TRENDS



FOOD AND NUTRITION TRENDS FOR EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

2025



Dairy Council of California is a leading nutrition organization working in collaboration to elevate the health of children and communities through fostering lifelong healthy eating patterns. Focusing on education and advocacy, dairy agricultural literacy and partnerships, we advance the health benefits of milk and dairy foods in achieving nutrition security and sustainable food systems.

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EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

DAIRY AGRICULTURAL
LITERACY AND
PARTNERSHIPS





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FOREWORD

Leadership:

Embracing Diverse Perspectives in the Workforce

The U.S. population is more diverse than ever before. The 2020 census showed people of color represent 43% of the total U.S. population, and the share of those who identify as Hispanic, Latino or multiracial grew the most. Further, more than half of young Californians identify as Latino.¹

Diversity, equity, inclusion and access (DEIA), which has been a focus across businesses and organizations for several years, has political implications. As of November 2024, more than 30 bills in the United States are targeting DEIA funding, practices and promotion in schools; at the same time, at least 22 states are rolling back or banning DEIA measures at state university systems.2 In January 2025, an executive order was signed to end DEIA programs in the federal government and encourage other workplaces to follow suit. According to a 2023 PEW Research study, 56% of U.S. workers felt DEIA was a good thing at work, yet only about 30% of all workers reported that it was very important to have diverse employees at their workplace.³ Among demographic groups, women and Black employees value working in diverse workplaces the most. Across sectors, it is important for leaders to recognize the need to incorporate multiple perspectives to foster innovation, inclusivity and problem-solving for better results and solutions that reduce inequities.

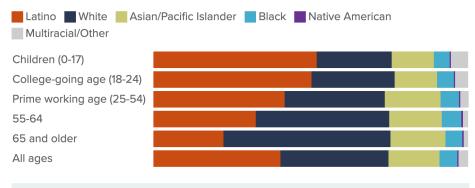
For the first time in history, the workforce includes five generations—ranging from the Silent Generation's octogenarians to the teens and young adults of Generation Z beginning their first jobs. Multigenerational workforces promote different perspectives, aid innovation and problem-solving, and create multidirectional mentorship opportunities, which allow for sharing unique skills and knowledge within each generation.4 While women have made incremental progress in leadership positions, they continue to be underrepresented in C-suite roles; only 22% of white women and a mere 7% of Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian and other women of color are represented in the C-suite.5



Representation also matters in health care and education. In California, students of color represent approximately 77% of the K–12 population, yet teachers of color represent only 37% of educators.⁶ When students have teachers with similar demographic characteristics, they may perform better across a range of academic outcomes.⁷ Educators serve as role models and mentors and can bring cultural competency to the classroom. In California, where 40% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, only 20% of the health care workforce is Hispanic, which makes this the most underrepresented group in health care.⁸

Latinos make up more than half of young Californians

Percent of population by age group

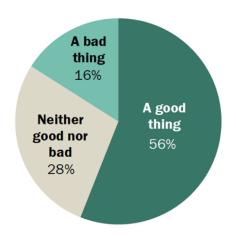


SOURCE: US Census Bureau estimates for July 1, 2023.

Source: The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)

A majority of workers say focusing on DEI at work is a good thing

% of employed adults saying that in general, focusing on increasing diversity, equity and inclusion at work is mainly ...



Note: Based on workers who are not selfemployed and work at a company or organization with 10 or more people. Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer (<0.5%) not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. workers conducted Feb. 6-12, 2023.

"Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Racial and ethnic representation supports the relationship between patients and health care providers and may support improvements in care and better health outcomes.⁹

This issue of Trends explores current happenings in access to healthy environments and quality healthcare, vast disparities in women's health and opportunities for nutrition policies to improve health outcomes as the health gap continues to widen. Leaders can champion new ways of thinking within organizations and create environments that explore these wicked problems to address the root causes instead of settling for temporary solutions. Transformational change starts with leaders, who have the ability to create a network of trust and collaboration across sectors and elevate underrepresented perspectives. Developing diverse teams and creating an inclusive shared vision will ultimately be better for business, improve health outcomes and advance society as a whole.

