

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

Statement of Rajen Anand, Executive Director  
Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion  
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies

Thank you, Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2012. I am especially pleased to have the honor of explaining the work of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP), one of two agencies in the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) mission area.

CNPP serves as a recognized authority for providing evidence-based, scientific dietary guidance for the American public. With the Nation facing significant public health issues related to the quality of the American diet, particularly with regard to the need to reduce and prevent chronic disease risks, overweight, and obesity, the efforts of the Center are the key to promoting more healthful eating behavior and lifestyles across the Nation. The Center's functions, as part of FNCS are driven by a core commitment to improve the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links the most recent and evidence-based scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers. Thus, the Center has a critical role in how USDA meets its strategic objective to "promote healthy diet and physical activity behavior."

## **Improved Nutritional Well-Being and Healthful Lifestyles: Goal of Federal Nutrition Guidance and Education**

Recent studies indicate that obesity is a major public health problem among U.S. adults and children. America's dietary and physical activity behavior reveals disturbing trends. Since the mid-seventies, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. It is generally known that a combination of poor diet and sedentary lifestyle not only undermines quality of life and productivity, but also contributes to some of the preventable causes of death each year in the United States and a great deal of avoidable expense.

It is also known that overweight and obesity are contributing factors to problems associated with reduced quality of life. Evidence shows that not eating well and not being physically active have short- and long-term effects, including obesity, diabetes, certain types of cancer, and other diet-related chronic diseases. These diseases can have a devastating effect on productivity, lifestyle, healthcare, and lifespan.

Childhood obesity is associated with various health-related consequences. Overweight children and adolescents may experience immediate health consequences and may be at risk for weight-related health problems in adulthood. Overweight children and teens have been found to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and abnormal glucose tolerance. With Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) estimates indicating that annual obesity-related medical expenditures in the United States have reached \$147 billion, the health of

Americans is a serious and growing cost concern to the Federal government, government at all levels, and the private sector.

The lack of physical activity has been associated with a number of conditions, including diabetes, overweight and obesity, cardiovascular disease, and certain types of cancer. Supporting evidence indicates that less than one-third of adults and children are regularly physically active. On the other hand, children and teens are spending more hours using entertainment media, such as television, video games, computers, iPods, and MP3 players. By 2010, children and teens were spending over 7 and one-half hours using one entertainment medium on a typical day, an increase of more than an hour from their usage pattern in 2004.

USDA's development and implementation of Federal nutrition guidance—including the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the MyPyramid Food Guidance System—are critical in helping to stem and eventually reverse some of these disturbing trends. It is important for children and teens, especially, to adopt healthier eating behavior that is balanced with physical activity for about 60 minutes a day for overall health and fitness that will last their lifetime.

### **Administering the Process for the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans***

In January 2011, the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) released the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* -- the seventh edition -- a science-based blueprint for promoting good nutrition and health. The *Guidelines* are the

basis for setting the nutrition benefits for SNAP, the National School Lunch Program, WIC, and other nutrition assistance programs. Further, the *Guidelines* are the basis for dietary guidance and messages in nutrition education. The *Guidelines* provide advice for Americans, ages two years and older, about food choices that promote health and prevent disease, set standards for the nutrition assistance programs, guide nutrition research and education, and are the basis for USDA nutrition promotion activities. To promote the messages of the *Guidelines*, the CNPP uses on-line interactive tools, as well as a variety of print materials, to reach the general public and targeted audiences.

All nutrition assistance programs, a multiplicity of nutrition education and promotion programs Government-wide, as well as private sector nutrition education and promotion use the *Guidelines* as their focal point. This includes the education programs focused on promoting healthier eating behavior for the general population that CNPP administers as well as those administered by its sister agency, the Food and Nutrition Service, which focuses on serving two primary audiences: children and low-income populations. The DHHS has included the goals of increasing the consumption of nutrient dense foods and reducing the consumption of calories from solid fats and added sugars to its Healthy People 2020 objectives. Therefore, it is critical that the *Guidelines* be both scientifically up-to-date and in touch with the realities of contemporary living and what that means for the development and maintenance of a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. By statute, Congress requires that USDA and DHHS review the *Guidelines* at least every 5 years (see 7 U.S.C. 5341).

