



By Eric F. Greenberg, Attorney-at-law

Let Science Inform Label Guidance Changes

Most consumers have seen the nutritional claims on food package labels like “low fat” and “high fiber,” plus the distinctive Nutrition Facts box. But few know what’s behind that label content, both in terms of law and consumer demands. A big driver of what shows up on those labels is a less known but remarkably influential document called the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA). This document gets updated every five years, and at press time the new edition for 2025-2030 was imminent.



Because they are both little-known and highly influential, I thought it would be interesting to study the new DGA both before, and after, the new edition emerges.

To help us with today’s “before” discussion, I enlisted an expert, my old friend Dr. Robert Post. He has been, as they say, in the room where it happened. Among his credentials is that he was a senior executive and appointed government official leading federal public health regulatory programs and nutrition policy agencies, which included the DGA development process for several editions of the policy. As a policy advisor to the White House, he also adapted the food pyramid to create MyPlate(.gov), which was the system to implement the DGA in 2011. Post is now the CEO of a food and nutrition regulatory and policy affairs consulting firm, **FoodTriton Solutions, LLC**.

Since its start in the 1980s, the DGA has been like a large stone causing ripples in the federal policy pool. Post says they influence the design of USDA’s national school meal programs and the other 15 food assistance programs, nutrition standards for military meals and rations, and the recommendations of health organizations and healthcare professionals, health and nutrition educators, and nutrition influencers. In turn, they also cause ripples in the food marketing and packaging pools, too.

“The DGA serve as a significant catalyst for innovation in the food sector to meet the demands of health professionals, customers, and consumers who want to follow the latest DGA recommendations,” Post says.

After past DGA editions have appeared, manufacturers have reformulated products to reduce sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fats. We also saw more whole grain food products, lower-sugar foods and beverages, and lower-sodium foods. Post adds, “When the DGA pushed for clearer labeling, companies provided more detailed nutritional

and ingredient information on packaging. The Guidelines also promote stricter standards for health claims on packaging to ensure that products align with the guidelines, enhancing consumer trust.”

The process of generating the DGA is “one that is scientifically robust, authoritative, and transparent,” Post says. “The DGA policy is formed jointly by federal nutrition agencies at the USDA and HHS based on the recommendations in a scientific report of an external expert committee—the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC)—that meets over a two-year period to assess the latest high-quality research to address the prevailing dietary health concerns.”

If the upcoming DGA document is developed as in the past, he predicts it’ll reflect the DGAC committee’s conclusions. But Robert Kennedy, the Secretary of HHS, has hinted that the new guidelines will be much shorter than past editions. Since 2000, each edition of the DGA has been longer and more comprehensive. The 2020 DGA is 164 pages.

“Therefore,” Post observes, “if the federal agencies are planning a short brochure-type of policy document, it wouldn’t be a new thing.” But he still hopes it’s consistent with the DGAC scientific report and puts science first.

As for what the substance of the new DGA will contain, Post says it “should emphasize healthy dietary patterns relevant to life-stage that promote intakes of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, low-fat dairy foods, and lean protein foods; reduce the intake of added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium in daily diets; encourage the consumption of lean proteins, including seafood, poultry, and plant-based sources; advocate for limiting foods and beverages high in calories but low in nutrients, and not unfairly define all ‘processed’

foods in a pejorative way; support policies that promote food equity and access to healthy foods in underserved communities; and highlight the importance of physical activity as part of a holistic approach to health and nutrition.”

And what about the widely anticipated government definition of “ultraprocessed” foods? How would that fit into the DGA’s development? “My sense is that there are some differing views between the current HHS leadership and the 2025 DGAC on the conclusions drawn from the scientific review to base the 2025-2030 DGA recommendations” in several areas. “Some of the concerns stressed in the MAHA strategy need more research to make definitive relationships and recommendations.”

When we next address the DGA in this column, it will be after the new DGA recommendations appear, and we can compare the reality to these hopes and predictions. **PW**

Nutrition Facts	
1 serving per container	
Serving size 1 Package (453g)	
Amount per serving	% Daily Value*
Calories 580	
Total Fat 28g	36%
Saturated Fat 14g	70%
Trans Fat 1.5g	
Cholesterol 90mg	30%
Sodium 1660mg	72%
Total Carbohydrate 47g	17%
Dietary Fiber 3g	11%
Total Sugars 7g	
Includes <1g Added Sugars	2%
Protein 36g	67%
Vitamin D 0.1mcg	0%
Calcium 340mg	25%
Iron 3.2mg	20%
Potassium 1200mg	25%

*The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.

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