"TRANSFORMATIONAL
CHANGE STARTS WITH
LEADERS, WHO HAVE
THE ABILITY TO CREATE
A NETWORK OF TRUST
AND COLLABORATION
ACROSS SECTORS."

TREND 1 The U.S. Health Gap Grows

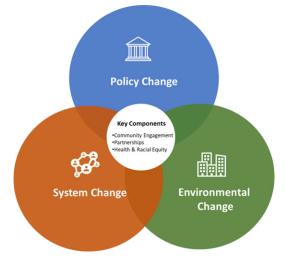
Despite advances in nutrition research and ongoing efforts to improve public health policies, adults and children in the United States continue to face rising rates of chronic disease, mental health challenges and agerelated conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's disease.¹⁰ Individuals are often the focus of nutrition interventions. yet the broader conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age have a significant impact on health and well-being.

Chronic disease rates continue to rise across the population. Stroke, which can lead to long-term disability, is the fifth leading cause of death, and its prevalence increased by nearly 8% over the last decade. Similarly, diabetes cases rose by 19% between 2012 and 2022, especially among

lower-income and older populations.¹² Although diabetes rates rose more gradually in California compared to the rest of the nation. the prevalence was still greatest among people of color and those with lower income and education.13 Adult obesity rates may be plateauing, but rates of severe obesity have risen.¹⁴ Childhood obesity rates continue to rise, with significant disparities between Black and Latino

youth relative to white peers, and youth who are socioeconomically disadvantaged compared to those who are affluent.¹⁵ Though there's growing interest in and scientific evidence supporting the potential use of weight-loss medications for children,¹⁶ experts recommend that children with a high BMI first be referred for comprehensive, intensive behavioral interventions.¹⁷





The relationship between policy, system, and environmental changes

Source: The Massachusetts Community Health and Healthy Aging Funds (the Funds)

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"THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE BORN, GROW, LIVE, WORK AND AGE HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING."

Health disparities extend beyond chronic conditions to outcomes such as maternal and infant health. Black women are nearly three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications, as compared to white women. Similarly, U.S. infant mortality rose for the first time in decades, with Black infants facing the highest mortality rates. The maternity care crisis is worsened by the closure of hospital labor and delivery wards throughout California; since 2012, 56 hospitals have stopped delivering babies, which represents 16% of all general acute care hospitals in the state.

Social determinants of health—including food insecurity, lack of private health insurance and lower household income are factors that impact health outcomes. and the need to address them in clinical settings is growing.21 In 2023, 8.4% of U.S. households experienced low food security, and 5.1% faced very low food security.²² Older adults are more vulnerable, with 18.1% of older Americans experiencing food insecurity.²³ Action to address social determinants of health, such as intergenerational programs to reduce social isolation and tools to share health information with patients, can positively impact health.24



"HEALTH DISPARITIES EXTEND BEYOND CHRONIC CONDITIONS TO OUTCOMES SUCH AS MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH."

Figure 1 Social Determinants of Health

Economic Stability	Neighborhood and Physical Environment	Education	Food	Community and Social Context	Health Care System
Employment Income Expenses Debt Medical bills Support	Housing Transportation Safety Parks Playgrounds Walkability Zip code / geography	Literacy Language Early childhood education Vocational training Higher education	Hunger Access to healthy options	Social integration Support systems Community engagement Discrimination Stress	Health coverage Provider availability Provider linguistic and cultural competency Quality of care

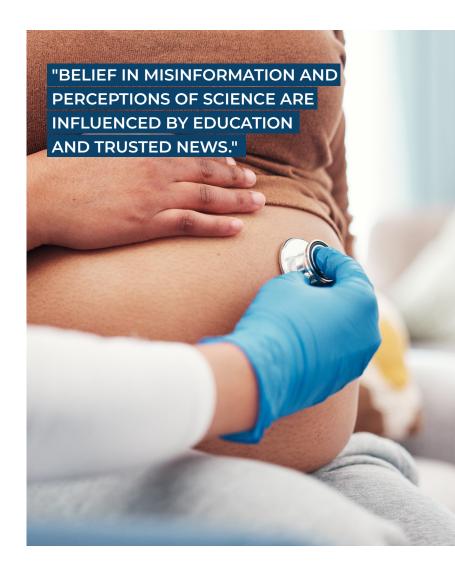
Health Outcomes

Mortality, Morbidity, Life Expectancy, Health Care Expenditures, Health Status, Functional Limitations

