



October 11, 2023

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Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Office of the Assistant Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 420  
Rockville, Maryland 20852

**RE: 2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, Docket No. HHS-OASH-2022-0021-0001**

Dear Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments for consideration by the 2025 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC or “the Committee”).

Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association (“The Association”) is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which comprises nearly 1 million restaurant and foodservice outlets and a workforce of 15 million employees. Together with 52 state associations, the National Restaurant Association creates a network of professional organizations dedicated to serving every restaurant through advocacy, education, and food safety.

### **Restaurants are increasingly focused on nutrition**

In reviewing the current edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the Association was pleased to see the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recognize that “during the past few decades, food products and menus have evolved substantially in response to consumer demand and public health concerns.” This recognition is consistent with the increase in efforts we see from our members to focus on nutrition. Today, restaurants are currently employing a wide range of strategies that help Americans live healthier lives and reverse the trend of obesity in the United States.

As the *Dietary Guidelines* point out, “Food reformulation and menu modification opportunities include offering more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat and fat-free dairy, and a greater variety of protein foods that are nutrient dense, while also reducing sodium, added sugars, saturated fat and replacing it with unsaturated fats.” We know our members have taken this to heart by growing the number of better-for-you menu options and choices. Restaurants are serving a variety of nutritious menu choices and brands have centered their businesses to providing more options meeting the current DGA.



In addition, some restaurants have formally pledged to make positive changes through public commitments, while others have chosen to make modifications to the menu options. This includes participation in the Association's Kids LiveWell program. Kids LiveWell was originally launched in 2009 and recently revamped in conjunction with an announcement at the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in 2022.

This voluntary program provides a growing selection of better-for-you options on children's menus across the country. Kids LiveWell focuses on increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains and low-fat dairy, and limiting total calories, added sugar, and sodium. Additionally, participating restaurants follow a default beverage policy that only allows water, milk, and 100% fruit juice on the menu.

Moreover, the restaurant industry is committed to providing nutrition information to customers. We championed national menu labeling regulations to give our customers the information they need to make healthier choices for themselves and their families. Menu labeling also promotes transparency and may inform consumers' choice of foods to meet their dietary needs and preferences.

The restaurant industry is also employing more registered dietitians and nutrition experts. Our industry is looking to experts for help in achieving healthier menus and providing accurate nutrition information by employing a record number of registered dietitians and nutrition professionals.

Additionally, the Association and our members participate in important coalitions focused on practical solutions to drive balance and healthy menu choices at restaurants. For example, we participate in the Portion Balance Coalition in conjunction with Georgetown University, whose work is centered around identifying and implementing innovations in support of balanced, healthy lifestyles. Similarly, many of our members are also engaged in the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) Healthy Menus R&D Collaborative (HMC), which develops practical solutions that help expand the availability and sales of healthy menu choices.

### **Restaurants offer a variety of foods to meet dietary patterns and life stages**

Restaurants throughout the country have worked to address Americans' needs and desires by offering a variety of foods to meet particular dietary patterns, including those listed by the Agencies such as healthy U.S.- style, Mediterranean-style, and vegetarian. Additionally, our members have worked to offer foods that meet the needs of those following diets that require ingredient restrictions, such as gluten-free, nutrient reductions, or reduced calories. Our members have also modified menus to increase better-for-you options through innovation and reformulation.

Restaurants currently offer a wide range of food options to meet the needs of consumers whether they dine out frequently or only on special occasions. By offering items that incorporate more produce, lean meat and meat alternatives, low-fat dairy products, and whole grains, while



limiting calories, sodium and unhealthy fats, the restaurant industry continues to provide balanced choices for consumers.

In fact, through a September survey of over 1,000 Americans, the Association found most Americans (84 percent) believe they can eat healthy when dining out.<sup>1</sup> Adults surveyed recently were optimistic about menus becoming healthier, offering lower calorie beverages, and making it easier to monitor calorie intake.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 72 percent of adults say there are more healthy food and beverage options on children's menus than there used to be and 56 percent of adults say most restaurants make it easy for you to choose the portion size that you want.<sup>1</sup>

As noted above, the industry is also focused on kids' menus particularly through our Kids LiveWell program. With numerous brands working to achieve our standards, kids and parents can find better-for-you options available at more restaurants than ever before.

### **USDA/HHS should focus on dietary patterns and consider all factors when reviewing food-based recommendations**

In reviewing the proposed scientific questions to inform the next edition of the *Dietary Guidelines*, we were pleased to see the focus on diet and health outcomes across the lifespan. Moreover, we were encouraged to see the Committee's attention on dietary patterns and food-based recommendations. Given that restaurants are diverse and their offerings include more nutritious options than ever before, the DGAC's focus on overall dietary patterns, rather than on where a meal, snack, or food is purchased, will avoid disparaging comments on the format of a very diverse industry.

In meeting three there was a discussion about conducting an evidence scan related to accessibility and availability of food and beverages. We respectfully urge the DGAC to avoid any recommendations like avoidance of away from home eating as the Guidelines should focus on the food, rather than the format. This sensible, food-based approach is consistent with previous editions of the DGA and will help to inspire our members to incorporate healthier items on their menus.

In reviewing the proposed scientific questions and progress noted in meeting three, we understand both the enthusiasm for and the challenges with the ultra-processed foods question and protocol. Restaurants range in diversity by offering scratch-cooked menu items as well as relying on manufacturers for particular processed ingredients. These ingredients are often used to add specific flavors and speed up service or preparation, but they can also be used to improve food safety, nutrition, or reduce food waste. We urge the DGAC to evaluate the research findings related to ultra-processed foods, while fully considering the many important benefits of processing.

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<sup>1</sup> National Restaurant Association, national survey of 1,000 adults conducted September 22-24, 2023

<sup>2</sup> Morning Consult. National Restaurant Association Polling Presentation, April 20219.



Thank you for your consideration of our comments. The restaurant industry will continue to proactively work to improve offerings, respond to consumers' interest in healthful items, and participate in educational activities across the lifespan. We look forward to future participation in the *2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Abshire". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing "L" and "A".

Laura Abshire  
Director of Food and Sustainability Policy  
National Restaurant Association