

## Ensuring Trust in Nutrition Science

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### Disclosures

- Board Member/Advisory Panel
  - Old Naval Hospital Foundation, Board member
  - DELS Committee, National Academy of Sciences, Committee member
  - Open Data Charter, Board member
  - Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation, President
  - ASN Advisory Committee on Trust in Nutrition Science, member
- Academic affiliations
  - Professor, Iowa State University
  - Visiting Scholar, Virginia's Biocomplexity Institute
- Research Support/Consultancies
  - None currently
- Stock/Shareholder
  - Meet requirements of the Federal Office of Government Ethics
  - Publicly available

### Outline

- What do we know about public trust in nutrition science and science in general?
- Why is public trust in nutrition science important?
- What is the nutrition science community doing about building trust?

### Trust

- "firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something; **acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation**" (Oxford English Dictionary)

### Does the nutrition science community need to be more proactive to build public trust?

- John Ioannidis and John Trepanowski, Disclosures in nutrition research: Why it is different. *JAMA*, Dec. 7, 2017.
  - Why is nutrition different from other fields of science?
    - One of the most contentious fields of science
    - Industry sponsorship of research
    - Financial conflicts of interest (e.g., books, for-profit weight loss)
    - Nonfinancial conflicts of interest (cultural, religious)
    - Advocacy/activism
    - Dietary preferences (vegan/vegetarian/high animal protein/supplements)
  - What should be done?
    - Disclose all

### What do we know about the public's trust in nutrition science?

- Not much!
- What we do have are:
  - Perceptions (dietitians, Extension specialists and agents, and scientists) that public's trust in nutrition science is eroding
  - Public opinion polls with questions about organic foods, GMO
  - Broader literature on public trust in science and institutions

### What might account for loss of trust?

- Growing complexity of nutrition science
- Science is tentative, iterative, evolving
- Experts are constantly changing assessments of available evidence
- Failures/scandals in scientific and professional ethics
- Polarization in social and political sectors related to high profile scientific topics (e.g. GMO, climate change, vaccine safety)
- General erosion of public trust in experts, in general/rise of social media

### Pew Research Center

"Food has become a flashpoint in American culture and politics."

1. Public views about Americans' eating habits
2. Americans' views about and consumption of organic foods
3. Public opinion about genetically modified foods and trust in scientists connected with these foods

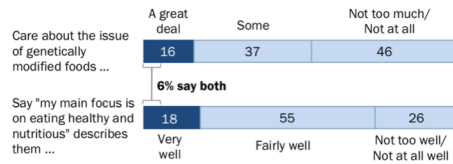
The New Food Fights: U.S. Public Divides Over Food Science



Cary Funk and Brian Kennedy, December 1, 2016

### Two largely distinct groups of Americans are focused on food issues

% of U.S. adults who ...



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown.  
Source: Survey conducted May 10-June 6, 2016.  
"The New Food Fights: U.S. Public Divides Over Food Science"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

### ASN Advisory Committee on Ensuring Trust in Nutrition Science

Best practices in nutrition science to earn and keep the public's trust  
Cutberto Garza Patrick J Stover Sarah D Ohlhorst Martha S Field Robert Steinbrook Sylvia Rowe Catherine Woteki Eric Campbell

The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Volume 109, Issue 1, 1 January 2019, Pages 225-243, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/109.1.225>  
Published: 18 January 2019

- Vinita Ball: Chair of Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, GAIN
- Catherine Bertini: Syracuse University
- Eric Campbell: Harvard University, School of Medicine
- Edward Cooney: Retired, Former Executive Director Congressional Hunger Center
- Cutberto Garza (Chair): Emeritus, Cornell University
- Michael McGinnis: National Academy of Medicine
- Sylvia Rowe: SR Strategy
- Robert Steinbrook: Yale University
- Catherine Woteki: Retired, USDA
- John Courtney (ex-officio member): ASN
- Patrick Stover (ex-officio member): Cornell University
- Judith Alonzo (Research Associate): Cornell University
- Martha Field (Research Associate): Cornell University
- Sarah Ohlhorst (Research Associate): ASN

### Core Areas Key to Public Trust in Science and Nutrition

- COI and objectivity
- public benefit
- achieving highest standards of rigor and reproducibility
- transparency
- equity
- information dissemination: education, communication, and marketing
- accountability

### Recommended Best Practices #1

- Managing COIs – 2 alternatives
  - ASN should enter into partnerships and other agreements only when these partnerships or agreements are supported exclusively by membership resources or not-for-profit entities with no COIs, or
  - ASN should develop a rigorous, transparent approach to cosponsoring and managing all activities financially supported by "entities and/or individuals at interest."

## Recommended Best Practices #2

- ASN as the standard for evidence-based conclusions in its publications
  - Should include a front-of-the-publication label that describes 3 key study characteristics
    - 1) the type of evidence presented in the study (e.g., observational, RCT, discovery, mechanistic, etc.),
    - 2) the study finding's most proper use(s) (e.g., draw conclusions/inform policy, hypothesis generation, or increase basic knowledge), and
    - 3) the quality of evidence (low, moderate, or high based on specified GRADE criteria)

## Recommended Best Practices #3,4,5

- Effective dialogue between the ASN, public and media
  - ASN should bolster its efforts to engage the public and media in more effective dialogue among its members, the media, and the public.
- Guidelines development for conducting nutrition research funded by entities with COIs
  - ASN should develop guidelines for its members in managing and conducting nutrition research funded by entities at interest—often those with a financial stake in the outcomes of the funded work.
- Independent audits of adherence
  - ASN should commission independent audits of its adherence to adopted policies and practices intended to heighten and maintain public trust in nutrition science.

## Recommended Best Practices #6

- Disclosure of COIs
  - ASN should develop comprehensive COI disclosure statements that cover financial and other COI sources that serve as a model in nutrition science for use by its members, other stakeholder groups, and staff.

ASN President Dr. Catherine Field has called on ASN members to comment on these recommendations.

## Why is trust in nutrition science important?

- Science-based decisions about the safety and nutritional quality of our food supply
  - Food and Drug Administration
  - Food Safety and Inspection Service
  - Environmental Protection Agency
  - Food and Nutrition Service
- Evidence-based dietetic practice and client counseling
  - AND: "Providing Reliable and Evidence-based Nutrition Information for the Public"
- Health of the nation is based on personal decisions about food, nutrition and other health practices
  - Well-informed, helpful and not harmful

What happens if the public believes scientific basis for decisions is contestable, unreliable, unusable or flat-out wrong?