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF)

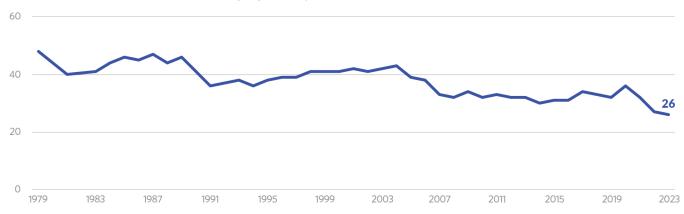


Despite mounting need for effective health policy and systems, trust in American institutions continues to decline, with rapid decreases in recent years. People worry that government leaders, business leaders, journalists and reporters are misleading, and only 36% express trust in the medical system.25 When it comes to sources for information on healthy, sustainable foods, the top two are the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), but that trust is declining over time. There is also growing distrust of farmers/ growers and health professional organizations, but trust in registered dietitian nutritionists has remained steady.²⁶ Among other factors, belief in misinformation and perceptions of science are influenced by education and trusted news sources, with most adults falling in the "malleable middle," meaning they do not fully believe or disbelieve misinformation.²⁷



AVERAGE CONFIDENCE IN MAJOR U.S. INSTITUTIONS, 1979-2023

Average percentage of U.S. adults who have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in 9 institutions measured consistently by Gallup



Source: The Pew Charitable Trusts

Implications ____

Allocating funding and enacting policies that address social determinants of health and root causes of chronic disease can have a societal impact on improving health outcomes and equity.

Declining trust is concerning in an era where health misinformation is easily accessed and spread. People in positions of influence, especially those that reflect diverse communities, can help combat misinformation by building trust with consumers and sharing credible information in different ways.

As society works to find solutions for health challenges, it is important to consider where people go for health information. Health professionals and educators can teach sciencebased nutrition education and help people identify credible sources of health information.



Tech Application |

An unprecedented amount of health information and data is available to patients and consumers via websites, social media, wearables and artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots. Empowering people with credible health information will help bridge knowledge gaps and ensure a continuity in the relationship between patients and the healthcare community.²⁸

TREND 2

Culture and Equity Are Prioritized in Health Interventions

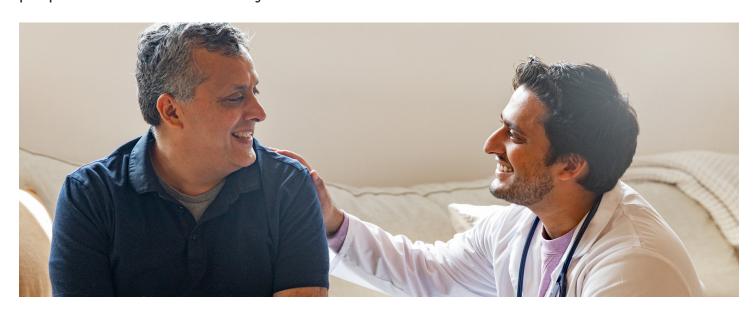
There is growing recognition that complex health problems require multipronged solutions to meet the needs of a diverse population. Because there is not a universal standard, the definition of what it means to be healthy is more frequently considering life stage, access to nutritious food, education and lived experience. For example, religious identity can influence the meaning of food at both the community and individual levels within the Social-Ecological Model.²⁹ Increasingly, nutrition interventions are incorporating culturally relevant foods and traditions, as well as a health equity lens to meet people's needs more effectively.

