

Body weights at an all-time high, but not on consumers' radar

Seventy percent of Americans are now considered overweight or obese, an unprecedented high. However, only 50 percent of people consider themselves to be overweight, indicating some complacency over their weight status. Associated with this increase in overweight, it is expected that one in seven Americans will have type 2 diabetes by 2025, almost double the current rate. Government leadership, regulation, investment in prevention and treatment programs, monitoring and research are all ways our society is reacting to this trend. Specific strategies being debated include taxing 'bad' foods, subsidizing 'good' foods, menu labeling at restaurants, updating food labels with more useful information and changing the way we market foods. Nutrition education will remain a less visible, yet critical component of public health efforts to curb the obesity epidemic. With less personal concern around body weight, however, the challenge in this arena will be in finding new ways to motivate people to make healthy choices.

Dairy bodes well in the weight management and diabetes arenas. Adolescent girls whose diets resemble the DASH diet—rich in low-fat milk products, fruits, vegetables and whole grains—have an easier time maintaining a stable weight through early adulthood. Research continues to show a relationship between milk intake and more successful weight loss, as well as improved body composition. In addition, higher dairy intakes are linked to lower risk of diabetes in both adolescents and adults. This research presents significant opportunity to position dairy soundly in healthy, balanced diets aimed at attaining optimal health and preventing chronic disease.

Choosing meat on some days gains momentum for health, sustainability reasons

Increasing numbers of consumers are choosing to eat less meat on some days, primarily for health or environmental concerns. This dietary preference generally focuses on minimizing meat, rather than on milk and milk product consumption, and is consistent with the DASH pattern. Locally-produced, organic and whole foods fit here as well. Although organic foods represent only about 4 percent of total sales, 6 out of 10 consumers report preferring organic over conventionally-produced products.

Ovo-lacto vegetarians (those who include milk and eggs) in particular have higher intakes of vitamins A, C, E, fiber, thiamin, riboflavin, folate, calcium, magnesium and iron and often consume more milk and dairy than nonvegetarians. Strict vegetarians or vegans—who avoid animal products altogether—however, can have deficiencies in iodine, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12—those nutrients high in animal foods. Lacto-ovo vegetarian diets present an opportunity to showcase dairy foods for their nutrient contributions of calcium, protein, riboflavin and vitamin B12. Dairy needs to be positioned as a 'must-have' in these alternative and vegetarian diets.

Nutrition guidelines miss the mark on real drivers of food decisions

Consumer research shows that consumers are looking for fun and flavorful foods and are willing to experiment. Local, real, high-quality, fresh, unique and cultural foods are buzzwords in this trend, with the goal of feeling good again about the way we eat. This is leading to an increased liberalization around our food choices and a need for foods ranging from basic to indulgent. For example, there seems to be a greater acceptance of dietary fat among some, consistent with research showing there may, in fact,

be some benefits of consuming certain kinds of dietary fats. People are interested in learning about the food itself... its history, what makes it special and what they can do with it. Artisanal cheeses, specialty yogurts, craft butters and high-quality, locally-sourced products will be good opportunities for dairy in this movement.

Simultaneously—or perhaps fueling this—is the confusion over dietary recommendations and increased frustration over the feasibility of meeting the new Dietary Guidelines. For example, it was found to be almost impossible for people to reach both their sodium and their potassium recommendations in the context of an overall balanced, healthy diet. This well-intentioned scientific approach to nutrition has taken the emotional, cultural and mindful act of eating and transformed it into almost a clinical exercise comprised of specific nutrients, numbers, weights and percentages. The consumer backlash to this will continue to manifest through a move back to whole, natural foods with the goal of putting the pulse back into eating.

Wellness movement catching on in both schools and workplace environments

Increased funding around wellness is leading to more programs in both the schools and workplace arenas, with the focus on teaching and encouraging healthy diets, fitness and overall improved lifestyles. Eighty-six percent of workplaces intend to expand their wellness programs over the next couple of years, especially in small businesses where funding is available. The end goal is to reduce obesity rates and risk of chronic disease. Traditionally measured through cost savings to the employer, future measures will be around behavior change such as food choices, smoking and exercise habits. Farmer's markets, standing desks, nutrition instruction, fitness classes and gym memberships are all components of workplace wellness programs, but implementation will vary from site to site.

California schools are expecting to reap \$14 million in federal funding to support school-based health clinics. These efforts will foster community partnerships to improve literacy, health, nutrition and other services before, during and after school. These efforts will reach not just the schoolchildren but their entire families. There will be ample opportunity for nutrition education organizations such as Dairy Council of California to provide programs, materials and instruction as part of these wellness programs in both school and workplace environments.

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 form our annual and long-range operational plans geared at educating the health 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.