

## MyPlate at One Year

It was last year at this time that the US Department of Agriculture introduced MyPlate, the icon that replaced the food pyramid. The idea: Simplify the USDA's graphical approach to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans because many consumers found the pyramid confusing.

How is MyPlate doing? The USDA, while acknowledging that one year isn't a long time to change people's eating behaviors, is pleased nevertheless. "We found an engaging, familiar symbol, the plate," says Robert Post, PhD, deputy director of the USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. "We have a simple icon supported by a robust educational initiative."

The heart of that educational effort is [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov) and SuperTracker, which helps people create personalized nutrition and exercise plans. Post says the site has 34,000 million page views and almost 700,000 regular SuperTracker users, and that the agency anticipates developing a MyPlate mobile app.

MyPlate has company; other groups have issued icons designed to promote a healthier approach to eating. One such group is Oldways

([www.oldwayspt.org](http://www.oldwayspt.org)), which focuses on "traditional foods and heritage diets" through pyramids that cover Mediterranean, Asian, Latin and African foodways (plus a pyramid for vegetarians). Oldways president Sara Baer-Sinnott says MyPlate is better than the old USDA pyramid, adding, "Any tool like this is accompanied by education, which I think they're

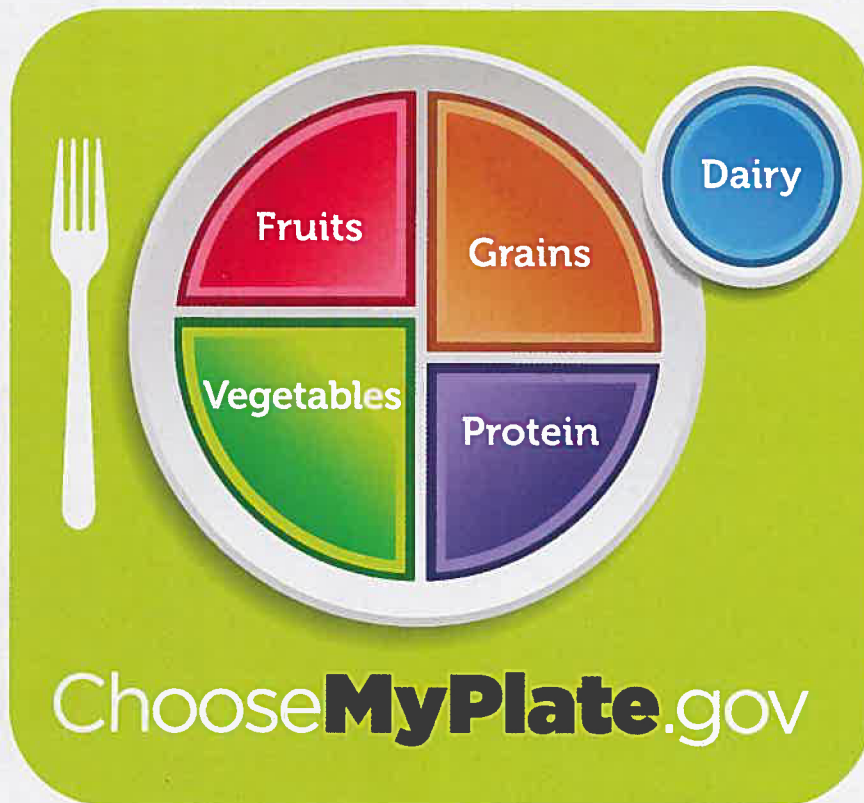
a glass to the side implies a glass of milk and not everyone needs a glass of milk."

Others don't believe the switch to MyPlate will help at all. "The shape of the icon is irrelevant," says Michele Simon, JD, MPH, a public health lawyer who blogs at Appetite for Profit ([www.appetiteforprofit.com](http://www.appetiteforprofit.com)) and has written a book of the same

name (Nation Books). Simon says the USDA has two tasks, health promotion and support of the US food industry, and "the latter mission tends to trump the former. We should be asking, 'What does it take to shift our agricultural policies to support a health food system?'"

Post says education can help drive such a shift by convincing people to eat better. "Over time, when food demands change, we anticipate that changes in agricultural policy will occur," he explains.

What can't be determined after a year is how successful MyPlate will be at driving change in a country where more than a third of all adults are already obese. "We're in a crisis and it's only going to get worse," says Simon. "It's about changing our whole mindset of what food is."



working really hard at."

Oldways emphasizes whole grains in its pyramids. But Baer-Sinnott notes the while the USDA promotes that half the grains be whole, "the word used on MyPlate just says 'grains.'" What's more, "you can't really cook without healthy oils," which don't appear on MyPlate, and "dairy" in