



July 29, 2026

Dear Department of Healthcare Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Community Supports Policy Guide: Volume 1*, specifically regarding guidance for Medically Tailored Meals (MTM) and Medically Supportive Foods (MSF). We appreciate the emphasis on fruits and vegetables as part of strategies to improve health outcomes and reduce chronic disease. At the same time, we encourage DHCS to more explicitly incorporate the important role of nutrient-dense dairy foods, specifically milk, yogurt and cheese, within MTM/MSF guidance.

Dairy foods provide nutrients that work together to support health and well-being.

MTM/MSF are designed to address the complex nutritional needs of individuals living with chronic diseases and other health conditions. Dairy foods are uniquely positioned to support these goals because they provide high-quality protein and essential nutrients in a single, affordable, and accessible food group.¹ Milk, yogurt and cheese are important sources of calcium, vitamin D, potassium and protein, nutrients that many Americans do not consume in adequate amounts.²

Emerging evidence highlights the importance of the dairy matrix, the natural combination and interaction of nutrients, bioactive compounds, and food structure found in milk, yogurt and cheese. These interactions help explain the health benefits associated with dairy foods that extend beyond the effects of individual nutrients.³ Dairy foods can support optimal health outcomes and may help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.⁴

Including fermented dairy foods is especially important. Yogurt, kefir and many cheeses contain probiotics that support digestive and immune health and are associated with improved gastrointestinal, cardiovascular and bone health, improved weight maintenance, and a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer and colorectal cancer.^{5,6} A 2024 qualified health claim from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recognized evidence that eating yogurt

regularly may reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.⁷ Given the high rates of diabetes and cardiometabolic conditions among populations in California, these dairy foods should be given specific consideration within nutrition guidance.

Dairy foods nourish and support optimal health across the life span, from pregnancy through older adulthood.

Dairy foods support brain, bone and immune development during pregnancy to age 2, a critical period to establish lifelong health.⁸ *My First 1000 Days: A Dairy Initiative*, a nutrition intervention program in California's rural Central Valley, found that monthly digital dairy vouchers combined with culturally responsive text-based nutrition education was associated with a significant change in dairy food consumption frequency among children ages 6–24 months, improving access to key nutrients for early child growth and development, including high-quality protein, calcium, iodine, choline and vitamin B12. Ninety percent of families redeemed vouchers across multiple dairy categories, highlighting the value of community-based programs that increase access to nutrient-dense, culturally relevant dairy foods.

Dairy foods also support healthy aging. Three daily servings of milk, yogurt, and cheese can help aging adults maintain bone strength, preserve muscle mass, support cognitive health and reduce the risk of chronic disease.^{9,10,11,12} Many dairy foods are soft, easy to consume and nutrient-dense, making them especially appropriate for individuals with oral health challenges, reduced appetite or increased nutrient needs.

Dairy foods provide accessible, convenient nutrition and remain a recommended component of healthy diets.

Importantly, dairy foods are affordable, widely available and culturally adaptable across diverse communities throughout California. Options such as lactose-free milk, yogurt and lower-lactose cheeses provide flexibility for individuals with varying dietary needs, taste preferences, and cultural food traditions. Ensuring that dairy foods are recognized as a core component of healthy dietary patterns can help MTM programs better meet the nutritional needs of California's diverse population.

The 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans continue to recommend dairy foods as part of healthy dietary patterns across the lifespan.¹³ The guidelines recognize milk, yogurt and cheese at all fat levels as nutrient-dense foods that provide high-quality protein and a unique matrix of nutrients and bioactive compounds that support health and chronic disease prevention.

Dairy Council of California Recommendation

We respectfully recommend that DHCS strengthen the MTM/MSF guidance by explicitly recognizing milk, yogurt, cheese, and other dairy foods as evidence-based components of MTM and MSF designations and interventions. Elevating dairy alongside fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other nutrient-rich foods will help ensure these programs reflect current nutrition science and provide comprehensive, balanced approaches to improving health outcomes and preventing chronic disease.

