Nutraceuticals World

# Making a Case for Dairy

## Dairy Research Institute calls for milk product industry to present dairy's total nutrient package as a key point of difference.

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With cow's milk products continuing to compete against the ever encroaching market for dairy alternatives like soy and almond milk products, the Rosemont, IL-based Dairy Research Institute has issued a call for milk product marketers to leverage dairy's unique nutrient-rich content as part of a quality, healthful diet.

Gregory Miller, PhD, president of the Dairy Research Institute said that conveying the sum total of milk's nutritional value will be an important priority as it relates to boosting dairy's competitive edge in the marketplace.

"Dairy provides a unique combination of nutrients not naturally found in other food or beverage choices, and each serving helps meet important nutrient recommendations at every stage of life," he said. "Over the last couple of decades, nutrition guidance has mostly centered on telling consumers what to avoid—sodium, certain fats, added sugars—and I think turning the paradigm toward choosing nutrient-rich foods rather than nutrient avoidance is a critical step toward improving the quality of the American diet."

To underscore his comment, Dr. Miller pointed to a study that was recently published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* that examined the nutrient contribution and affordability of milk and milk products. The study, funded in part by the National Institutes of Health, found that despite their low energy contribution (10–13% of energy), milk and milk products contributed 47% of calcium, 42% of retinol and 65% of vitamin D to the diets of children and adults." Milk and milk products were also among the top sources of riboflavin, phosphorous, and vitamin B12. Cost analyses determined milk and milk products to be the lowest-cost source of dietary calcium and were among the lowest-cost sources of riboflavin and vitamin B12.

Getting the word out will hinge on educational initiatives. According to the Dairy Research Institute, nutrition advice in recent years has focused on avoiding certain foods and nutrients, yet the diet quality of Americans has not improved. "Most consumers are looking for simple, practical ways to help get more nutrients for their calories," the group said. "Research has found

that educating consumers about the nutrient-rich foods (NRF) approach to eating is a feasible and effective way to promote healthful shopping and eating patterns and improve diet quality."

In a recent study funded by the Dairy Research Institute, a group of U.S. adults took part in a randomized controlled trial to examine the effect of nutrition education based on an index of nutrient density on dietary quality and food purchasing behavior. The study, published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, found that positive nutrition education to help participants identify and choose nutrient-rich foods led to increased intakes of key food categories, including milk (with tendencies toward low-fat and fat-free), low-fat yogurt, fruits and whole grains, and decreased intakes of total fat and saturated fat, and improved overall diet quality. This approach to building healthier dietary patterns, the Institute asserted, is consistent with dietary goals outlined in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

What's more, food choices play a critical role in meeting nutrient needs. As a growing number of consumers turn to alternatives to traditional dairy, the Institute said trying to replace dairy foods with other food sources of calcium can result in "nutrient shortfalls." Another study sponsored by the Dairy Research Institute and published in *Nutrition Research* used food pattern modeling and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveyand found that removing dairy from the diet with the intent of using nondairy substitutions in order to replace calcium, can result in lower amounts of several nutrients like protein, phosphorous, riboflavin, zinc and vitamin B12.

"In reality, nondairy alternatives are not a nutritionally equivalent substitute for dairy foods," said Erin Quann, PhD, RD, a co-author on the published review and director of regulatory affairs for Dairy Research Institute. "Similar to the conclusion made by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, our study showed that substituting dairy with other sources of calcium like fortified soy beverage, fortified orange juice, leafy greens and bony fish, can be unrealistic substitutions, since some of these foods are rarely consumed and in some cases a large amount would be required to get the same nutrients provided by dairy foods."

For more information about the dairy research endeavors of the Dairy Research Institute, click this link.