

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, Madam Chairwoman and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2011. I am especially pleased to have the honor of explaining the work of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (The Center), one of two agencies in the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services mission area.

The Center was established to serve 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, I believe that the outcome-based efforts of the Center are pivotal to promoting more healthful eating behavior and lifestyles across the Nation. The Center's functions, as part of the 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. In doing so, 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 status reveals disturbing trends. Since the mid-seventies, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. Today, 16.9 percent of U.S. children, aged 2 to 19 years, are obese and 31.7 percent are overweight. 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.

It is also generally 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. This generation, it is believed, is potentially at risk of having a shorter life span than will their parents if we do nothing about preventing chronic diseases in children.

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. 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 estimates indicating that 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.

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. USDA's development and implementation of Federal nutrition guidance—including the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the MyPyramid Food Guidance System that 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 trends. It is important for children and teens, especially, to adopt a 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 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*

In January 2005, the USDA and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), with the collaboration of the Center, released the sixth edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 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. 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's nutrition promotion activities. To promote the messages of the *Guidelines*, the Center 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 the Center administers, as well as those administered by its sister agency, the Food and Nutrition Service, that focuses on serving children and low-income populations, its primary target audiences. Therefore, it is critical that the *Guidelines* be both scientifically up-to-date and in touch with the realities of contemporary living. Congress has mandated, in Public Law 101-445, that USDA and DHHS review the *Guidelines* at least every five years. Both Departments alternate administrative leadership of this review.

The Center has assumed the leadership role for USDA in administering the development of the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines*. To lead the interagency coordination, USDA is using strategies that include creating and implementing a new evidence-based system that is being used by the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) as its members review the most recent scientific literature. Historically, this Advisory Committee has developed dietary

recommendations by using a critical-review process to examine the literature that formed the basis of the science-based dietary recommendations. The 2005 Advisory Committee used a modified “evidence-based review” approach that increased the rigor and transparency of the literature examination. However, it 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 2008, in response to this evolution, USDA, through the Center’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.

Therefore, for the 2010 Advisory Committee, the Center is using an electronic Nutrition Evidence Library to ensure that Federal nutrition guidance is based on the preponderance of the scientific literature. During the development of the recommendations for the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the Advisory Committee reviewed the science to answer 35 major questions about the weight of the evidence in areas, such as the effects of carbohydrates on diet and health, and the effects of saturated fats on obesity. During the current deliberations, because of the support of the Nutrition Evidence Library, the 2010 Advisory Committee is reviewing the

science to answer over 170 questions, about 5 times as many as before. The dependence on evidence-based reviews has improved the degree of thoroughness of the Advisory Committee's work.

The use of the Nutrition Evidence Library will strengthen policymakers', opinion leaders', and the general public's confidence in the dietary guidance developed by the Federal Government. Moreover, by weighing the preponderance of evidence on a wider array of relationships between nutrition and health, USDA will be in a better position to recommend dietary guidance that positively affects behavioral changes among Americans in the general population and subpopulations.

MyPyramid Encourages Healthful Eating Habits and Lifestyles

The Center's interactive Web site—MyPyramid.gov—is devoted to promoting dietary guidance and educational materials that can help Americans improve their diet and become more physically active. When the Department released MyPyramid, the focus was on its ability to help Americans personalize their approach to choosing a healthier lifestyle that balances nutrition and exercise, as well as its ability to help Americans improve their overall health significantly by making modest improvements to their diet and by incorporating regular physical activity into their daily lives. MyPyramid, the educational tool that translates the recommendations of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, continues to be a significant means of helping Americans take “Steps to a Healthier You.”

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 including: 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 the recently added My-Food-a-Pedia. As a result, MyPyramid.gov has had over 12.5 billion hits, mostly from general consumers, students, educators, and health professionals. Such a response makes it one of the most popular government Web sites. Nationwide survey results show that MyPyramid.gov has both the highest overall customer satisfaction score, as well as the highest rating for government transparency. That being said, it is a priority for USDA to improve the accessibility of the information that is provided through MyPyramid.gov to make sure that the messages we are sending the public are ones that are simple and easy for them to adapt into making changes in their families' diets.

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 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* require continual enhancements. The Center must, therefore, plan for changes to MyPyramid.gov and the educational information posted there. The Center is planning for the necessary changes resulting from the recommendations by the 2010 Advisory Committee and the policy document produced by the USDA and DHHS. The Center must also prepare a comprehensive campaign to communicate nutrition messages to different segments of the U.S. population. In addition, the Center must remain prepared to support the Department's initiatives, such as The People's Garden and Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food.

The President's budget requests \$16 million for the Center, an increase of \$9 million from the previous year. This budget would allow USDA to prepare for and complete the tasks associated with the research work of the Nutrition Evidence Library, the implementation of the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and the enhancements to the MyPyramid Food Guidance System, specifically updating the MyPyramid.gov Web site and educational toolkits.

In 2011, the focus on dietary guidance will transition to a robust operation for communicating messages to the public and delivery of effective nutrition education to various population groups, especially schoolchildren. The Center 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. To employ these messages, 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. In addition, 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. Specifically, these funds will allow the Center to (1) continue implementing the scientific evidence-based approach to nutrition guidance, (2) promote 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.

The funding requested will help the Center to make a significant contribution to USDA's goal to help Americans in general and children in particular develop eating patterns that are more consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. The Center will use foundational work in 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 Committee, 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—such as those at MyPyramid.gov as well as new, simpler tools that we expect to develop—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 am very grateful to the Subcommittee for the opportunity to present this written testimony.