About Dairy Council of California

Dairy Council of California is a science-based nutrition organization that collaborates with partners to elevate the health of children and communities through the pursuit of lifelong healthy eating patterns. Funded by California's dairy farm families and milk processors and under the guidance of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Dairy Council of California's registered dietitian nutritionists and experts in nutrition science, education, agricultural literacy and community health engage with partners in school, health care and community settings, working together to achieve nutrition security and optimal health. Each year these collective efforts improve access to nutritious foods and provide nutrition education and resources for millions of people in California and beyond, demonstrating the dairy community's contribution to sustainable nutrition and community health.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,



Amy DeLisio, MPH, RDN
Chief Executive Officer



Ashley Rosales, MS, RDN
Nutrition and Industry Affairs Officer

References

1. Comerford KB, Miller GD, Boileau AC, Masiello Schuette SN, Giddens JC, Brown KA. Global review of dairy recommendations in food-based dietary guidelines. *Front Nutr.* 2021;8. doi:[10.3389/fnut.2021.671999](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2021.671999)
2. Weaver CM. Dairy matrix: is the whole greater than the sum of the parts? *Nutr Rev.* 2021;79(suppl 2):4-15. doi:[10.1093/nutrit/nuab081](https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuab081)
3. Weaver CM. Dairy matrix: is the whole greater than the sum of the parts? *Nutr Rev.* 2021;79(suppl 2):4-15. doi:[10.1093/nutrit/nuab081](https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuab081)
4. Feng Y, Zhao Y, Liu J, et al. Consumption of dairy products and the risk of overweight or obesity, hypertension and type 2 diabetes mellitus: a dose-response meta-analysis and systematic review of cohort studies. *Adv Nutr.* 2022;13(6):2165-2179. doi:[10.1093/advances/nmac096](https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmac096)
5. Leeuwendaal NK, Stanton C, O'Toole PW, Beresford TP. Fermented foods, health and the gut microbiome. *Nutrients.* 2022;14(7):1527. doi:[10.3390/nu14071527](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14071527)
6. Savaiano DA, Hutkins RW. Yogurt, cultured fermented milk, and health: a systematic review. *Nutr Rev.* 2021;79(5):599-614. doi:[10.1093/nutrit/nuaa013](https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuaa013)
7. US Food & Drug Administration. FDA announces qualified health claim for yogurt and reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. FDA website. Published March 1, 2024. Accessed December 9, 2025. <https://www.fda.gov/food/hfp-constituent-updates/fda-announces-qualified-health-claim-yogurt-and-reduced-risk-type-2-diabetes>
8. Sullivan LM, Brumfield C. *The First 1,000 Days: Nourishing America's Future*. 1,000 Days; 2016. Accessed November 18, 2025. Available at <https://thousanddays.org/resource/nourishing-americas-future>
9. Lana A, Rodriguez-Artalejo F, Lopez-Garcia E. Dairy consumption and risk of frailty in older adults: a prospective cohort study. *J Am Geriatr Soc.* 2015;63(9):1852-1860. doi:[10.1111/jgs.13626](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.13626)
10. Wallace TC, Bailey RL, Lappe J, et al. Dairy intake and bone health across the lifespan: a systematic review and expert narrative. *Crit Rev Food Sci Nutr.* 2021;61(21):3661-3707. doi:[10.1080/10408398.2020.1810624](https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2020.1810624)
11. Hanach NI, McCullough F, Avery A. The impact of dairy protein intake on muscle mass, muscle strength, and physical performance in middle-aged to older adults with or without existing sarcopenia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Adv Nutr.* 2019;10(1):59-69. doi:[10.1093/advances/nmy065](https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmy065)
12. Choi IY, Taylor MK, Lee P, et al. Milk intake enhances cerebral antioxidant (glutathione) concentration in older adults: a randomized controlled intervention study. *Front Nutr.* 2022;9. doi:[10.3389/fnut.2022.811650](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2022.811650)
13. US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025-2030*. 10th Ed. 2026. Accessed January 7, 2026. Available at [RealFood.gov](https://www.realfood.gov).