CNPP had the leadership role for USDA in administering the development of the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines*. USDA used strategies that included creating and implementing a new evidence-based system that was used by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) as it reviewed the most recent scientific literature. Historically, this Committee developed dietary recommendations by using a critical-review process to examine the literature that formed the basis of the science-based dietary recommendations. However, this process was not as rigorous as a system supported by a network of literature abstractors and an electronic framework, which is a more rigorous and transparent approach that is known as an “evidence-based review” system.

Over the past few decades, evidence-based systematic reviews have replaced expert opinion as the predominant basis for health-related treatment guidelines and policy. In response to this evolution, USDA, through CNPP’s efforts, established the Nutrition Evidence Library to specialize in conducting systematic evidence-based reviews to inform nutrition policy and programs. Use of the Nutrition Evidence Library ensures compliance with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 or *Data Quality Act*, which mandates that Federal agencies ensure the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information used to form Federal guidance.

The Nutrition Evidence Library also helped to ensure transparency. All of the evidence portfolios for each research question addressed by the 2010 Advisory Committee are posted on the Nutrition Evidence Library website. Therefore, the public has access to the Advisory Committee’s review of the scientific evidence used to support the

Committee's conclusions and recommendations submitted to the Secretaries of USDA and DHHS.

### **USDA Food Pyramid Encourages Healthful Eating Habits and Lifestyles**

The Food Pyramid is an educational system developed by USDA to translate the *Dietary Guidelines* into food-based recommendations and applications for the public. The broader MyPyramid Food Guidance System provides educational resources, messages, and personalized tips about nutrition and physical activity and extensive online interactive tools to promote healthy eating.

CNPP's interactive website—MyPyramid.gov—is devoted to promoting dietary guidance and educational materials that can help Americans improve their diet and become more physically active. Many Americans can dramatically improve their overall health by making modest improvements to their diets and by incorporating regular physical activity into their daily lives. MyPyramid helps people make healthy choices: It encourages flexibility in making choices to create a healthy eating pattern that meets nutrient needs and stays within calorie limits.

MyPyramid.gov has been extremely successful in reaching the public with scientifically based nutrition information. The public's use of MyPyramid tools has exceeded expectations and continues to increase. Visitors to MyPyramid.gov use a number of interactive, personalized tools, some of which are the following: MyPyramid Tracker, MyPyramid Plan, Inside MyPyramid, MyPyramid for Kids, MiPirámide (the

Spanish-language version), MyPyramid for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women, the MyPyramid Menu Planner, and My-Food-a-Pedia. As a result, MyPyramid.gov has had well over 12 billion hits, mostly from general consumers, students, educators, and health professionals. Such a response makes it one of the most visited government websites.

Being responsive to addressing the nutrition education needs of Americans and ensuring that the MyPyramid Food Guidance System provides up-to-date information based on the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* requires IT platform-based development and continual enhancements. CNPP is making the necessary changes resulting from the recommendations by the 2010 Advisory Committee and the policy document produced by the USDA and the DHHS to change its educational system used to translate the *Dietary Guidelines*. CNPP is also preparing a comprehensive campaign to communicate nutrition messages to different segments of the U.S. population. In addition, CNPP continues to support the Administration's and Department's initiatives, such as Let's Move; The People's Garden; and Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food.

### **USDA Food Plans – Eating Healthy at Minimal Cost**

USDA issues four Food Plans—the Thrifty, Low-Cost, Moderate-Cost, and Liberal Food Plans—that show people how to eat a healthy diet at various cost levels. The Thrifty Food Plan represents a minimal cost, nutritious diet; whereas, the other plans represent a nutritious diet at the second (Low-Cost Plan), third (Moderate-Cost Plan), and upper (Liberal Plan) quartiles of food spending. Each plan contains a set of market baskets, applicable to one of 15 age-gender groups; because, different groups have different

nutritional needs. Each market basket contains a selection of foods in quantities that reflect current dietary recommendations, food composition data, food prices, and actual consumption patterns.

