



## ASN Health and Nutrition Public Policy Newsletter August 3, 2007

### CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

#### House Passes Farm Bill with ASN's Nutrition Monitoring Language

Following a long approval process in the House Agriculture Committee, H.R. 2419, the Farm, Nutrition and Bio-energy Act of 2007 (The Farm Bill) went to the House floor late on July 26 and passed the following day by a relatively narrow margin of 231-191. Over 30 amendments were approved by the Rules Committee for consideration, and last minute negotiations with the Ways and Means Committee and Democratic leaders produced \$4 billion in additional funds for nutrition assistance programs by way of changes in tax policies, resulting in a rancorous debate. Those who sought to preserve the status quo and those concerned with providing a safety net for farmers and rural communities lined up against those who sought reform in the farm subsidy program to redistribute funds to food assistance programs, conservation and environmental measures. Ultimately, the votes materialized to pass the bill.

ASN was pleased to see that the nutrition monitoring issue, which the Public Policy Committee had identified as one of the top priorities for the 110 th Congress, was addressed in language passed as part of the Nutrition Title. This language does the following:

- Reaffirms the importance of nutrition monitoring activities and restated that they shall be conducted continuously and jointly by the U.S Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and data shall be on dietary, health, physical activity, and diet and health knowledge
- Calls for periodic surveys on special populations, often referred to as "Community HANES"
- Requires the continuous updating of the USDA food composition tables
- Requires that the information on health, nutrition, the environment and physical activity be released to the public in timely fashion; and,
- Calls for the continued research on and development of data collection methods and standards.

Sense of the Congress language in support of human nutrition research at USDA also passed in the Research title of the bill.

Beyond these two provisions, however, H.R. 2419 falls far short of making meaningful changes to bolster research at USDA through organizational changes, and it fails to ensure that food, nutrition and agricultural research, both intramural and extramural, will receive adequate funding now or in the future. Only research for specialty crops, organic agriculture and bio-energy received increases in funding commitments.

Other nutrition and research related highlights include:

- Establishment of a National Program Office to coordinate current USDA research agencies through six program offices, including an Office of Food Safety, Nutrition and Health, to prioritize and track research activities. New funding was not included with the new program offices.
- \$4 billion in additional funding to food assistance programs, including the Food Stamp Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)
- A new name for the Food Stamp Program-- The Secure Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SSNAP)

- An amendment to the research section “that emphasis should be placed on proposals that examine the efficacy of current agriculture policies in promoting the health and welfare of economically disadvantaged populations (in addition to supporting research/ health promotion to “solve the problems of nutritional inadequacy).”
- Sense of Congress language stating that the food available to schoolchildren under the school breakfast and lunch program should be selected so as to reduce the incidence of juvenile obesity and to maximize nutritional value.
- Extension of the Commodity Supplemental Feeding Program and expansion of the Senior Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program.
- A demonstration project to evaluate strategies to address obesity among low-income communities.
- Expanded access to research and extension dollars to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Native American Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Agricultural Colleges and Universities, and small land grant universities.

### **Farm Bill Action Moves to the Senate**

ASN and other food, nutrition and agriculture stakeholders will now turn our attention to the Senate where the Farm Bill reauthorization process has just begun. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) confirmed that his Committee will not take up the Farm Bill until September. The Senate version of the bill will have a \$30 billion lower baseline than the 2002 farm bill, and according to Harkin, will focus on maintaining subsidies to farmers, albeit with a subsidy limitation below the House bill’s cap of \$1 million; supporting conservation measures for non-working and working land; providing new sources of energy; and, making improvements to nutrition assistance programs.

