **Protein—specifically animal protein—yields multiple health benefits**

Numerous studies are reporting the health benefits of protein, which extend well beyond its known muscle-building attributes to include weight management, reducing blood pressure, helping with insulin sensitivity and improving body composition and bone health. Studies that differentiate animal from plant sources of protein often find greater benefits from animal protein. Specifically, whey protein and its high levels of branched-chain amino acids continue to get positive attention among athletes. A new method of assessing protein quality that would benefit dairy products is being investigated in international circles and may be implemented in the next few years.

As a result of these positive messages around protein, a reported 54 percent of consumers are trying to get

more in their diets. Dairy currently contributes about 20 percent of the total protein intake in the average U.S. diet and is seen as a high quality source. Products like Greek yogurt—which has twice the protein as traditional yogurt—are well positioned to take advantage of this movement. Other products, however, will compete for this market share, as sports bars and beverages, cereals and even soft drinks are boosting their protein levels to ride this wave.

Touting the natural, balanced and well-absorbed protein that dairy provides will be the industry's best positioning in this arena. Our diverse family of products also fits with the need to tailor messages to different subgroups of consumers: the young athlete wanting to build muscle and optimize performance, the middle-aged woman seeking to manage her weight, the baby boomer trying to minimize his or her chronic disease risk and the older person aiming to prevent falls and avoid the muscle wasting condition, sarcopenia. Dairy protein—especially whey protein—holds promise in the export market as well, a rapidly growing area still largely untapped.

The opportunities for the dairy industry over the next few years are many, from package labeling to advertising to nutrition education. Dairy Council of California has already started in the education arena, with symposia at national and state health and nutrition conferences as well as materials for the health professional summarizing the benefits of protein.

### **While demographics change, interest in health and nutrition remains high**

Overall, people remain very interested in health, with surveys showing that four out of five consumers are trying to make healthy choices some of the time; many are buying fewer prepared meals and trying to cook more at home. Price also reigns, as consumers are shopping sales and using coupons, making grocery lists and cutting back on prime cuts of meat and seafood. Of their health concerns, heart health ranks highest—followed by energy levels, empty calories, digestive health and immunity. Dairy bodes well in all these arenas, from economy (the cost of dairy foods is relatively low when considering their nutrient package) to meeting consumers' primary health concerns.

Millennials—those born between 1982 and 2001—are an increasingly powerful force in the marketplace, slowly replacing baby boomers as the most influential population subgroup. Their need for convenience and freshness dominates over brand or store loyalty, and typically, they will shop at a variety of stores to get the products they desire. Some will pay a premium for attributes such as organics, natural, ethnic and specialty foods. It will behoove the dairy industry to continue developing and marketing specialty products for specific niches and to highlight attributes on current products, through labeling, to keep dairy products top-of-mind in this group.

*Through our ongoing trends-identification process, Dairy Council of California paints a picture of the environment in which we operate and identifies issues we must address in order to be effective and influential. The trends identified shape our strategic plans geared at educating the health and wellness professional, educator and consumer audiences 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](mailto:KHouse@DairyCouncilofCA.org).



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