

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

**Statement of Rajen Anand, Executive Director
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Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

Thank you, Chairman Kingston, Ranking Member Farr and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2013. I am especially pleased to have the honor of explaining the work of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, one of two agencies in the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services mission area.

The Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion 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 diet-related chronic disease risks, overweight, and obesity, I believe that the efforts of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion are the key to promoting more healthful eating habits and lifestyles across the Nation. The Center's functions, as part of the USDA's Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services mission area, 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 behaviors."

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

Recent studies report that obesity is a major public health problem among U.S. adults and children. America's dietary and physical activity behaviors reveal 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.

Childhood overweight 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. They have been found to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol level, high blood pressure, and abnormal glucose tolerance. With 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 concern that must be addressed both for America's well-being and for its fiscal health.

Obesity and overweight have an impact on direct medical expenditures for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment; The most recent data (1999-2010) show that 16.9 percent of U.S. children and adolescents are obese and 68.8 percent of U.S. adults are either overweight or obese. All considered, overweight and obesity are "weighing down" multiple systems, and millions of Americans—including children—must deal with the short- and long-term consequences of this national public health problem.

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 (31 percent) of adults are regularly physically active. By age 15, less than one third (31 percent) of children meet physical activity recommendations during weekdays. On the other hand, children and teens are spending more hours using entertainment media, such as television, video games, computers, and portable media 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 ChooseMyPlate.gov, which outline the building blocks of a healthy diet, and also recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days for the general population—are critical in helping to stem and eventually reverse some of these disturbing public health trends. It is important for children and teens, especially, to adopt more healthful eating behaviors that are balanced with physical activity for about 60 minutes a day for overall health and fitness that will last their lifetime.

Implementing the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

In January 2011, the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the seventh edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*, a science-based blueprint for promoting good nutrition and health. The *Guidelines* are the basis for Federal policy development in government nutrition programs and serve as the basis for dietary guidance and messages in nutrition education and public outreach. The *Guidelines*

provide advice for Americans, aged 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 Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion uses on-line interactive tools at ChooseMyPlate.gov, 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 programs focused on promoting more healthful eating behavior for the general population that the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion 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.

To support the development of the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines*, USDA implemented 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 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 (www.nel.gov). 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 Agriculture and HHS Secretaries.

USDA and HHS have committed to using the NEL to support the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee. The Nutrition Evidence Library staff has begun comprehensive monitoring of food and nutrition literature to support this important effort.

USDA's MyPlate Icon and ChooseMyPlate Encourage Healthful Eating Habits and Lifestyles

While the MyPlate icon is a reminder to eat healthfully, ChooseMyPlate.gov is a web platform developed by USDA to translate the *Dietary Guidelines* into food-based recommendations and applications for the public. ChooseMyPlate.gov provides educational resources, messages, and personalized tips about nutrition and physical activity and extensive online interactive tools to promote healthy eating and a physically active lifestyle.

The USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion's interactive website—ChooseMyPlate.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 significantly improve their overall health by making modest improvements to their diet and by incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

ChooseMyPlate.gov helps people make those healthful choices: The Dietary Guidelines implemented at the website encourage flexibility in making choices to create a healthful eating pattern that meets nutrient needs and stays within calorie limits.

ChooseMyPlate.gov has been extremely successful in reaching the public with scientifically based nutrition information. Since its launch in the fall of 2011, there have been millions of visitors at the website and there are hundreds of thousands of registered users of its personalized, interactive dietary assessment and planning tools. In fact, the number of new registered users of the tools has been about 6000 each day since December 2011. It is popular because visitors to ChooseMyPlate.gov have access to a wide variety of information and e-tools tailored to their needs and goals. Examples include the following: the new SuperTracker e-tool; the Blast-off Game for kids; information on healthy eating on a budget, 10-Tips Nutrition Education series, and sample menus and recipes; information about the strategic and community partnering program; and information for consumers and professionals. The SuperTracker, USDA's state-of-the art e-tool that was released in December 2011, is a comprehensive resource designed to help people make changes to their diet and physical activity. USDA believes that overcoming the health and nutrition challenges we face as a Nation is critical and that the SuperTracker provides consumers with an assortment of tools to help our Nation overcome those challenges. From the

responses received, ChooseMyPlate.gov appears to be on track to become one of the most visited government websites.

Being responsive to addressing the nutrition information needs of Americans and ensuring that ChooseMyPlate.gov provides up-to-date information based on the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* requires efficient IT platform-based development and continual enhancements to serve the general population and specific audiences. Providing information to meet the nutrition needs of consumers requires multi-modal approaches that reflect the Department's goal of transforming how we conduct business and continually improve our processes.

USDA Food Plans Provides Model of a Healthful Diet 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 healthful 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 allotments for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). 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, who require a higher caloric level when 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.

To help all consumers choose a diet that conforms to the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, CNPP recently introduced a 7-day menu plan. Averaged over a week, this menu provides food choices that meet the recommended amount of key nutrients. Based on national average food costs, adjusted to 2011 prices, the cost of this menu is less than the average amount spent for food, per person, for a 4-person family.

President's Budget Request for 2013

The President's Budget requests \$8.7 million for the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. During 2013, we will continue to implement a robust operation for communicating messages to the public at large and effective nutrition information to various subpopulations, 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 and many private sector partners. CNPP is maintaining and enhancing cutting-edge web-based systems designed to empower consumers with the best science-based advice to foster behavioral changes toward positive dietary practices and active lifestyle. CNPP will increase the distribution of educational 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. CNPP 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. CNPP will also continue evidence-based reviews that answer specific policy questions to provide an evidence base for food, nutrition, and nutrition education practice decisions.

Specifically, the requested funds will allow CNPP to (1) continue supporting nutrition guidance with scientific evidence-based up-to-date research, (2) implement the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to ensure that nutrition education has the greatest impact on diet quality, (3) engage in preparatory work for developing dietary advice for individuals from birth to two years of age, (4) continue to perform evidence-based systematic review of nutrition education research to guide effective nutrition education interventions in schools and communities and in preparation for the 2015 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and (5) continue to build, maintain, and evaluate educational tools and systems that Americans can use to apply the *Dietary Guidelines*, plan and assess eating patterns, and adopt behavior that leads to a more healthful eating and active lifestyle.

With the support of the Subcommittee, 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.