

Nutrition Innovation Strategy Public Meeting

Opening Remarks

Remarks by Susan Mayne, Ph.D.
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Thank you Dr. Gottlieb for your informative opening remarks and a special thanks for addressing standards of identity.

We're here today to begin an important dialogue on the new elements of our Nutrition Innovation Strategy. Public engagement is critical to the success of this initiative, and today's public meeting is an important part of that effort. But the opportunity for input doesn't end today. We have established a docket to receive comments, and we are committed to continuing public engagement as we further develop and fine-tune our Nutrition Innovation Strategy.

As Dr. Gottlieb said, the Nutrition Innovation Strategy provides us with a tremendous opportunity to take a fresh look at what can be done to reduce preventable death and disease related to poor nutrition.

Today, chronic diseases are the leading causes of death and disability in the U.S. We need to reduce the burden of chronic disease stemming from poor nutrition, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers. The prevalence of obesity in adults increased from 33.7 percent in 2007-2008 to 39.6 percent in 2015-2016, and it increased in children from 16.8 percent to 18.5 percent over that same time period. Chronic diseases and obesity-related conditions raise health care costs, reduce productivity and shorten lifespans. It's also important to recognize that disparities in diet and nutrition are exacerbating disparities in health, and contributing to growing gaps in our society – including those related to longevity.

I'd like to take a few minutes to provide a bit more detail about two of the three new elements of our Nutrition Innovation Strategy and about our Nutrition Facts Label educational campaign.

Modernizing Label Claims

Modernizing labeling claims is a key element of our Nutrition Innovation Strategy. We know that claims are quick signals that provide consumers with important information about the nutritional benefits of the foods and beverages they choose. We also know they can provide incentives for industry to innovate and offer products with more healthful attributes. It's time to reexamine claims to make sure they are still relevant and aligned with current science and that they foster innovation as well. So today, we will be asking you questions such as:

- How and why do manufacturers choose to use claims on food packages?

- How do claims, and what types of claims, best stimulate innovation by the food industry to create products with better health attributes?
- What types of claims and other information are most helpful to consumers in selecting healthful foods?

We also will explore the concept of a standard icon or symbol for the word “healthy.” We will not be discussing the definition for healthy, because FDA has already held a public meeting on that issue. We are reviewing comments and developing a proposed rule.

Modernizing Ingredient Labels

Modernizing ingredient labels is another part of the Nutrition Innovation Strategy. We will discuss possible changes that could make ingredient information more consumer friendly. One aspect is readability of the ingredient information. Another is whether simpler alternative names can be used for certain ingredients.

- We will ask for input on whether there are particular features of the ingredient label that could be improved to enhance consumer comprehension.
- Also, what changes could be made to increase clarity, and better support consumers who want to make more informed decisions about the nutritional attributes of the products they are considering purchasing?

Nutrition Facts Label consumer educational campaign

We will also discuss our new educational campaign for consumers on the Nutrition Facts label. We know you are likely already seeing the new label when you buy packaged food. About 30,000 products in the marketplace are now carrying the revised Nutrition Facts panel.

Educating consumers is a big part of making information on nutrition more relevant and usable. We will be using a variety of tools to help consumers understand how the choices they make impact their health and the health of their families.

Our efforts will focus on areas where we recognize that there are gaps in consumer understanding and the use of nutrition information. We can't do all of this alone. We are very interested in working with groups that educate consumers—especially those consumers who are at greatest risk for chronic diseases related to nutrition. During our breakout session, we will be asking about any educational partnerships you have been involved with, what has worked and what hasn't. Your experience will help guide us as we move forward with our campaign.

Closing

I join the Commissioner in thanking you for giving us your time and collective thinking today. Meetings such as this one are incredibly valuable in enabling us to hear the broad array of thinking on various topics.

I want to remind you that while this meeting is focusing on the new elements of the Nutrition Innovation Strategy, we've also held public meetings on other aspects of the strategy. I

mentioned that we held a meeting on the definition for “healthy,” and we also have held a public meeting on sodium. All of the information we receive, in total, will be considered.

Thank you again for participating today.