

# Investments and Policies for Improving The Nation's Food and Agriculture Policies

AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2007 FARM BILL

**The creation of a National Institute for Food and Agriculture, with \$1 billion of new Federal funding for food, nutrition, agriculture and environment research and extension is vitally needed.** Federal research provides the bedrock for our knowledge about food, nutrition, agricultural productivity, the environment and climate. The discovery and application of new knowledge will help us take care of this and future generations, protect the environment and the plants and animals that live among us, and it will sow the seeds for our people to live healthier and more prosperous lives.

We need federal investment in food, nutrition, agriculture and environment research in order to guide sound environmental, agriculture, economic and social decisions. A shift of about 1 percent in total federal expenditures for food and agriculture -- \$1 billion of new funding -- can help catch up from years of flat and declining budgets and adequately invest in the knowledge that can sustain and improve life on this planet.

ADA also commends the extraordinary value of federal nutrition research performed in the Agricultural Research Service and the seven Human Nutrition Research Centers across the nation. These facilities focus uniquely on human nutrition research, consistent with the directives of the 1977 farm bill which designated USDA as the lead agency for human nutrition research. The National Institutes of Health conducts research that complements but in no way replaces this critically important USDA program.

**ADA supports reforms to the Dietary Guidelines process that will make them more valuable and less confusing to consumers. ADA seeks less frequent issuance of these important findings -- not every five years, as now required, but that the Dietary Guidelines be updated once a decade.** The additional five years can be used for two important components of Dietary Guidelines work: to focus on better education and implementation strategies and to follow up with adequate time for conducting evidence-based research to be used in the development of future guidelines.

**ADA recommends that food assistance/food stamps cover and create incentives for purchases consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.** To improve nutrition outcomes for people who are beneficiaries of the food assistance, program changes and environmental supports can guide beneficiaries to dietary choices that can make -- and keep -- them healthier. Today's technologies make it possible to reward healthful food options and reinforce nutrition education and information messages. ADA is mindful that our larger environment often works against the consumer choosing optimally for health and wellbeing. ADA supports a policy preserving choice, but which raises nutritional standards and outcomes.

**USDA's food assistance programs must be available to those in need and adequately funded.** The Food Stamp Program is a key component of the Federal food assistance programs, and provides crucial support to needy households. ADA supports many of the key

tenets articulated by the anti-hunger community: increasing the minimum benefit and allotments, providing broader access, simplifying application and reporting criteria, matching state administrative reimbursements, providing greater funding for outreach and education, relying on the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology, improving the environment for people to purchase food and obtaining fruits and vegetables, promoting after school and summer programs that offer safe recreational activities and urging that the public invest in ways to make real progress to eradicate hunger and food insecurity in the United States.

**Food security and food safety issues must rise in priority.** The traditional definition of food security has evolved beyond “access” to sufficient, healthy food and now encompasses an abundant food supply safe from intentional and unintentional contamination. Recent outbreaks of food and waterborne disease and threats of bioterrorism have focused attention on the safety of US food and water systems. The public needs its government to play a proactive role in ensuring that appropriate food and water safety practices are implemented and followed, that inspections are focused appropriately and that research is conducted to reduce or eliminate future threats.

## Details

### Addressing Hunger and Nutrition

ADA believes that U.S. food and agriculture policies must recognize hunger -- not just the concepts of food insecurity.

Access to enough nutritious food remains an issue for millions of Americans.

- Finding ways to bring nutritious food – through retail, wholesale, direct from the farmer outlets – to underserved communities is important.
- Institutions and emergency food programs need to be able to procure a variety of foods to assure people balanced diets. Policies should never preclude procurement from local sources when those sources can provide healthful, fresh food at comparable total cost and with consumer preference.
- ADA's support for programs consistent with the Dietary Guidelines extends to schools as well. Excluding foods defined as minimally nutritious from schools will give children a better opportunity to learn good nutrition habits and attain health and nutrition literacy. Creating an instrument so that communities can measure the effectiveness of their newly implemented school wellness initiatives is sorely needed.

Encouraging Americans' fruit and vegetable consumption is a good strategy for improving the nation's nutritional status. It will call on a variety of approaches – including specific programs for promotion, research and nutrition education.

In concert with others who support expanded production, promotion and marketing of fruits and vegetables, ADA will convey:

- U.S. domestic farm programs should not be a barrier to the production of fruits and vegetables in the United States.
- Beneficiaries should be able to use food stamps for food at local farmers markets and other retail outlets.