Initiatives across the nation aim to enhance health communication and education. The University of Chicago NORC Center for Health Communication Science works with government and charitable organizations to create culturally relevant communications to address health challenges for various audiences.30 In Arizona, the AZ Health Zone uses the Language of Health, a style guide that provides tools for effectively communicating about health and encourages a comprehensive view of health versus simply labeling food as "healthy" or "unhealthy."31 In California, Leah's Pantry promotes food security and healthy eating, particularly in underserved communities, through programs that align with traumainformed, resilience-focused principles.32 Action at the national level includes funding to create three more USDA

Nutrition Hubs to equitably advance food and nutrition security and help prevent chronic diseases in underserved communities.³³

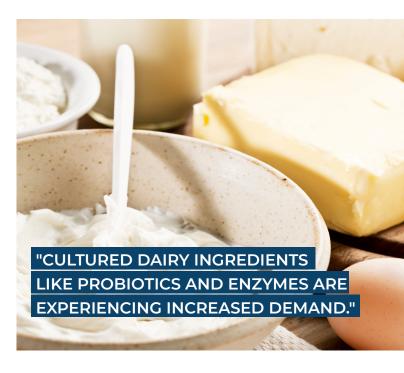


Source: https://leahspantry.org/



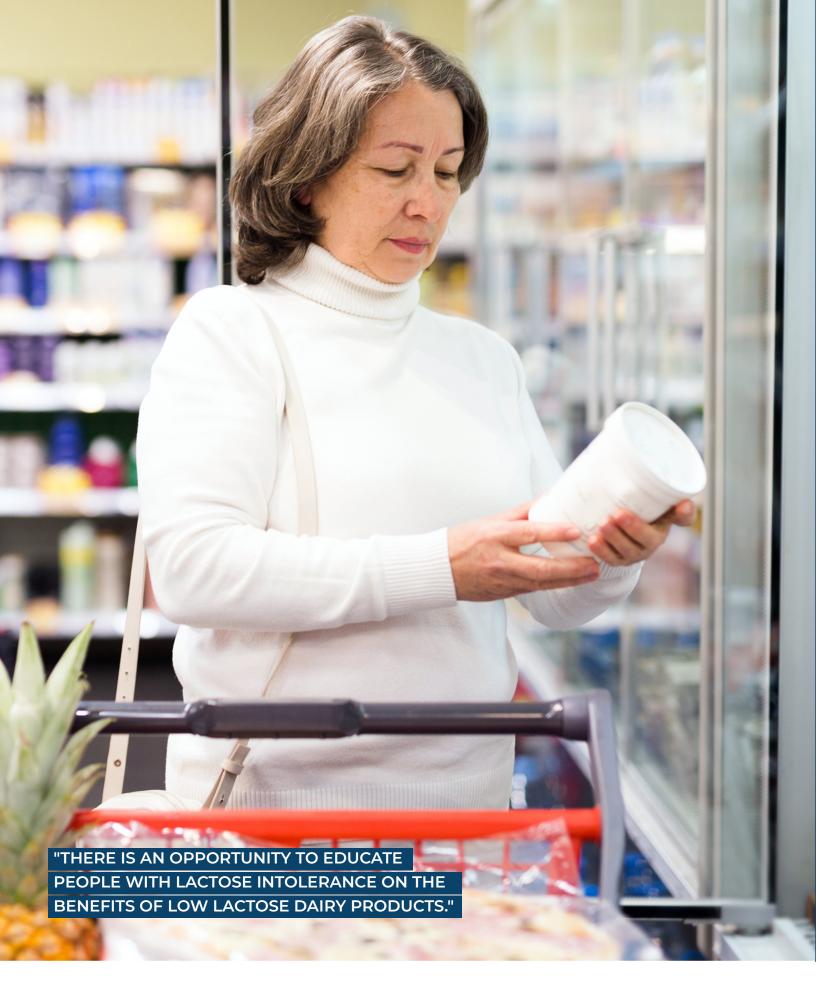
Access to care and medical costs have a direct impact on health outcomes. as people are less likely to receive preventative care and early diagnosis and treatment of illnesses and disease. As the need for nutrition interventions rises, challenges such as lack of access to primary care continue to impact 83 million Americans. Additionally, rising medical costs and debt are a significant issue for people in California; legislation passed in September 2024 removes medical debt from consumer credit reports to give people more time to address their medical bills before debt collection.34