Nutrition and research stakeholders are hopeful the Senate Farm Bill will take bolder steps than H.R. 2419 to ensure research at USDA is strengthened and nutrition programs are adequately funded. However, Sen. Harkin has not indicated that the necessary budget offsets have been found to fund such provisions. An early draft of the Research Title, which was circulated by Senate Agriculture Committee staff, included ASN’s nutrition monitoring language and incorporated several of the recommendations from stakeholders related to the establishment of a National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Sources on the Hill say the Farm Bill likely will be on the Senate floor by September 30, the day the current Farm Bill expires . If this holds true, a short-term extension of the current legislation will be necessary while House and Senate conferees negotiate the differences between the two Farm Bills, and ultimately vote on a compromise version to send to the President. President Bush has issued a veto threat should the final bill include budget offsets via what the Bush administration terms “a tax increase on foreign investment in the United States.”

### **House Tackles Agriculture Appropriations Bill**

When this article went to press, the House of Representatives was debating the FY 2008 agriculture appropriations bill, which would provide \$18.817 billion primarily to the USDA and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The bill represents a five percent increase over 2007 spending and allocates funds to numerous federal health and nutrition programs and nutrition research agencies, reflecting Subcommittee Chair Rosa DeLauro’s (D-CT) commitment to nutrition.

“Our top priority has always been to move with a clear purpose and direction toward several key goals: strengthening rural America , protecting public health, improving nutrition for more Americans, transforming our energy future, supporting conservation, investing in research, and finally, enhancing oversight,” said DeLauro.

With respect to nutrition and research, there are both winners and losers in the House bill. Food assistance programs and nutrition education are clear winners, while research receives less support. Below are the highlights:

### **Research**

- The Agriculture Research Service (ARS) budget decreases by about \$52 million; however, obesity research under ARS receives an increase of \$6.5 million.
- The National Research Initiative is flat-funded at \$190 million
- The Economic Research Service (ERS) receives a 3.4 percent increase over FY 2007

## **Nutrition**

- FDA receives a 7 percent increase in funding for a total of about \$1.7 billion. The bill increases CFSAN funding by \$28 million and increases funding by \$5 million for the Office of Women's Health.
- The Food Stamp program receives a 4 percent increase and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) receives an 8 percent increase.
- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program is funded at a record level.

Nutrition education also is supported by the following:

- An 8 percent increase in funding for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program
- \$1 million to promote the Dietary Guidelines to families receiving Food Stamp benefits
- \$1 million to the TEAM Nutrition Program to develop and maintain MyPyramid and Dietary Guidelines materials
- An additional \$2 million for continued development of an evidence-based system for the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and enhancements to MyPyramid.

The bill went to the House floor without earmarks, as House Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey (D-WI) previously commented that earmarks would be determined during the Conference Report Meeting when the Senate and House reconcile the differences between the two appropriations bills.

While the Senate Appropriations Committee has approved its version of the agriculture spending bill, it is not expected to go to the Senate floor until after the August recess.

For more information, please visit the [House Appropriations Website](#).

## **House Approves Labor-HHS-Ed Appropriations Bill**

By a vote of 276 to 140, the House passed the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education (Labor-HHS-Ed) funding bill on July 19. The bill increases funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$750 million (2.6 percent), and it lifts freezes on the average cost of new research grants. It also increases funding for the National Center for Health Statistics, which carries out the nutrition monitoring activities for DHHS.

Of particular interest to ASN was an amendment, offered by House Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Joe Barton (R-TX) and defeated by a vote of 181-249, to increase NIH's FY2008 appropriation by nearly \$700 million by prohibiting the transfer of 2.4 percent of NIH's budget to DHHS for program evaluation activities. It has been common practice for DHHS to tap this funding to provide sister agencies with funds to pay for program evaluation activities. This mechanism is perhaps most notable for ASN because it has provided as much as 30 percent of the funding for the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) when NCHS funding has remained stagnant. ASN, through FASEB, has asserted that NIH increases should not come from other vital programs within DHHS, but rather, the overall funding for the department should be increased.

