

A Dietary Assessment of the U.S. Food Supply: Comparing Per Capita Food Consumption with Food Guide Pyramid Serving Recommendations.

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Abstract

Most American diets do not meet Federal Food Guide Pyramid dietary recommendations. On average, people consume too many servings of added fats and sugars and too few servings of fruits, vegetables, dairy products, lean meats, and foods made from whole grains compared with a reference set of Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations appropriate to the age and gender composition of the U.S. population. In addition, while the healthfulness of diets has improved over time, the pace of improvement has been uneven. For example, while Americans consumed record amounts of fruits and vegetables in 1996, consumption of caloric sweeteners also reached a 27-year high. This report is the first dietary assessment to use ERS's time-series food supply data to compare average diets with Federal dietary recommendations depicted in the Food Guide Pyramid. Food Guide Pyramid servings were estimated for more than 250 agricultural commodities for 1970-96. New techniques were developed to adjust the data for food spoilage and other losses accumulated throughout the marketing system and the home.

Keywords: Food, food consumption, CSFII, Food Guide Pyramid, Dietary Guidelines for Americans

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Summary

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Information on how diets differ from Federal dietary recommendations is key to Federal efforts to monitor the dietary and nutritional status of the population under the Ten-Year Comprehensive Plan for National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Program mandated by the National Nutrition and Related Research Act of 1990.

This study contributes to the existing dietary assessment literature by providing researchers and policymakers with the ability to measure changes in food consumption behavior over time relative to major nutrition education or policy initiatives. Also, because the servings estimates reported here are derived from consumption data for raw and semi-processed agricultural commodities, rather than for final food products, food servings can be readily converted back to farm-level data, easing the translation of dietary recommendations into production and supply goals for farmers and the food industry. Finally, the time-series estimates reported here can be used as a baseline to project future trends in food demand and for comparing these trends against Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations.

The data are also useful for helping researchers better understand the differences and similarities between the food supply data and USDA's Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII), which measures food products actually eaten by individuals. The servings estimates provided in this report allow researchers, for the first time, to compare the amount and types of food available in the food supply with information on actual food intakes by Americans.