

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

Statement of Eric J. Hentges, Executive Director
Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2007.

With the Nation facing significant public health issues related to the quality of the American diet, I believe that the outcome-based efforts of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion are key to promoting more healthful eating behaviors and lifestyles across the Nation. Working from its mission to improve the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers, the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has a critical role in how USDA meets its strategic goal to improve the Nation's nutrition and health.

**Trends Continue to Show Need for
Revised Nutrition Guidance and Educational Tools**

Recent studies of America's dietary and physical activity behaviors reveal disturbing trends. First, a combination of poor diet and sedentary lifestyle not only undermines quality of life and productivity, but it also contributes to the preventable causes of deaths each year in the United States.

Second, specific diseases and conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, overweight and obesity, and osteoporosis, are clearly linked to a poor diet. Recent statistics are staggering: 65 percent of adults (ages 20 to 74) are overweight, with 31 percent among this group classified as obese. Children and adolescents have not escaped this unhealthy outcome: among 6- to 19-year-olds, 16 percent (over 9 million) are overweight—triple what the proportion was in 1980. Another 15 percent are at risk of becoming overweight. With statistics showing an increase in overweight and obesity and estimates indicating that obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the United States reached \$75 billion in 2003, the health of Americans is a serious concern that must be addressed.

Third, the lack of physical activity has been associated with a number of conditions, including diabetes, overweight and obesity, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers. Supporting evidence indicates less than half (46 percent) of the U.S. population meets the recommended level of physical activity. USDA's involvement is critical in helping to stem and eventually reverse some of these disturbing trends.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans Establish Federal Nutrition Policy

In conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services, USDA released the sixth edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* on January 12, 2005. This science-based blueprint for promoting good nutrition and health encourages

Americans to “(1) Make smart choices from every food group, (2) Find your balance between food and physical activity, and (3) Get the most nutrition out of your calories.”

The *Guidelines*, the basis for Federal nutrition policy, provide advice for healthy Americans, ages 2 years and older, about food choices that promote health and prevent disease. These *Guidelines* not only form Federal nutrition policy, but they also set standards for the nutrition assistance programs, guide nutrition research and education efforts, and are the basis for USDA nutrition promotion activities.

As the lead Federal agency in administration of the 2010 *Guidelines*, USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has already begun laying the foundations — planning the management strategies that USDA will use to lead in interagency coordination and putting into place an evidence-based system. An evidence-based system will provide a framework or protocol for comprehensive analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, ranking its strengths according to established criteria. In developing nutrition guidance, this system will enable government decision makers to make the best policy supported by the strongest scientific evidence available, giving both the Executive and Legislative branches of government along with the scientific community and the general public a continued confidence in nutrition policies, guidelines and recommendations that are being developed and promoted.

MyPyramid Serves as Premier Teaching Tool

MyPyramid, based on the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, supports two pillars of the President's *HealthierUS* Initiative: to "Eat a Nutritious Diet" and to "Be Physically Active Every Day." MyPyramid is an individualized, interactive tool to help Americans build the *Guidelines* into their daily lives. Included in the MyPyramid webpage are the MyPyramid Plan and MyPyramid Tracker. MyPyramid Plan helps consumers find the types and amounts of food they should eat to meet nutrient requirements. MyPyramid Tracker, which has nearly 1 million registered users to date, is for consumers who want a detailed assessment and analysis of their current eating and physical activity behaviors; and it provides guidance on how to improve those behaviors. Since its launch in April 2005, MyPyramid.gov has received over 1.5 billion hits.

USDA also launched MyPyramid for Kids, a child-friendly version of MyPyramid targeted to schoolchildren. This tool is designed to encourage children to make smart food choices each day. An interactive learning computer game; lesson plans for educators; colorful posters and flyers; and other resources are available to help children make those choices. To reach an even broader audience, Spanish language versions of MyPyramid (*MiPirámide*) and MyPyramid for Kids (*MiPirámide para Niños*) have been developed. These materials have been distributed to tens of thousands of schools across America and are also available online.

The President's budget requests an increase of \$1.98 million for CNPP. These funds will support maintenance and enhancements to MyPyramid, improvements in customer support and outreach capabilities. This budget will help USDA determine

whether the use of the *Dietary Guidelines* and MyPyramid by the American public, teachers, students, and health professionals ultimately improves the American diet.

Planned activities directly related to MyPyramid include the procurement of ongoing web hosting and maintenance of MyPyramid.gov and MyPyramid Tracker, which assist the public in monitoring and developing individualized healthy eating plans. In addition, this funding will provide for the maintenance and upgrading of related hardware and software; increased operational costs realized from spikes in the usage of the website; developmental costs associated with improvements to MyPyramid Tracker; and acquisition of new food and nutrient composition data bases and integration of the Healthy Eating Index into MyPyramid Tracker.

With this budget, CNPP will procure the development and implementation of a continual evaluation plan for MyPyramid to ascertain its usefulness by the American consumer. Additionally, CNPP plans to enhance the MyPyramid.gov website with interactive capabilities to encourage behavior change that promotes healthful diets across a broad spectrum of American society. This would include a meal planning feature which is currently missing, a recipe file feature, and a shopping list feature all of which have been requested by the public and the professional nutrition community.

With thousands of emails, written correspondence, telephone inquiries and hotline calls that have resulted from the overwhelming success of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and MyPyramid.gov, CNPP also intends to use appropriated resources toward four additional staff years devoted exclusively to assisting the public in the areas of

information dissemination and improvement of the CNPP, *Dietary Guidelines* and MyPyramid websites. These additional staff years would allow CNPP to provide customer support in timely manner; enhance the outreach and promotion of MyPyramid.gov; and support USDA's Nutrition.gov website and USDA's on-line "Ask the Expert."

With your support, we look forward to continuing to build, enhance, and better promote personalized and individualized nutrition guidance tools—such as MyPyramid.gov—reaching millions of Americans daily. Your support will also help us improve customer support and outreach as well as set the foundation for future development of scientific nutrition policy, which is vital to addressing the growing problems of overweight and obesity and the related health challenges in America.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this written testimony.