



Oldways Common Ground Consensus Statement on Healthy Eating

At the Oldways Finding Common Ground conference in Boston, MA on November 17-18, 2015, a group of leading nutrition and food systems experts reached consensus on the following points of common ground about healthy eating:

1. The Scientists of *Oldways Common Ground* lend strong, collective support to the food-based recommendations of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, and to the DGAC's endorsement of healthy food patterns such as the Mediterranean Diet, Vegetarian Diet and Healthy American Diet.

The overall body of evidence examined by the 2015 DGAC identifies that a healthy dietary pattern is higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, seafood, legumes, and nuts; moderate in alcohol (among adults); lower in red and processed meats; and low in sugar-sweetened foods and drinks and refined grains. Additional strong evidence shows that it is not necessary to eliminate food groups or conform to a single dietary pattern to achieve healthy dietary patterns. Rather, individuals can combine foods in a variety of flexible ways to achieve healthy dietary patterns, and these strategies should be tailored to meet the individual's health needs, dietary preferences and cultural traditions. Current research also strongly demonstrates that regular physical activity promotes health and reduces chronic disease risk. (Source: 2015 DGAC summary wording)

2. We emphatically support the inclusion of **sustainability** in the 2015 DGAC report, and affirm the appropriateness and importance of this imperative in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans because food insecurity cannot be solved without sustainable food systems. Inattention to sustainability is willful disregard for the quality and quantity of food available to the next generation, i.e., our own children.
3. The Scientists of Oldways Common Ground lend strong, collective support to the overall process, as well as the overall product, of the 2015 DGAC. We express confidence in their approach to the weight of evidence. We support a transparent process where the evidence-based report of the scientists is translated directly into policy without political manipulation.
4. Food can and should be:
 - Good for human health
 - Good for the planet (sustainability; ecosystem conservation; biodiversity)
 - And simply...good – unapologetically delicious.
5. We express strong concern for the high level of apparent **confusion** prevailing, and propagated among the public about what constitutes a healthy eating pattern. Despite uncertainty about some details, much of this confusion is **unnecessary**, and at odds with the understanding of experts and the weight of evidence. We affirm that experts with diverse perspectives and priorities can find common ground.

6. Fundamentals and current understanding do NOT change every time a new study makes headlines. The Oldways Common Ground Scientists emphasize the importance of basing understanding of diet and health on the weight of evidence, including ALL relevant research methods. Biology (adaptation, evolution, plausibility) is a relevant source of evidence.

Heritage (cultural traditions) are an additional, relevant source of real-world information on long-term feasibility and health effects of diet.

7. Representations of new diet studies to the public should be made in the context of the prevailing consensus. New evidence should be added to what was known before, not substituted for it sequentially. Accurate reporting is the responsibility of both scientists and the media.
8. To make recommendations for dietary changes meaningful, we strongly endorse the general principle of specifying practical dietary **substitutions** – a “compared to what” approach. e.g, Instead of simply saying, “Drink less soda,” for instance, say “Drink water instead of soda.” What we consume *and* what we don’t consume instead, both contribute to health outcomes.
9. Oldways Common Ground Scientists recommend that education programming, policy, and legislation in support of these goals be implemented widely and in a timely manner, with regular monitoring and evaluation. For example, in the U.S., we urge compliance with 7 USC Sec. 5341, which calls for the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to “be promoted by each Federal agency in carrying out any Federal food, nutrition, or health program” – including food assistance programs.
10. We support the cultivation of widespread “**food literacy**” and believe that individuals benefit from becoming knowledgeable about the origins of their food, the conditions under which it is produced, and its impact on their health and the health of the planet. A knowledge of and respect for food traditions and the cultural context of food – health through heritage – is also beneficial, and can be a powerful motivator for better eating, as well as a means of imparting crucial life skills (e.g., cooking).
11. Oldways Common Ground Scientists agree that **food systems** (production, manufacture, food waste, etc.) should align with priorities for human and planetary health while supporting social responsibility/justice and animal welfare. Diverse, localized/regionalized solutions, that reflect site-specific priorities and capabilities are more resilient and democratic. Each of us has a role to play in ensuring a healthy and sustainable global food supply.

Scientific Consensus Committee

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