

February 16, 2023

Dockets Management Staff (HFA-305)
Food and Drug Administration
5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061
Rockville, MD 20852

Re: Food Labeling: Nutrient Content Claims; Definition of Term “Healthy” (Docket No. FDA-2016-D-2335).

Dockets Management Staff,

The National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Food Labeling: Nutrient Content Claims; Definition of Term “Healthy.” NPPC is the global voice for the U.S. pork industry and consists of 43 affiliated state organizations representing America’s 66,000 pork producers who produce a demonstrably safe, wholesome, and nutritious product that is appreciated on American and international tables.

The term “healthy” was first established as a nutrient content claim in 1994. The proposed rule focuses on improving the health of Americans through nutrition by updating the “healthy” label. This label is intended to help consumers make decisions on food products that are intended to help maintain healthy dietary practices. Protein is an essential nutrient in a person’s diet, and pork is a wholesome protein that complements the consumers’ diet. As the voice of pork farmers, NPPC supports updating the “healthy” label to be consistent with current nutrition science. With this update, however, NPPC questions how often the label will have to be updated, the use of restrictive nutrients, and the changes in consumer behavior as it relates to a daily diet.

Label Update in Accordance with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

The proposed definition of the term “healthy” is to be consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines are to serve as diet and nutrition advice for Americans that will promote healthy living and reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Although these guidelines are a great source of information for nutrition, they must be updated every five years by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS). This leads to the assumption that the definition of “healthy” could also have to be updated every five years since it will be based on these guidelines. NPPC is concerned that the definition of “healthy” could be changed every five years, resulting in products having to be continually reevaluated to maintain their nutritive values in the stated guidelines of the “healthy” definition.

Use of Restrictive Nutrients vs. Positive Nutrients

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are designed to provide guidance to consumers, policymakers, and the medical profession. These guidelines, however, tend to focus on restricting certain nutrients versus an approach based on using a positive nutrient diet. Restricting nutrients can have a negative impact by unintentionally having

consumers avoid certain products that would otherwise serve in a healthy diet. For example, the increase in fat content in single foods acknowledges that protein foods have fat that is naturally occurring, and therefore consumers should not avoid these products due to fat content. Salmon is a prime example of a product that was excluded from being labeled “healthy” due to the use of restricting nutrients, as its natural fat content exceeds the standard. By using the positive nutrient approach, products that are nutrient-dense will be included in “healthy” and used by consumers to help support a healthy dietary pattern.

Changes in Consumers

In the past, it was assumed that the average American consumer would eat three meals and one snack per day. This would mean the consumer would have four opportunities to meet daily dietary needs. Daily nutrition recommendations are typically calculated based on the four opportunities originally thought that consumers would have to meet these requirements. However, the average American has changed their daily consumption drastically over the years, and consumption patterns are continually evolving. For example, more Americans are incorporating products such as “ready to eat” meals, meal preparation kits and services, and quick food options. NPPC encourages the FDA to consider the changes in eating patterns of Americans and new innovative products that will help encourage healthy diets.

Conclusion

Almost 30 years of science and research in nutrition have accumulated since the original definition of “healthy” was proposed. As such, NPPC supports the FDA’s proposal to update the definition of “healthy.” However, NPPC also encourages the FDA to consider the impacts of updating the term every five years in accordance with the Dietary Guidelines of Americans, the unintended consequences of utilizing restrictive nutrients, and the ever-changing behavior of consumers. The pork industry is committed to producing a safe and wholesome protein product for consumers in the United States and globally. NPPC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed food labeling: nutrient content claims; definition of the term “healthy,” and we look forward to working with the FDA and other stakeholders to ensure that the pork industry continues to produce safe, wholesome, and a nutritious protein for America and the world.

Sincerely,



Dr. Ashley Johnson
Director of Food Policy
National Pork Producers Council