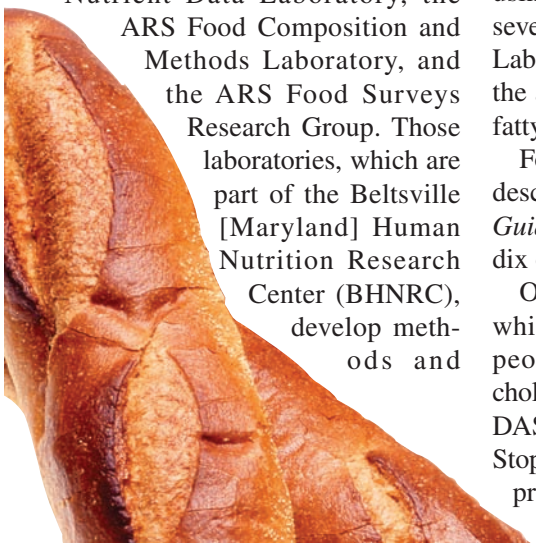
Data That Works for Your Diet

The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* was published in 2005 to help folks choose diets that meet their nutrient requirements, promote health, and reduce risks of chronic diseases.

These updated guidelines were developed by USDA and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services scientists, staff, and policy officials. The group included several ARS Human Nutrition Program scientists, center directors, and national program leaders.

The governmental group based the *Dietary Guidelines* on science-based evidence provided by a panel of 13 private-sector scientists from academia. This panel—the 2005 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee—was appointed by the two federal agencies.

Researchers within three ARS laboratories in particular produce analytical data that is key to development of the *Dietary Guidelines*: the ARS Nutrient Data Laboratory, the ARS Food Composition and Methods Laboratory, and the ARS Food Surveys Research Group. Those laboratories, which are part of the Beltsville [Maryland] Human Nutrition Research Center (BHNRC), develop methods and obtain food-composition data and dietary-intake survey results that are later made public for a variety of uses.



The BHNRC researchers used those data products to produce custom data sets that now appear as a variety of tables and appendices in the current edition of the *Dietary Guidelines*—an 80-page booklet. BHNRC statistician Alvin Nowverl, for example, performed many specialized data analyses, using the most current food-composition and food-consumption data published by the BHNRC laboratories.

"These ARS data runs were used by the advisory committee to validate conclusions previously drawn from much older data—or to provide support for new projections," says Pamela Pehrsson, a nutritionist at BHNRC. She was one of four governmental co-executive secretaries who supported the advisory committee. "In addition to using our food-composition databases, several researchers at the Nutrient Data Laboratory compiled data for sections of the advisory committee's report on trans fatty acids, vitamin D, and fat."

For the first time, two meal plans are described for implementing the *Dietary Guidelines,* and they appear in the appendix of the 2005 policy booklet.

One of these meal plans is "DASH," which was originally designed to help people lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol, and improve insulin sensitivity. DASH stands for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension. BHNRC collaborators previously worked with colleagues at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland (one of four DASH clinical centers) to develop the DASH meal patterns for testing.

The other meal plan is the "USDA Food Guide," now called "MyPyramid." Both of these meal plans are designed to integrate the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* into a healthy way of eating for most individuals. To access the *Dietary Guidelines* online, go to www.MyPyramid.gov/guidelines/index.html. To put the *Dietary Guidelines* into practice, go to www.MyPyramid.gov.—By **Rosalie Marion Bliss,** ARS.

This research is part of Human Nutrition, an ARS national program (#107) described on the World Wide Web at www.nps.ars.usda.gov.

Pamela R. Pehrsson is with the USDA-ARS Nutrient Data Laboratory, 10300 Baltimore Ave., Bldg. 005, Beltsville, MD 20705; phone (301) 504-0693, fax (301) 504-0692, e-mail pamela.pehrsson@ars.usda.gov. ✸

Tips for a Healthy Diet

- *Make sure at least half your grains are whole grains.*
- *Vary your vegetables and fruits.*
- *Eat calcium-rich foods.*
- *Go lean with protein (consume fat free or low fat).*
- *Find your balance between food and physical activity.*