

Dairy Research Institute Calls on Change in Paradigm on Dietary Guidance

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Summary: Better understanding the value of nutrient-rich dairy foods is a key priority area for the Dairy Research Institute, an organization that, along with other sponsors, is funded by America's dairy farmers through the dairy checkoff program.

Jan 13 2012 --- New studies underscore the importance of considering a food's total nutrient package when helping consumers identify and choose nutrient-rich foods to improve the quality of their diet. The dairy industry is well positioned to leverage the unique nutrient-rich content of dairy as part of a quality, healthful diet, according to the Dairy Research Institute, an organization established under the leadership of America's dairy farmers with a commitment to nutrition, product and sustainability research. Better understanding the value of nutrient-rich dairy foods is a key priority area for the Dairy Research Institute, an organization that, along with other sponsors, is funded by America's dairy farmers through the dairy checkoff program.

“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,” said Gregory Miller, Ph.D., president of the Dairy Research Institute. “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.”

Recent research on the nutrient contribution and affordability of milk and milk products, funded in part by the National Institutes of Health, confirms that dairy is a nutrient-rich source of protein, potassium, riboflavin, zinc, phosphorous and vitamin D and a primary source of calcium in the American diet. Further, cost analyses in the research showed that milk and milk products were by far the lowest-cost source of dietary calcium and were among the lowest-cost sources of riboflavin and vitamin B12.

Nutrition advice in recent years has focused on avoiding certain foods and nutrients, but the diet

quality of Americans has not improved. Most consumers are looking for simple, practical ways to help get more nutrients for their calories. 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 one recent study funded by the Dairy Research Institute, a group of U.S. adults was studied 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 is consistent with dietary goals outlined in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Food choices play a critical role in meeting nutrient needs. Authors of a new study, sponsored by the Dairy Research Institute, that used food pattern modeling and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, published in Nutrition Research, 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, Ph.D., R.D., a co-author on the published review and director, 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.”