The 66.4 percent majority vote in the House suggests the bill can withstand a Presidential veto threat, which was issued once the bill passed. The Senate Appropriations Committee has already passed its version of FY08 spending for the Labor-HHS-Ed; however, it is not expected to go to the Senate floor for debate until after the August recess. For more information, please visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/approp/app08.html>.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION**

### **FDA to Hold Hearing on Nutrient Profiling**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will hold a public hearing called *Food Labeling: Use of Symbols to Communicate Information, Consideration of Consumer Studies and Nutritional Criteria*, on September 10-11. The hearing, which is being convened in response to a petition by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, aims to address growing concern about the use of front-of-package nutrition labels, classifying systems used by retail grocery chains, and other nutrient profiling techniques currently being used by manufacturers. Europe and the U.K. have begun using some front-of-package labeling systems, such as the “stop light” system; however, these systems have not been fully evaluated and are voluntary. This hearing will review systems currently in place in the U.S. and gather information about their effectiveness. For more information or to register, please visit the [Federal Register Notice](#).

ASN’s Public Information Committee is planning a Symposium on this hot topic at Experimental Biology 2008 in San Diego.

### **U.S. Preventive Services Task Force issues new recommendations for evidence review**

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), an independent panel of experts in primary care and prevention that systematically reviews the evidence of effectiveness and develops recommendations for clinical preventive services, has developed new methods for evidence review and recommendation development. In the [report](#) released last month, the USPSTF examines, using a social-ecological model, the evidence-based strategies for use in clinical and community settings to address preventable health-related problems such as tobacco use and obesity. It also advocates for prioritization and integration of clinical and community preventive strategies in the planning of programs and policy development, calling for additional research to develop the strategies and systems needed to integrate them.

[An article](#) published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* also provides an excellent summary of the recent changes in the recommendation development process. It describes how the USPSTF solicits topics for review and sets priorities, updates evidence reviews and recommendations, and communicates with its audience. Also published in the *Annals* is a USPSTF method update, [How to Read the New Recommendation Statement](#). This paper focuses on changes to the Preventive Services Task Force recommendation statement, which now comprises 9 sections. Important changes include standardizing the format of the summary statement to specify what service is being recommended in what population, rewording the definition of a “grade C” recommendation and the “I statement,” and adding a new section called “Other Considerations.”

### **NCMHD Appoints New Deputy Director**

Joyce A. Hunter, Ph.D., a cardiovascular physiologist and award-winning administrator at NIH has been appointed Deputy Director for the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD). Hunter is a recognized expert on NIH extramural policies and has an extensive career in program and scientific review administration. Prior to joining NCMHD, Hunter served as deputy director in the Division of Extramural Activities at the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. “I believe strongly in the NCMHD mission,” said Dr. Hunter.

The [NCMHD](#) promotes minority health and leads, coordinates, supports, and assesses the NIH effort to eliminate health disparities. The NCMHD programs focus on expanding the nation’s ability to conduct research and to build a diverse, culturally-competent research workforce to eliminate health disparities. For more information, please read the [NIH Press Release](#).

### **New NCCAM Director of the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation**

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at NIH has selected Jean H. McKay, M.L.S. as the new Director. The NCCAM explores complementary and alternative medical practices in the context of rigorous science, trains CAM researchers, and disseminates authoritative information to the public and professionals. McKay brings to NCCAM over 20 years of NIH experience. During her career she has worked at the National Library of Medicine, the National Cancer Institute, and the National Human Genome Research Institute. For more information, please visit the [NIH Press Room](#).

## **NATIONAL INITIATIVES and MEETINGS**

### **Vitamin D and Health in the 21 st Century**

The Office of Dietary Supplements at NIH will be hosting a conference, "Vitamin D and Health in the 21 st Century: An Update," September 5-6 in the Masur Auditorium on the NIH campus. The conference will open with a review of vitamin D production, bioavailability, metabolism, active forms, functions, and metabolic turnover. Vitamin D's effects on health outcomes across the life cycle and measurement of status will also be critically evaluated. Other topics to be addressed include the impact of dietary intakes and sun exposure on blood levels of 25(OH)D and its relationship to vitamin D status. The findings of the AHRQ evidence-based review on vitamin D will also be presented. Attendees will have opportunities to engage in discussions with panels of experts. The information presented and produced by the conference will inform NIH's research agenda.