Dairy Innovation to Meet Consumer Needs

People are looking for health-supporting products, which is an opportunity for product innovation and education. In the United States, consumers are drinking less milk but are turning to other dairy products such as cheese, butter and yogurt and new healthy, protein-rich snack products designed to meet a rising demand.35 Cultured dairy ingredients like probiotics and enzymes are experiencing increased demand due to their health benefits and versatile applications.³⁶ There is also growing focus on lactosefree dairy products and the role they can play in dietary patterns for the approximately 30% of Latino, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander populations that report having lactose intolerance. Of these populations, more than twothirds have never consumed lactose-free milk or dairy products, particularly baby boomers and Generation Xers.37



Implications ——

Effective nutrition interventions need to consider how social factors, environmental influences and individual behaviors interact to influence health outcomes. Empowering people with knowledge and resources allows them to make informed decisions about their health while acknowledging that the definition of health is different for every person and depends on a variety of factors such as personal values, family background and cultural influences.

Nutrition interventions at all levels should be culturally relevant, address inequities and foster individual agency. Engaging communities most affected by public health issues and involving professionals from these communities is crucial for identifying root causes, developing solutions and improving health outcomes.

There is an opportunity to educate people with lactose intolerance on the benefits of low lactose dairy products. Both lactose-containing and lactose-free dairy products supply important nutrients that help fill nutrient gaps and can be tailored to meet cultural flavors and preferences.



Tech Application

Applying principles from multiple disciplines—including behavioral science, geography, psychology—to technology-based strategies such as apps and wearable devices may be an important key to changing individual health behaviors on a larger scale.³⁸

TREND 3

WOMEN'S HEALTHY AGING IS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Nutrition during each life stage impacts health and quality of life across the life span. Promoting healthy behaviors such as nutrition and physical activity during adulthood is especially important as the population shifts to a growing aging population. In California, the number of adults that are 55 years and older will grow by 10% in the next 40 years, with older women outnumbering older men.³⁹ Gender differences in the aging process become more apparent midlife (around age 50), making women's health a growing topic of interest to health professionals and consumers.



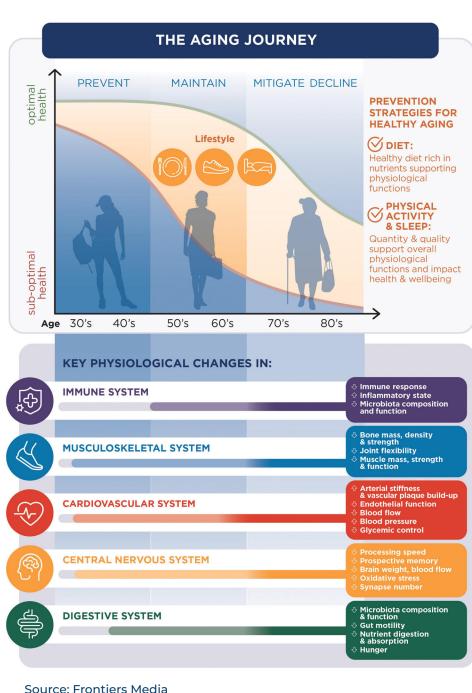
In all stages of women's lives, positive health behaviors can help protect the health span (number of years they are in good health). Adolescence is a critical period for optimizing nutrient intake, yet nutrient shortfalls often rise as healthy eating declines. During pregnancy and into the postnatal period, nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, iron, iodine and choline support fetal growth and development as well as maternal health. As women get older, changes to metabolism and mobility mean that healthsupporting habits help maintain bone and muscle health, cognition and a diverse microbiome. Women are at increased risk for abdominal obesity, cardiovascular disease, gut dysbiosis and depression, as well as hormonal shifts related to the menopause transition; lifestyle factors, including physical activity and sleep, work together with nutrition to promote health during aging.40 Middle-aged women who are providing care to both their children and aging parents need support to prioritize their own health.