The Thrifty Food Plan serves as the basis for maximum SNAP allotments. Often, the value of the Low-Cost Plan is used in bankruptcy courts to determine the portion of a person's income to allocate to necessary food expenses. The value of the Liberal Food Plan is used by the Department of Defense to determine the Basic Allowance for Subsistence (food allowance) rates for all service members because, they require a higher caloric level as they are undergoing basic training. The Low-Cost, Moderate-Cost, and Liberal Food Plans are used in USDA's *Expenditures on Children by Families* report, which is used to set State child support guidelines and foster care payments, and many divorce courts use the values of the USDA Food Plans to set alimony payments.

### **USDA's Healthy Eating Index -- Measuring the Quality of the American Diet**

The USDA Healthy Eating Index (HEI) is a dietary assessment tool that measures quality in terms of conformance to the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the USDA Food Patterns. The original HEI was created by USDA in 1995 and revised in 2005 to reflect the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The HEI-2005 is used for population monitoring, to inform development of nutrition education programs, for evaluation of nutrition interventions, and in research. As a research tool, the HEI has been used to assess the quality of Americans' diet and determine trends over time, measure the association between diet quality and health-related outcomes, determine factors that

influence diet quality, evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition programs, and evaluate the quality of food environments. The HEI will be updated for launch in 2012 to be consistent with the recommendations of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

The President's budget for 2012 requests \$12.9 million for CNPP, of which \$9 million is requested to provide core nutrition education and research activities, including, the Nutrition Evidence Library (\$1,000,000); *2010 Dietary Guidelines* implementation (\$2,000,000); MyPyramid Enhancements (\$4,000,000); and Nutrition Education (\$2,000,000). This budget would allow USDA to prepare for and complete the tasks associated with the research work of the Nutrition Evidence Library, the promotion of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and the enhancements to the *Dietary Guidelines*-based educational tools, specifically updating internet-based interactive tools and educational toolkits and updating USDA projects that incorporate the *Dietary Guidelines* as a standard for diet quality.

In 2012, the focus on dietary guidance will be implementation of a robust operation for communicating messages to the public and delivery of effective nutrition education to various population groups, especially schoolchildren. CNPP will be at the focal point of the research on the consumer- and health professional-tested, understandable and actionable nutrition guidance messages used by all of its Federal partners. The Center is building cutting-edge systems designed to foster behavioral changes toward positive dietary practices and active lifestyles, as well as increase the distribution of materials, to help reduce the obesity epidemic, reduce incidences of diet-related chronic diseases, through prevention-focused interventions, and improve the overall health of Americans.

The Center will implement systematic evidence-based reviews of research on obesity and nutrition education interventions to determine the most effective communication strategies, the most effective classroom and community-based instructional designs, and the best methods of measuring the success of such interventions in terms of knowledge attainment as well as behavioral changes. Also, CNPP will continue evidence-based reviews that answer specific policy questions to provide an evidence base for food, nutrition, and nutrition education practice decisions.

Specifically these funds will allow CNPP to (1) continue implementing the scientific evidence-based approach to nutrition guidance, (2) promote and communicate the messages of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to ensure that nutrition education has the greatest impact on diet quality, (3) perform evidence-based systematic review of nutrition education research to guide effective nutrition education interventions in schools and communities, and (4) build and maintain educational tools and systems that Americans can use to adopt behavior that leads to more healthful eating and active lifestyles. Additionally, these funds will be used to update USDA Food Plans and the USDA Healthy Eating Index, each of which must capture new aspects of diet quality identified in the recommendations of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.

The funding requested will help CNPP make a significant contribution to USDA's goal to help Americans in general and children in particular develop eating behavior that is more consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. CNPP will use foundational work in education, research, policy development, and promotion to build cutting-edge systems that will result in positive consumer behavior that can help reduce the obesity

epidemic, reduce incidences of diet-related chronic diseases, and improve the overall health of Americans.

With the support of the House Committee on Appropriations, we look forward to continuing to work toward improving the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links the best scientific research to the nutrition needs of all consumers. With this support, we will build and better promote personalized and individualized nutrition guidance tools that reach millions of Americans. Your support will help set the foundation for future development of nutrition policy that is vital to addressing the growing problems associated with overweight and obesity and the related health challenges in America.

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