Dietary guidelines get mixed reviews

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services have reaffirmed the role of beef and dairy in a healthy diet in the final 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, according to National Cattlemen's Beef Association and National Milk Producers Federation.

The two groups issued statements on Tuesday following the release of the guidelines, which are updated every five years.

"Beef is one of America's favorite foods, and science consistently shows lean beef can be a cornerstone in a variety of healthy diets," Marty Smith, NCBA president, said.

"Now more than ever, the key to proper nutrition is giving people practical and realistic advice to help create balanced diets that work for them, featuring foods they love — like beef, which pairs perfectly with other nutrient-rich foods," he said.

The latest update to the guidelines also restates dairy's importance in healthy diets.

"The panel's recognition that dairy is a key source of 'nutrients of concern' in U.S. diets is especially important," said Jim Mulhern, NMPF president and CEO.

"During a time of food insecurity and concerns about nutrition among Americans, dairy is a readily available solution to clearly identified public-health challenges," he said.

While the guidelines reaffirm the central role of dairy in a healthy diet, NMPF will continue its efforts to broaden consideration of the latest science on dairy fats in the next dietary guidelines process.

Another group, however, took issue with the guidelines.

The Nutrition Coalition, a nonprofit group of public health advocates, is concerned the guidelines address only a minority of Americans and not the 60% with at least one diet-related chronic disease.

"This narrow scope fails to meet the congressional statute that the DGA address the general public," Nina Teicholz, the coalition's executive director, said in a press release.

"The general public is now ill, afflicted with chronic disease, and we have a national nutrition policy that ignores them," she said.

The policy is scoped for disease prevention only and ignores the 60% of the population diagnosed with one or more chronic diseases, including heart disease, obesity and diabetes, she said.

The guidelines broadly influence policy followed by healthcare practitioners, educators, media outlets and the military. They drive food choices for the $100 billion spent by USDA on nutrition assistance programs for school lunches and food assistance programs for the elderly, women with infant children and disadvantaged communities, the coalition said.

"The populations in these USDA programs have significantly higher rates of diet-related conditions, and yet the foods delivered to them are arguably inappropriate for their diseases," Teicholz said.

The coalition has called for increased transparency, a more rigorous scientific process and the need for the guidelines to be more applicable to all Americans, including people with chronic diet-related diseases.

The coalition also takes issue with the nondisclosure of potentially significant conflicts of interest on the expert committee, including members with ties to Nestle, Merck & Co., ConAgra, Dannon, Monsanto and infant formula and baby food companies.

Dairy promotion pivots with pandemic

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File

Jersey cows look up from their feed on the Ballard Dairy in Gooding, Idaho. The Dairy Checkoff pivoted during the pandemic and maintained demand for dairy products.

The COVID-19 pandemic threw a curve ball at Dairy Management Inc.'s 2020 plan to promote the industry though the Dairy Checkoff program, but DMI repositioned itself and hit the ball out of the park.

"The 2020 plan wasn't sufficient for the circumstances we had. We had to redirect and move milk in other ways," Marilyn Hershey, a Pennsylvania dairy farmer and DMI chairman, said during a phone conference with the media.

The program in place for 2020 was shifted and redirected, and partnerships and relationships were critical. That included partnerships with Feeding America, foodservice, state, regional and national affiliates and farmers, she said.

Things happened rapidly with COVID, and DMI's promotion plan in 2020 and in 2021 reflects that, she said.

Through September, combined domestic sales and exports were up 1.2% for about 2.7 million pounds of milk equivalent, DMI CEO Tom Gallagher said.

"I think people were never going to guess (in March) we'd be at that level," he said.

Through September, domestic sales were only down 1%, and exports were up 15%, he said.

"We pivoted on a dime in both those areas, and the industry did an excellent job," he said.

On the domestic side, everyone's early expectation was that sales would be down much more, he said.

"I think we will finish the year in positive territory domestically if cheese keeps going the way it's been going," he said.

Retail sales did well but were nowhere near enough to offset the loss at restaurants. DMI's efforts in four areas are the reason domestic sales are about flat and moving to positive, he said.

First were the pizza promotions with Papa John's and Domino's, he said.

"Pizza has done excellent because of contactless delivery. Where did that come from? That came from us testing that in the early days of COVID with Domino's in Japan. We helped to fund that and without contactless delivery being tested, proved and worked through, we wouldn't be where we are," he said.

The second effort was continuing to press foodservice to introduce new products, he said.

"All of this is aimed at overcoming what we lost to restaurants," he said.

The third area was GENYOUth's work in schools. It's collected $17 million so far this year from non-dairy sources to keep school feeding programs going locally, which means great things for students and continued sales for dairy farmers, he said.

"So that channel didn't go as low as it otherwise could have," he said.

GENYOUth is a partnership between the National Dairy Council and the National Football League and was created by the Dairy Checkoff.

The fourth area was the work by DMI's state, regional and national staff to help divert food to food banks, he said.

DMI also worked at getting the dairy sustainability message to Generation Z people using popular gamers like MrBeast to explain farming and sustainability in the video game Minecraft, he said.