For more information and to register online, go to: <http://vitamindandhealth.od.nih.gov>

### **Development of DRIs, 1994-2004: Lessons Learned and New Challenges**

There is still time to register for the Institute of Medicine's workshop on the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), scheduled for September 18-20 in Washington, DC. A number of ASN members will be participating in what promises to be an exciting workshop that will consider lessons learned from the DRI development and will identify issues to be considered in enhancing the approach.

For more information, including the most current meeting agenda, and to register, please go to: <http://www.iom.edu/driworkshop2007> .

### **30th Annual National Food Policy Conference**

The Consumer Federation of America will hold the 30th Annual National Food Policy Conference in Washington, DC on September 27-28. This year's conference will focus on a wide range of issues from childhood obesity, to the Farm Bill, to food safety, and even food versus fuel issues.

For more information or to register, please visit [www.consumerfed.org/events.cfm](http://www.consumerfed.org/events.cfm).

**Active Living Research Conference Seeks Abstracts and Award Nominations**— *Active Living Research* , a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), announced a call for presentations and paper abstracts for its annual conference to be held April 9-12, 2008, in Washington, D.C. The theme of the conference is "[Connecting Active Living Research to Policy Solutions](#)." Abstracts on all topics related to active living policies and environments are welcome.

Active Living Research has also issued a call for nominations for the "Translating Research to Policy" award, which will be presented at the conference. This national award will recognize innovators who have successfully harnessed research to impact policy and environmental changes.

### **Advocacy Tools**

#### **FASEB Releases Clinical Research Advocacy Tool**

A new advocacy resource developed by FASEB, "Clinical Research: Bridging the Gap between Basic Science and Improved Human Health" is now available. This PowerPoint presentation was created to assist clinical research advocates in conveying to the scientific and policy communities the excitement and significance of this area of investigation. The slides provide information on what clinical research is, why it is important, and how it is funded. They also describe the relationship between clinical and basic research and highlight some of the challenges facing the clinical research enterprise. FASEB hopes this resource will be of value to the clinical research community and to anyone with an interest in promoting biomedical science. To view this new resource, please visit: [Clinical Research Advocacy Tool](#).

Explore Research! America's *Your Congress-Your Health* Initiative Online

ASN works with numerous organizations to ensure that our interest and support for science is well represented in the Halls of Congress. One organization that ASN and FASEB have enjoyed a long-standing working

relationship with is Research! America. Research! America is currently undertaking an initiative to ask members of Congress to complete a questionnaire on where they stand on health issues.

Just 11 percent of Americans say they are well-informed about their elected officials' positions on research. To improve this number, [Research!America](#), the [Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation](#) and their partners established the [Your Congress–Your Health](#) initiative.

The purpose of Your Congress–Your Health is to establish a dialogue on research and health between Congress and the American people. To get the conversation started, PARADE magazine invited its 74 million readers to share what health issues matter most to them. Based on this public response, 15 questions were developed and all members of Congress were invited to address them.

Congressional responses are now available online at [www.yourcongressyourhealth.org](http://www.yourcongressyourhealth.org) and are searchable by zip code, state, last name, chamber and party. Although nearly one-fourth of Congress is participating in Your Congress–Your Health, Americans in every state and district want to see responses from their elected officials. If you do not see a response from your Member of Congress, take the time to contact his or her office today and encourage him or her to participate!

#### **NIH Requests Information on Peer Review**

NIH is seeking comments regarding its support of the biomedical and behavioral research, including peer review, in order to examine the current system and maximize effectiveness. The NIH is especially interested in creative, concrete suggestions for strengthening over the long term any and all aspects of their system for identifying the most meritorious and innovative research for support: NIH Director Elias Zerhouni has established two working groups to gather input. [Read more](#) about the call for information.

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