People are embracing positive aging behaviors and showing interest in optimizing aging through food and beverages. The top three criteria people use to define a healthy food are "fresh," "good source of protein" and "low in sugar," and they report seeking benefits from food, including energy, healthy aging, weight loss, weight management and digestive health.

71% also report that they are trying to consume protein primarily from food. 41 Increased focus on protein, combined with the nutritional benefits of dairy foods, means the market for high-protein dairy foods is expanding, with an average annual growth rate of 20.8% in new product launches from 2016 to 2021. Products include ready-to-mix powders, ready-todrink beverages and meal replacement beverages.⁴²

Dairy Foods Support Healthy Aging

Dairy foods offer a package of nutrients—including calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, vitamin D and protein that can help maintain bone strength and prevent muscle loss as women age.43 A dietary pattern rich in meat, vegetables, dairy, fruit and eggs can help lower the risk of clinical and vertebral fractures. especially in postmenopausal women.44 Additionally, higher dairy intake is associated with lower levels of certain markers linked to impaired bone health, indicating that regular dairy intake may support improved bone turnover and structure.⁴⁵ Many dairy foods also have functional health benefits, particularly the naturally occurring probiotics found in fermented dairy supporting gut health. Research on the microbiome is expanding, with evidence that those with a "younger" aut microbiome had a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, regardless of their biological age.46





Implications

Women's healthy aging begins early in the life span, with health during adolescence, pregnancy and each stage of adulthood impacting subsequent stages. It is important to consider bone and muscle health at an early age and implement strategies to minimize risk of adverse outcomes.

Women of all ages are looking for products and recommendations to optimize their physical and mental health. High-protein beverages and gutenhancing products like yogurt provide quality protein and probiotics to support physical and mental health during each life stage.

Milk and dairy foods provide a unique package of nutrients to women as they age, including calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc, vitamin D and protein. In addition, they are affordable and accessible, making them an important option for people.



Tech Application

Precision nutrition aims to improve health by tailoring dietary recommendations to individual needs. Al can support research by finding connections between the microbiome and specific diseases, enabling personalized interventions and disease prevention.⁴⁷

TREND 4

Evolving Food and Nutrition Policy Landscape

Food and nutrition policy changes at the global, national and local levels are occurring against the backdrop of soaring food prices and public concern about topics such as sustainability and food additives. From global and national recommendations on food labeling, dietary intake and food formulation to Food as Medicine and funding decisions at the state and federal levels, regulatory changes are happening fast, even as uncertainty around long-term funding increases.

Nutritio	n I	nfo
Per serving 1 container	%	Daily /alue
Saturated Fat	18%	Med
Sodium	37%	High
Added Sugars	5%	Low
	FDA.gov	

FDA Proposed Rule on Front-of-Package Labeling Scheme

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Key U.S. Policy Updates and Changes

The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans are scheduled to be released in 2025 after a multiyear process of evidence analysis, advisory panel meetings and public input. The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's scientific report reflects important conclusions from the effort. Following are some key insights from the report:

Diet Quality and Nutrient Shortfalls:

Underconsumption of specific food groups, including Dairy and Fortified Soy Alternatives, has ramifications for nutrient intakes and status throughout life. Vitamin D, calcium, potassium and fiber continue to be nutrients of public health concern due to underconsumption by those ages 1 year and older.

Dietary Patterns:

The advisory committee proposed the Eat Healthy Your Way Dietary Pattern, a single, inclusive, flexible dietary pattern that is a modified version of the current Healthy U.S.-Style Dietary Pattern. The proposed pattern promotes consumption of vegetables, fruits, legumes (beans, peas, lentils), whole grains, nuts, fish/seafood and low-fat or fat-free dairy. It recommends decreasing intake of red and processed meats within the Protein food group.

Dairy Recommendations:

Recommendations continue to support the intake of three servings of low-fat and fat-free dairy and fortified soy alternatives per day. Adding other plant-based alternatives to cow's milk, beyond fortified soy, is not recommended since alternatives may introduce unintended consequences for meeting other nutrient needs due to variability across products. Substitutions are a particular concern in children where nutrients such as protein, phosphorus and magnesium are

critical for bone mineral development. The report also notes that lactose-free milk is an equivalent choice in the Dairy food group that is culturally relevant.