The videos had 12 million views, and the MrBeast video was the No. 1 trending video on YouTube for gaming for 24 hours and had 75 million followers, he said.

Study: Wolf immigration does not offset harvest losses

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

When a wolf is harvested, another wolf probably won't join the pack because of its social structure, researchers say.

Scientists working in central Idaho and southwest Alberta, Canada, found immigration does not offset harvest mortality, and that pack density declined after the governments began harvest programs.

Their paper appears in Zoological Society of London journal Animal Conservation.

"Our results indicate immigration did not compensate for harvest mortality," the researchers found. "We hypothesize the social structure of wolf groups may limit the potentially compensatory response of immigration in some populations."

Central Idaho study areas saw wolf density decline, lead researcher Sarah Bassing said. Density declined even more in Alberta.

"We basically found that immigration did not change after harvest began," Bassing said. "The idea that we are removing more wolves in the system and that there should be more wolves coming in to replace those individuals — we did not find that, which was unexpected."

Researchers believe that to an extent "part of why we do not see a change in immigration is because of the social structure of wolf packs," she said. As family units with a complex social hierarchy, they may not be receptive to in-migrating individuals.

"How wolves respond to harvest, at least through immigration, is more nuanced than we initially realized," Bassing said.

Researchers from 2007 to 2016 collected genetic samples. In central Idaho, they surveyed 1,833 predicted rendezvous sites, located 70 active sites and collected 12,192 samples.

They said ungulate densities remained generally consistent, and no disease outbreaks were reported that could potentially explain changes in wolf density or immigration.

The team also surveyed 622 predicted rendezvous sites in southwestern Alberta, located 12 active sites and collected 1,270 genetic samples.

Bassing said the data, which a University of Idaho laboratory analyzed, can show the number of individuals in a group and how they are related. It also can identify unrelated wolves — possible immigrants whose origins could be explored further.

Cascade, Idaho, rancher Phil Davis said he disagrees with the study's assumption about central Idaho elk populations. Declines occurred in response to pressure from wolves, and more elk are moving from timber to sagebrush, he said.

"And it has been my experience that when there have been wolves harvested, there have been similar depredation numbers for the years following," he said. "We've always had wolves backfill."

Capital Press File

Regulators in the three West Coast states have stopped the use of a soil amendment used by organic farmers.

West Coast states issue stop order for organic soil amendment; company to appeal

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

WSDA PESTICIDE COMPLIANCE STOP SALE, USE AND REMOVAL ORDER

For more information regarding the WSDA Pesticide Compliance Stop Sale, Use and Removal Order, contact Scott Nielsen in the WSDA Pesticide Compliance program at snielsen@agr.wa.gov or (509) 990-6518.

Oregon, Washington and California have banned a product used in organic agriculture, saying it contains active pesticide ingredients.

The company that produces it says it is appealing the bans.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture recently issued a statewide Stop Sale, Use and Removal order for Agro Gold WS, saying it has been found to contain active pesticide ingredients.

Similar orders were issued in Oregon and California, according to WSDA.

Marc Lajeunesse, president of manufacturer Agro Research International, based in Sorrento, Fla., said the company is appealing the decisions in the three states.

"They are wrong," Lajeunesse told the Capital Press. "We do not use any pesticide in the production of our products. We do not add any pesticide to our products. None."

He hopes to have the orders rescinded as soon as possible, he said.

"We have already hired a team of attorneys to defend us," Lajeunesse said.

Any organic operation that continues to use the product risks losing its organic certification, the Washington department said.

"It is rare to find a material approved for organic use that contains ingredients prohibited in organic production, or to find a material that is misbranded or mislabeled," Scott Rice, organic accreditation manager at WSDA, told the Capital Press.

Agro Gold WS is labeled as an organic biological soil amendment, meaning it was approved for use in organic agriculture production. Normally, it is sold with the herbicide Weed Slayer, which is registered for use in Washington state.

WSDA's Dec. 16 order requires that all distribution, promotion, sales and use of Agro Gold WS in Washington must cease immediately. The order also requires the product be removed from all visible or accessible public locations.

Agro Gold WS was listed on 182 WSDA certified organic farms' plans in 2020, Rice said.

Rice said the organic program cannot consult with the companies it certifies or recommend specific materials as a replacement for Agro Gold WS but can offer technical assistance to help an operation comply with the regulations.

As a soil amendment, Agro Gold WS does not have to be registered for distribution or use in Washington, but because it was found to contain pesticide ingredients that were not listed on its label, WSDA considers it a misbranded, unregistered pesticide.

Agro Research International is required to submit a plan to WSDA on their disposal instructions for dealers, distributors and retailers who may still hold some of the product.

Dealers, distributors and retailers are advised to await further guidance as to any quantities they have in stock.

WSDA advises any operations, organic or conventional, that have been using Agro Gold WS to contact their supplier for options on returning partially used or unopened product.

WSDA's Pesticide Compliance Program and Organic Program both tested separate samples of Agro Gold WS using two different laboratories, according to the department. The pesticide active ingredients of diquat and glyphosate were detected in both samples. Diquat and glyphosate are herbicide active ingredients used for non-selective vegetation control.