- Expansion of the highly popular fruit and vegetable program in schools should take place after a careful examination to learn how well it is operating and to target its resources most cost -effectively.

### **Addressing a Well-nourished Population**

ADA's support for stronger nutrition education and information programs goes beyond food assistance programs and school meals. It is time to direct attention to the nutritional needs of all of the population, including the so-called "healthy."

Congress needs to provide authorization for the national programs that keeps tabs on what people are eating and drinking. Nutrition monitoring is necessary for evaluating public health strategies, the effectiveness of food and nutrition programs, and making the connection between diet and health. Similarly, consistently current information on the composition of foods is necessary for individuals to know what they are consuming, manage some disease conditions, and make healthful choices; for the public, composition of foods data is needed to evaluate the food supply as it relates to the nutritional status of Americans.

### **Addressing global hunger, nutrition and health**

ADA believes everyone – regardless of nationality or economic status, conditions of war or peace – should be free of hunger and have access to a nutritionally adequate diet. ADA respects food cultures and consumers' having personal food choices. Public policies here and in other countries can either support or undermine basic nutrition around the world.

ADA believes that food should not be used as a sanction against other nations. The American agricultural community has led the fight against "food being used as a weapon." ADA joins them in that stance.

ADA supports the continuation of emergency humanitarian food assistance. Donations should not undermine local food production or marketing systems or distort trade.

The structure of U.S. domestic programs should not undermine food production or marketing systems outside the United States or distort trade.

ADA supports the Dole-McGovern International Food for Education Program for its role in feeding children and encouraging education, and encourages its full funding.

There is no national or international initiative to deal with the most costly form of malnutrition – that is from ages 0 to 2. In all other stages of life, people can recover from malnutrition, but the impacts of nutrient deficiencies on children in the womb and up to age 2 can never be overcome. They include low birth weight, impaired cognitive development, impaired immunity and reduced earning potential and compromised life expectancy.

- World Bank and others propose a campaign to encourage breast feeding, to educate parents about nutrition and to make sure that every child -- from womb to age 2 -- has the necessary nutrients for life.

## Seeking a Better Balance

The United States' food and agricultural system is generally regarded as one of – if not the – best in the world. Americans can rightly take pride in supporting the efficient production and distribution of abundant, food supplies. Providing \$50 billion annually to the poor, to children and a variety of high-risk groups throughout society is another demonstration of U.S. food and agriculture policy, in this case, addressing nutrition and health. When we hear that U.S. consumers' high quality diet costs on average, just 10 percent of disposal income – we recognize a remarkable achievement unmatched anywhere else in the world. It's all testimony to a food production, marketing, and distribution system that with government support has steadily worked to improve itself. But there are large costs associated with the current system and it can be made to work better.

- A critical misperception at the foundation of U.S. agricultural policy is that abundance of food translates into a well nourished population. It simply is not true. Today we have a nation of people where the vast majority of us are overfed and undernourished. Seven of the top ten causes of death in the United States are linked to diet. A range of public policies – beginning with our agricultural policies -- need to recognize the ironies of a system that frequently rewards over-abundance and over-consumption to the public's detriment.
- In the future, with more mouths to feed and fewer arable acres available around the world, it is critically important to help assure that farmers can produce for consumer needs – particularly products that contribute to human health. There must be adequate production and marketing of nutritious, culturally acceptable and affordable foods to sustain our populations. And there must be a way of encouraging healthful consumption of foods – including healthier foods themselves – here and around the world.
- ADA believes that domestic farm programs can be improved so that they no longer reward short-sighted production and conservation practices. Domestic farm programs can be improved so that they do not distort production, marketing and trade. ADA members are experts in food, nutrition and health; experts in agriculture production and markets, economics, environment, social and other sciences can guide the formulation of new, more balanced policies for rural America and its agricultural base in the future.
- In summary, our farm policies need to be complemented with policies that improve food safety, environmental quality, resource conservation and protection, and seek the goal of feeding a growing population more healthily in the future.

And a cautionary word on bio-fuels

- With the emergence of commercial biofuels based on food and feed grains and oilseeds, consideration must be given to consumer impacts and interests. Policies need to factor in the impact of bio fuels on cropping patterns, the food supply, food prices and assistance, as well as the domestic and the global environment.