The FDA updated its definition of "healthy" to reflect the most current evidence and dietary guidelines. This definition will have far-reaching impacts, such as affecting the foods allowed in school meal programs and approved health claims. The FDA will also develop a "healthy" symbol to make it easier for consumers to identify foods that meet the published definition.⁴⁸

The FDA released draft guidance in August 2024 on a new set of proposed voluntary sodium reduction goals for the U.S. food and beverage industry. This is the second phase of voluntary sodium reductions that aim to reduce sodium in the food supply.⁴⁸

The FDA reorganized to establish a unified Human Foods Program that aims to enhance food safety, chemical safety and innovative food products.⁴⁹

are willing to pay more for sustainable packaging.⁴¹ Affordability also plays a significant role; in the United States, animal-sourced foods are needed for achieving adequate nutrition at the lowest cost.⁵⁰

Front-of-package nutrition labeling is an ongoing consideration for policymakers to address consumer sustainability concerns. The World Health Organization released a draft guideline on nutrition labeling policies, recommending that national governments implement an interpretive labeling system that would enable consumers to make a quick assessment of a product's healthfulness through scoring, color-coding, warnings, endorsement and more. The authors did not offer guidance on sustainability labeling systems.⁵¹ To effectively implement ecolabeling policies, it is vital to consider consumer behavior data, design and price, among other factors. Effectively implementing sustainability labeling on food products will require a combination of policies.⁵²

Sustainability

Efforts to create a more sustainable food system continue to focus on reducing animal-based foods. Brands that demonstrate strong sustainability practices attract ethically minded customers, but the lack of a universal definition for "sustainable practices" complicates comparisons. Consumers consider animal welfare and carbon footprint/climate impact as key factors when making food purchasing decisions, and those with buying power



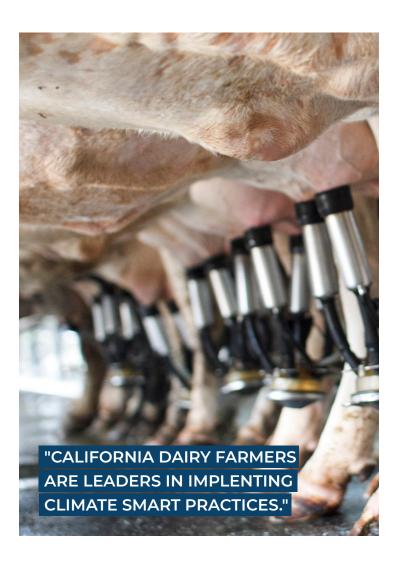
The World Bank's Recipe for a Livable Planet report outlines recommendations for agrifood transformation, including ending meat and dairy subsidies in industrialized nations, reducing emissions from rice and livestock in middle-income countries and preserving forests in low-income areas.53 A study on the environmental effects of reducing animal protein in diets from 70% to 50% found benefits in several areas, though some impacts, like freshwater pollution, were mixed.⁵⁴ California dairy farmers are leaders in implementing climate smart practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and generate renewable energy; the carbon footprint of a glass of milk has been reduced by more than 45% in the past 50 years.55

RECIPE FOR A LIVABLE PLANET. Achieving Net Zero Emissions in the Agrifood System WORLD BANK GROUP William R. Sutton, Alexander Lotsch, and Ashesh Prasann

Source: World Bank Group

California Food and Nutrition Policy

California continues to lead the way in advancing food policy on a variety of fronts. AB 2316 was signed into law in September 2024 (effective December 31, 2027), making California the first state to ban the following food additives in school meals: Blue 1, Blue 2, Green 3, Red 40, Yellow 5 and Yellow 6.56 However, California's 2024–2025 budget deficit creates uncertainty related to future funding. For example, though advocates continue to champion Food as Medicine legislation, Gov. Newsom vetoed a recent bill due to concerns related to general fund costs.57



Implications ____

Regulatory updates like the Dietary Guidelines and the FDA's "healthy" definition could impact people's health, food access and nutrition knowledge. It is essential for health care professionals, including registered dietitians, to understand and consider the full picture of people's health to accurately educate patients and consumers on changes to food labeling, dietary guidance and other regulatory updates.

Changes to food and nutrition policy impact the school environment, particularly the foods that are served. Education professionals can incorporate science-based nutrition education into their curriculum, while food service professionals can offer culturally relevant school meals that meet federal guidelines with a wide variety of local, healthy foods.

Sustainable nutrition needs to be clearly defined to support consumer knowledge and help determine the role of milk and dairy foods in supporting food systems transformation. Educators can teach science-based nutrition education and help people identify credible sources of health information.



Tech **Application**

California continues to adopt legislation to guide the safe and responsible use of Al. In September 2024, Gov. Newsom signed 17 bills related to AI, including a requirement that health care providers disclose the use of generative AI when using it to communicate clinical information to a patient.58

AFTERWORD

The Wonders and Perils of Technology

The trends in food and nutrition are occurring against the backdrop of rapid evolutions in technology. Advancements over the past decade have helped people stay more connected with family and friends, use virtual assistants, track steps and sleep, print in 3D, transition to electric cars and much more. Al may soon support precision nutrition, new health care diagnostics, personalized education and high-speed calculations of large data sets, helping contribute to a better quality of life.

Despite these advances, technology has created an "always-on" society and impacted mental health, especially in youth. In May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory about the effect of social media on youth mental health.59 According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 77% of high school students used social media several times a day in 2023, and female students were more likely than male students to do so.60 In a survey of Gen Z, the first generation to grow up with social media, nearly half report that they wish various social media platforms were never invented, and nearly all have taken steps to limit their social media usage. 61 Another survey found that the majority of young adults and 40% of teens want to learn

ways to manage their time and safety on social media, and more than half are only posting content they're comfortable sharing with others.62



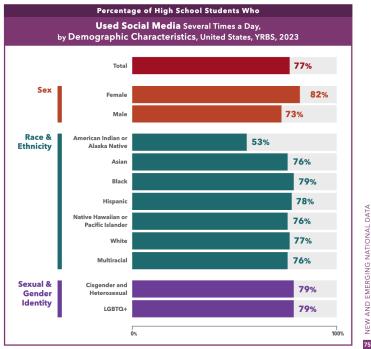
Communities, schools and governments are looking for solutions to create guardrails and responsible AI, especially for youth. School districts across the United States are enacting cell phone policies to curtail use during school hours. Cell phones can lead to problems, including lack of focus, disruption and cyberbullying.63 In September 2024, Gov. Newsom signed Assembly Bill 3216, the Phone-Free Schools Act, to require every school district, charter school and county office of education to adopt a policy limiting or prohibiting the use of smartphones in schools by July 1, 2026.

In January 2025, the U.S. government announced a massive investment of \$500 billion in artificial intelligent infrastructure inevitably accelerating its progress and growth. Across all sectors, leaders can play a role in ensuring safety, accuracy and transparency in information. Building trust through our communication and actions are key.



SOCIAL **MEDIA USE**

In 2023, 77% of high school students used social media several times a day. Female students were more likely than male students to use social media several times a day. American Indian or Alaska Native students were less likely than students from most other racial and ethnic groups to use social media several times a day.

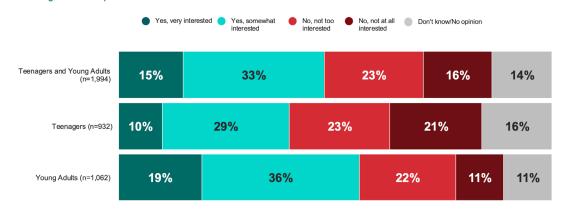


Source: U.S. Center for Diseases

SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Young adults (55%) express more interest than teenagers (39%) in learning about how to manage their time and safety on social media.

Have you ever been interested in resources or learning about how to manage your time and safety on social media? Asked among the full sample



Source: The Bipartisan Policy Center



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